**Reading ourselves against the grain: starting points for parental engagement with newly arrived families**

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In this paper we bring together research literature on *parental engagement* and *refugees and parental engagement* to open up novel conversations about schools’ work with newly arrived families in the context of a moment of mass forced migration to communities and their schools across the European Union. This work was undertaken as part of the Open School Doors (OSD) project, a two-year Erasmus funded project involving researchers and teachers from Austria, Germany, Greece and the UK in collaboration with a pan-European parents association (EPA) that aimed to develop resources for teachers and schools working to include and support newly arrived young people and their families. We use the term ‘newly arrived’ as an inclusive term, taking account of families from both forced and more-established migration contexts as well as families from diverse Roma communities. This review identified the theoretical and contextual issues that framed OSD. Our review of the literature found that existing models of parental engagement neglect the complexity of social identity markers for newly arrived families and their inter-section with a UK teaching practice framed by white-ness and ‘post’-colonialism. Through this review we problematize

ideas of socio-cultural neutrality in home-school interactions. and draw attention to disparities in actions and outcomes for different agents (teachers, young people, parents) which have potential impacts for newly arrived and refugee families. Through this we foreground a multi-layered, intersectional approach to parental engagement. Our hybrid thinking mobilises new insights on parental engagement that demands de-othering of refugee families and reading ‘teacher-selves’ against the grain. Our review contributes recommendations for primary and secondary education, including starting points for reflection, review and practice development for teachers and school leaders.

Keywords: **newly arrived families, parental engagement, home-school interactions, reflexivity, intersectionality, postcolonialism**

**Introduction**

Open School Doors (OSD) was a two year, Erasmus funded, multilateral project that brought together researchers, teachers and parents from Austria, Germany, Greece and the United Kingdom to develop resources for schools’ work with newly arrived families in response to a moment of mass forced migration to communities and their schools across the European Union. In the first half of 2017, the year that OSD launched, the United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR, estimates that 105, 000 refugees and ‘migrants’ entered Europe. Unicef suggests the figure for the whole year to be 171,300 with some 32,000 of these being children including at least 17,500 unaccompanied and separated children. Unicef further estimate that close to one third of all asylum seekers in Europe in 2017 were children (158,000), with more than half of them registered in Germany, the lead partner for OSD.

The right of refugee children to access education in a host country, regardless of asylum status, is protected under international human rights law (see 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, article 22). These figures have significant implications for European schools and teachers working to welcome, include and support new arrivals sometimes in contexts where there may be little or no prior experience of working with diverse, multi-cultural or multi-lingual communities and where as a consequent teachers’ skills and experience might be nascent and specialist resources scarce. OSD aimed to respond to this by undertaking primary research with teachers and parents across the partnership to explore gaps in knowledge, skills and understanding, identify inspiring practices and generate resources for practice development in response to findings.

Through our OSD work we self-consciously chose the term ‘newly arrived’ to challenge negative popularist discourse around ‘migrants’ and ‘migrancy’ that have become pervasive across European contexts (Greussing & Boomgaarden 2017) and in resistence to ‘migrant’ as a primary, dominant or reductive descriptor of an individual’s identity or lived experience – we use these terms only where they have been used by other writers and mark them self-consciously to draw attention to problematise their usage. The project aimed to address specific challenges faced by families from diverse linguistic and cultural contexts who had migrated within a recent timeframe, for example within the last five years, such as those from refugee or asylum seeking contexts. We also use the term ‘newly arrived’ in a broader sense to include families who may have lived in the UK, or one of the partner countries, for longer than five years yet were still awaiting decisions of migration status or were excluded / isolated from the school environment for other reasons, such as Roma families.

We begin our discussion with an overview of models of parental engagement/involvement as we think it is important that teachers new to this field have a reference point for the different ways home school interaction has been conceived and the issues, roles, identities and opportunities for action that contrasting models make available to different actors/stakeholders within the community. We then introduce the concept of intersectionality as a way of problematising the idea of socio-cultural neutrality in home-school interactions (in all forms) and collide models of parental engagement with critical readings of class and ethnicity. We examine how socio-cultural issues ‘intersect’ with practice and the ways that social identity markers may work to inflect practice and outcomes for different agents (teachers, young people, parents) involved in the processes of home/school interaction. We pay particular attention to issues of ‘white-ness’ and ‘post-colonialism’ and consider how these might impact (implicitly and explicitly) on home/school interactions. Drawing attention to the linguistic and textual nature of home-school interactions we over-lay parental engagement with ideas from literacy studies to offer a framework for practice that foregrounds the socio-cultural complexities of working with newly arrived families and keeps in play the need for dynamic, reflexive approaches to the *being* and *doing* of teacher identities.

Towards concluding we synthesise our reading into guidance for school leaders and classroom teachers that offer starting points for reflection, review and development of practice.

Our approach to the literature review

The first phase of the project involved a literature review in each country to understand the theoretical and contextual issues that framed the later research and development phases. In this paper we share the outcomes of the UK review. We focus our literature search on the United Kingdom (UK) context, however, due to the emergent nature of literature on schools working with refugee parent communities in the UK we also draw on research from the wider Anglophone context (Australia and the United States of America) where this has helped to extend and develop our thinking in relation to the UK context. We also acknowledge that whilst we focus on the ‘UK context’ our literature is primarily based on that from the English and Welsh education systems.

We carried out the literature review by drawing on peer-reviewed, academic literature, published where possible within the last ten years due to the rapidly changing political and educational environment for families from newly arrived contexts. We used a threefold approach to our literature search. Firstly, we focused on the key terms of parental engagement, parental involvement and parental partnership to establish traditional models used in UK schools. We then carried out a literature search based specifically on newly arrived families, that is literature which had as key terms asylum seeker, refugee, Roma and English as an Additional Language (EAL). Thirdly, we accessed literature focused on issues of discrimination, inclusion and diversity in educational contexts, and added to this with literature from a broader postcolonial theoretical context, such as the concepts of intersectionality and white-ness / white privilege.

Our final section on ‘recommendations for schools’ comes from our own theorising based on our reading of the literature. We analysed the content we read on newly arrived families by picking out the main challenge/s identified in the document and then turned this ‘on its head’ into a statement of positive action to address this challenge. Similarly, with the more general literature on parental engagement we used our theoretical postcolonial framing that drove our work to pick out what was deficient in the existing model for newly arrived families and turned this deficiency into a statement of action.

**Establishing our postcolonial, intersectional theoretical framework**

We begin our discussion by establishing the theoretical framework from which we approached the literature review and concluding recommendations. Due to OSD’s focus on newly arrived families we felt it was essential to approach the literature from a ‘post’- colonial perspective and to remain self-conscious about the way race, class and gender intersect to pattern and frame experience. A key concept in our approach was that of ‘intersectionality’.Chapman et al (2013) describe intersectionality as “a model for understanding, analyzing and engaging with forms of difference. Intersectionality can be understood as a dynamic, rather than a static process that is constantly changing and evolving at different times and in different spaces. Intersectionality is based on the notion of identities constantly shifting to reflect the context of specific situations and actors” (2013:564). Paying attention to intersectionality enables us to see beyond neutral descriptions of school parent interactions as simply one set of choices over another or one model of participation over another and take account of the way that different actors within those interactions are differentially positioned (and positioning) by concept making about race, class and gender.

**Conceptualising Home-School Interactions**

With this notion of positionality in mind, in terms of position of the school practitioner and the parent, we start the review with an overview of models of home-school interaction as we think it is productive that teachers new to this field have a reference point for the different ways home school interaction has been conceived and the issues, roles, identities and opportunities for action that contrasting models make available to different actors/stakeholders within the community.

***Models of Parental Engagement***

The part that parents in developed countries are expected to play in their children’s schooling has, according to Selwyn, changed significantly over the past 20 years (Selwyn 2011). The notion of the “engaged parent…” acting as “…quasi-consumer and chooser in educational ‘marketplaces’” and “monitor and guarantor of their children’s engagement with schooling” (Selywn, 2011:1) in combination with research evidence (Harris and Goodall, 2008; Deforges & Abouchaar, 2003) that parental involvement results in better outcomes for young people, has meant that the imperative to involve parents in schooling has gained widespread political traction.

However defining what is meant by parental involvement in schooling, the kind of interactions most likely to yield benefit and the nature and beneficiaries of any added value, remains controversial and politicians, researchers, schools, teachers and parents’ groups and children have failed to settle on shared definitions or priorities. Although often presented as a “unified concept” parental involvement “has a range of interpretations, which are variously acceptable or unacceptable by different constituents”(Crozier, 1999: 219) and is at times characterised by power struggles, and tensions between different constituents (ibid: 220). As Harris and Goodall’s (2008) study of parental interaction in schools illustrates, whilst parents were more likely to understand their involvement as support for their children and children, in turn, saw their parents as ‘moral support’, teachers viewed it as a “means to ‘improved behaviour and support for the school’” (2008: 282).

Epstein’s (2002) classification of practice has been influential in establishing a typography for parents’ involvement with school. Epstein’s Framework (2002:6) identified “six spheres of influence within which parents, teachers and others have the potential to influence student learning and development.” The six types of involvement, *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community*, are illustrated with sample practices, re-definitions of key roles and identities and predictive outcomes for students, parents and teachers. The typology aims to provide a “comprehensive programme of partnerships” (ibid 30) as well as ways in for teachers and researchers to explore and analyse parental involvement.

More recently Goodall and Montgomery (2013) have argued for a more refined approach that moves interest away from parents’ interactions with school generally towards a more specific focus on children’s learning. They make a key distinction between involvement and engagement suggesting that the latter invokes a “feeling of ownership of that activity which is greater than is present with simple involvement” (2013: 399) and propose a continuum that moves from parental involvement with school to parental engagement with children’s learning. This new concentration on children’s learning, they argue, represents a move away from a focus on the nature of the relationship between parents and schools toward an emphasis on the ‘object’ of that relationship which they identify as ‘children’s learning’. Goodall and Montgomery understand this significant shift in relations in terms of a redistribution of authority and agency with school relinquishing totalising control over the locality, content and processes of children’s learning and affording parent’s greater recognition, tenure and discretion. This might, they contend, be particularly important for parents (and of course children) from ethnic minorities or those facing economic difficulty who, research has shown (ibid 400) are more likely to find engagement with school difficult but who nevertheless have strong commitments to their children’s learning. This is a key issue for the Open School Doors project.

Whilst these frameworks acknowledge the complex, dynamic nature of relationships between parents, school and children’s learning and open meaningful opportunities for dialogue and re-negotiation of roles and responsibilities they trouble, rather than re-imagine, a traditional paradigm of home school relations. As such the risk of simply (unintentionally) reproducing/reinforcing the ‘involvement’ dynamic and the roles it makes available for teachers, children and parents is high. Without genuinely reflexive, open discussions about the purpose of learning that transcends the urgent and narrowing priorities of schools’ accountabilities, driven, as they tend to be, by managerialist metrics imposed by external government agencies, and which inevitably distract and pre-occupy teachers and school leaders, the boundary crossing aspired to by these models runs the risk instead of simply “colonising” (Grant, 2009:14) young people’s experience. Grant warns that “reframing children’s lives outside school and family life purely in terms of an educational project” could lead to the “worst case scenario” of children being “continuously worked on by ambitious parents and teachers” (Grant, 2009:14) and leading “a curricularised life within a professional logic” (Smith et al 2008:97 cited in Grant 2009:14).”

Faced with the possibility of a ‘curricularised’ life for their children Grant goes on to suggest, many parents may choose, quite reasonably, to invest in insulating the boundaries between school and home life seeing “part of their role as protecting children from school’s incursions into the home and ensuring that children socialise, play and relax as well as learn” (ibid). For others such boundary work might also be an expression of self-protection as they seek to protect their own identities against the ‘colonializing’ effects of school. Such actions may be understood negatively by schools and parents labeled as unresponsive or ‘hard to reach’.

***‘Hard to reach’ parents or Hard to Reach Schools?***

The term ‘hard to reach’ has often been used to ‘label’ and pathologise “parents who are deemed to inhabit the fringes of school, or society as a whole—who are socially excluded and who, seemingly, need to be ‘brought in’ and re-engaged as stakeholders (Crozier and Davis, 2007). Although the label has been problematized in recent literature, it remains an enduring concept in policy and practice discourses in the UK (Hamilton 2017:301) and may have particular implications for recently arrived parents as they encounter the potential double bind of navigating an unfamiliar education system in a new language. Campbell (2011) defines ‘hard to reach’ parents as those who: “have very low levels of engagement with school; do not attend school meetings nor respond to communications; exhibit high levels of inertia in overcoming perceived barriers to participation” (2011:10). The term is often used to refer to parents who fail to reproduce the attitudes, values and behaviours of a ‘white middle class’ norm described in Deforges above, which, argue Crozier and Davies (2007), underpins consciously or unconsciously, school expectations - as one of Campbell’s participants, a deputy head teacher remarks: “Our hard-to-reach parents are a mixture, the unemployed, the low income, English as an additional language parents, parents of poor attendees. They are non-responsive.” (Campbell, 2011). Here we see the definition used pejoratively to describe the deficit characteristic of ‘non-responsive’ which is explicitly linked to economic status, class and ethnicity, serving to stigmatise and ‘other’ particular groups of parents.

Goodall and Montgomery (2013) reference the difficulties that may be experienced by ethnic minority parents who may be ‘labelled’ as ‘hard to reach’ because school may not yet have facilitated an appropriate or effective way of building relationships with them. Findings from the Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement Project (EPRA) indicated that for some parents, often those characterized as ‘hard to reach’, schools, especially secondary school, can be experienced as a “closed system”, as hostile or disorientating, due perhaps to the parent’s own experiences of school or wider structural relations that they may feel position them negatively in relation to the ‘authority of school’ (Harris and Goodall, 2008). In her 2017 study of home-school relations and ‘migrant’ parents Hamilton contends that Epstein’s typology of involvement types has led to ‘classifications’ of parent behaviours suggesting that some types of involvement are more highly valued than others and argues that “whether parents are able to move beyond involvement type one are dependent on an array of complex and inter-related factors, linked to their socio-economic standing, cultural positioning, upbringing and personal educational experiences” (2017:300).

Goodall and Crozier (2007) position this debate within the wider context of the new managerialist paradigm that, they contend, dominates the English education context. This, they argue, imposes a target driven performativity culture that requires schools to focus on examination results, inspection outcomes and league table performances. As an outcome home school interaction becomes understood as a strategy for ‘performing better’ and the role of parents to provide compliant support for the demands the school must make on young people to perform successfully in public examinations. Discourses of the compliant or non-compliant, or ‘hard to reach’, parent emerge as expressions of this dynamic and become inculcated in to the ‘common sense’ of a performative culture.

Thandeka et al (2012) push this argument further still putting to work Derrick Bell’s concept of ‘interest-convergence’. Bell’s concept of ‘interest-convergence’ argues that “moments of racial progress are won when White power-holders perceive self-interest in accommodating the demands of minoritised groups; such moments are unusual and often short-lived.” They argue that the UK and the US are currently witnessing an inversion of this process, that is to say a period of what they describe “as pronounced *interest-divergence*, when White power-holders imagine that a direct advantage will accrue from the further exclusion and oppression of Black groups in society” (2013:563). This has far reaching implications for newly arrived families forced to ‘compete’ for resources in a system of which they have very little knowledge and understanding leaving them with limited ‘educational capital’. We draw on Crenshaw’s (1993) concept of intersectionality to explore how socio-cultural markers of class and race interact within this context to multiply these discriminatory effects for different groups of parents and communities in home school interactions.

 *Social Class and home/school interaction*

Goodall and Montgomery, discussed above, rightly demand that attention is paid to the way that social and cultural issues position different groups of parents in relation to schooling. However many of the home school interaction models discussed above fail to take full account for the way cultural and social and capitals circulate and are *put to work* within schools to secure benefits for certain groups of children and their parents. Social and cultural capitals describe the non-monetary ‘capitals’ (Bourdieu 1986) that more middle class parents bring to the encounters with school. Cultural capital “encompasses a broad array of linguistic competencies, manners, preferences and orientation” (Reay, 1988) and describes the skills and knowledge that middle class parents make available to their children. Reay identifies three variants of Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital “first, in the embodied state incorporated in mind and body; second in the institutionalized state, that is existing in the institutionalized forms such as educational qualifications; and third in the objectified state, simply existing as cultural goods such as books artifacts, dictionaries and paintings (Bourdieu, 1986 cited in Reay, 1988: 34).” Social capital is the privileged network of social contacts and associations that children from middle class families have access to. Capitals, Bourdieu argues, can be combined, converted and complemented to reap material reward and educational success and work to ensure that certain groups of parents (and their children) maintain the advantage. This has traditionally enabled them to gain benefit in relation to attainment – as noted by Deforges. Citing Reay’s (2000) work Harris and Goodall (2008) draw attention to the way that middle class parents tend to increase their positional ambition to ensure they maintain a relative advantage as the educational aspirations of the lower classes rise. This they argue ensures that barriers continue to be manufactured as others, for example access to education, are broken down.

Deforges’ (2002) systematic review of the realised benefits of parental involvement on children’s school attainment establishes the degree of significance of this. He found that whilst parents engaged in a broad range of activities to promote their children’s educational progress (including sharing information, participating in events and school governance) degree of parental involvement was strongly influenced by social class and the level of mothers’ education: the higher the class and level of maternal educational qualification the greater the extent and degree of involvement. In addition the review also noted that low levels of parental self-confidence, lack of understanding of (expected/normalised) ‘role’ in relation to education, psycho-socio and material deprivation also impacted negatively on levels of participation in school life with some parents simply being “put off involvement by memories of their own school experience or by their interactions with their children’s teachers or by a combination of both.” (2003:87). The review concluded that whilst quality interactions with school (for example information sharing and participation in events and governance) are characteristic of positive parental involvement in education, a child’s school attainment was more significantly bound up with a complex interplay of a much broader range of social and cultural factors, including “good parenting in the home…the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfillment and good citizenship; (2002:5). Identifying ‘at-home good parenting’ as the key factor in determining children’s attainment the review found that this form of involvement “works indirectly on school outcomes by helping the child build a pro-social, pro-learning self-concept and high educational aspirations” (2003:87) and had a much greater impact on achievement than the effects of school in the early years of schooling in particular. Grouping these factors together as ‘spontaneous parental involvement’ the report contrasted the positive correlation with children’s attainment they combined to secure, with the effects of “interventions that aim to enhance “spontaneous levels of engagement” (ibid 5). Although the extent and variety of intervention activity, which included parenting programmes, home school links and family and community education, was noted to be substantial the review was not able to find a positive correlation between these activities and attainment data and suggested they were “yet to deliver the achievement bonus that might be expected.”

*Ethnicity and home school interaction*

Chapman and Bhopal (2013) challenge what they call “majoritarian tales

of parents of color” (2013:563) that present women of color as “uninvolved and uninterested in their children’s education” (ibid). Drawing on data from two studies in the UK and US they argue that women of color [sic] are “involved and active leaders in the lives of their children by pursuing schooling options, advocating for their children, and pushing them to obtain higher education” (563) but that because their “actions are most often seen as hostile, and in opposition to the desires of the schools, women of color have not received credit for their actions” (ibid). Chapman and Bhopal found that the mothers in their study were highly committed to their children’s education seeing Education as a “gateway to success [and] greater social advantage” (577) and described an ‘immigrant mentality’ (578) that created a culture of high expectation for children within the family context. However the mothers perceived that they were judged differently than white mothers when making complaints to school and “were not seen as being equipped with enough social and cultural capital to be taken seriously. Yet when similar complaints were made by white mothers (particularly those from middle-class backgrounds) they were treated differently. Women were judged by the amount of social and cultural capital they were defined as possessing. White, middle-class norms of behavior were seen as acceptable within the white space of the school, but black working-class values were not” (570).

Crozier and Davies’ (2007) study of schools interactions of parents from Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in two towns in the north east of England found similar mis-recognition from teachers and schools of the roles parents played in nurturing their children’s learning and development. Often labelled as ‘hard to reach’ by schools parent participants discussed that they were not very involved with their children’s schools and knew very little about the education system but saw their role as providing a conducive home environment and as sense of community belonging, giving support, helping their children to construct a British Muslim identity and providing wider learning opportunities such as religious learning. Crozier and Davies suggest that because schools privilege what they call ‘expert’ and ‘transplant’ models (2007:300) of home school interaction parental contributions to children’s learning that do not adhere to expected norms tend to be de-legitimised or rendered invisible. The ‘expert’ model describes the taking up a position of expertise to which parents’ experiential or tacit knowledge is deferred and the ‘transplant’ model describes the transference of these idea about school expertise and the recruitment of parents as compliant collaborators. In combination the models operationalize a version of home school interaction that works to position and exclude non-conformist family and community practices.

*Colonialism/Post-colonialism*

Schools, Ray et al (2010) argue are often “the prime contact between refugees and the host country” (364) and as such have a crucial role to play in brokering the relationship families make with their new environment and that identities and roles that parents and children both build for themselves and make available to each other. They caution therefore against the potential affect of “colonial discourses of ‘helping’…vulnerable communities.” (2010: 347). Researching the relationships between schools in the US and Vietnamese Hmong refugee communities they notice the emergence of what they describe as ‘colonial’ language reflected in “desires to redirect their [Hmong families] time in a positive manner’…and to ‘assist [Hmong] parents helping them realize [what] some of their needs are” (2010: 363). Whilst recognizing the well-meaning motivations of practitioners on the ground working to develop ‘capacity and success’ in Hmong communities they warn against the imposition of a politics of universalism that “ensures the reproduction of a social order in which ‘the dominant or majority culture becomes the mold into which all other cultures are cast; the majority culture becomes the universal norm’ (Larson and Ovando 2001: 72 - cited in Ray et al 2010:363) and can lead to what they describe as ‘subtractive’ forms of education that can be socially and psychologically damaging for refugees and refugee communities. This may be a particularly important issue in the English context where the historical legacy of colonialism in combination with the current milieu of a post-Brexit referendum political environment may combine to give new expression to colonial discourses of ‘saving’, ‘rescuing’ and ‘helping’.

**Home School Interaction and Refugee or Recently Arrived Parents**

In this section we explore the literature on home school interaction and refugee and newly arrived parents. As we have found only a limited number of UK based studies relating to refugee and asylum seeker parents we have also ‘borrowed’ from work on newly arrived parents.

*Home school interaction and newly arrived parents*

Two studies, Puttick (2016) and Hope (2011) highlight specific challenges in home-school interactions faced by refugee parents. The former, based on Somali refugee parents and two primary schools in Manchester, highlights the confusion newly arrived parents can experience as they encounter the ‘norms’ of a new education system for example around school legislation, school safeguarding laws, school attendance and punctuality procedures, and particular parts of curriculum delivery. Schools addressed these challenges, which had led to tensions between this group of parents and the schools, by reviewing their communication methods and implementing specific measures for this cultural group. Examples of actions taken by the schools’ include establishment of a Somali parent representative on behalf of the Somali parents which had helped to build trust and collaboration, acting as a mediator with the school, as well as extending their community provision for parents in the form of ESOL and Family Learning classes (Puttick, 2016). Hope’s (2011) ethnographic study of family learning provision in two South London primary schools similarly found that refugees had specific needs and strengths which schools required an understanding of, particularly the existing networks refugee parents are part of, and a call for schools to involve them in the design and delivery of refugee parent provision. As has been discussed extensively, Hope also links this process of school’s interaction with refugees to the theory of ‘symbolic capitals’, ‘to acknowledge the stores of wealth that refugee families may possess, which can be activated in the new environment to create ‘transcultural capital’’ (2001: 91).

Whitmarsh’s (2011) study of six asylum-seeker mothers with children attending early years’ school provision in Wolverhampton, found tensions despite the mothers’ strenuous efforts to support the education of their children. These included: ‘the provision of resources in other minority languages, together with the lack of resources in, and speakers of, their home language has led the mothers to perceive their culture as devalued and inclusion as a token gesture’. Moreover, the study found an underpinning of ‘possibly racialized discourse’, and some of the mothers were found to be ‘self-excluding’ themselves from the schools as ‘the mothers perceive teachers as the experts in children’s education, therefore they are less likely to engage with a western model of white, middle class partnership’ (2011: 13). Interestingly, Whitmarsh in relation to this process of self-exclusion on the part of some of the mothers, posits that perhaps it is in fact the teacher that is ‘hard-to-reach’.

In her study of schools interactions with newly arrived parents from Eastern Europe in North Wales, Hamilton (2017) found that initially it was language that created an exclusionary barrier between teachers and families. Parents relied on their children or other members of the community to act as translators but this sometimes created additional problems of partial or inaccurate circulation of information, particularly where children chose to ‘filter’ information or where parents were subject to the vagaries of the local grapevine. Hamilton found that language barriers resulted in significant delays for parents to become aware of rules, routines and expectations about schooling and parental involvement and significant disparities in the expectations parents in turn bought to their experience of schooling in the new country. This related particularly to pedagogical style, age grouping and approaches to managing discipline and behaviour.

Hamilton draws particular attention to the ways that patterns and processes of migration, for example a father arriving in the UK first and being more competent in English or parents working long, sometimes unsociable hours, to support re-settlement, impact on family dynamics and emphasises the stress that this can put on family relationships and parents’ capacity to interact with school or provide support for children that align with expected ‘norms’ (discussed above). As such she suggests “the support parents are able to provide in addressing their children’s social and emotional needs may diminish and parents may give less priority than normal on fostering relations with their children’s school” (2017:312). Teachers’ in Hamilton’s study expressed a desire for teacher education that supported them to orientate a new situation and Hamilton argues that “practitioners who adopt a respectful, collaborative and reflective approach are more likely to achieve a positive learning environment, assisting learners and their families acclimatisation to new school cultures” (2017: 313).

**Looking forward: Third Spaces and Multi-Directional parental Engagement**

In this next section we draw attention to approaches to home school interaction that seek to address some of the issues and challenges we discuss above. We pay particular attention to Price-Mitchell’s notion of ‘multi-directionality’ and consider its usefulness as an underpinning model for more intersectional approaches to home school interaction and discuss the contribution that whole family approaches to literacy might make to a multi-directional approach.

***Multi-directionality***

Price-Mitchell’s notion of ‘unidirectional’ draws attention to what she sees as an over-emphasis on school learning as the only, or priority, objective of home/school interactions. As such schools offer a ‘mechanistic view’ which separates educators and parents rather than connecting them with “educators see[ing] themselves as experts” in children’s learning “rather than equals” (2009:5). This she argues creates hierarchical relationships and limits capacity to understand and develop partner­ships that create new knowledge. While many parents need and appreciate transfer of information, this unidirectional process lacks the characteristics of a learning organization, where people’s capacity to learn exists at all levels (Senge, 2006). In schools, this includes children, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members – all those who have an investment in the outcome of education. (2009:8)

The effect of this she argues is that “many schools continue to emphasize participation and volunteerism over partnership and engagement” (ibid). Such unidirectionals models miss the opportunity to think through the potential for alternative knowledge-producing community partnerships that are what Price-Mitchell describes as ‘multi-directional’. With the notion of multi-directionality Mitchell-Price imagines a paradigm shift, a move way from the traditionally bounded notions of school and home where individuals take up prescribed roles and identities, as expert or inexpert, in relation to who learns and what is learned, towards a community of practice model that “takes into account the tacit nature of knowledge” and embraces a “collective process of dialogic learning” within which parents and schools “value the knowledge and experience of one another” (2009:12). Crucially Mitchell-Price pays attention to the way that social capital circulates within the context of school and its potential to include or exclude parents from different social and cultural groups. Attending instead to the work of building communities has the capacity, she argues, to generate new opportunities for building social capital. Citing Santana & Schneider (2007) Mitchell-Price suggests that “lower income and ethnically diverse parents who traditionally have less access to resources for their children benefit greatly from social networks as a way of accruing ben­efits otherwise unavailable to them” (2009:19).

The praxis of multi-directionality is characterised by: boundary spanning’ approaches to leadership; explicit discussion of tacit knowledge; careful attention to social capital and how it can manifest both productively and destructively to support inclusivity/exclusivity; and generation and nurturing of actionable knowledge to support networked innovation. Towards concluding Mitchell-Price imagines a community of practice model spanning home, school and the wider community that shares a common concern and responsibility for the education of the whole child. Realisation of such a model, she suggests, requires all members of the school community who work with parents to “pro-actively embrace the role of boundary spanner”, taking up roles as practitioners who learn “to build relationships that hover at the peripheries of home, school and community” (2009:14). Such a role, we argue, substantially shifts the dynamics of what it means to practice education re-positioning professionals from the safety of ‘expertise’ towards *researchers* paying attention to the complex and shifting dynamic of home-school relations.

Hamilton argues that this requires teachers to develop an ‘outreach mentality’ (2017:313) going beyond “promoting awareness among parents of rules and expectations” towards deep, reflexive exploration of their own socio-cultural positionality as a ‘teacher’ and representative of authority and taking responsibility for the agency they have in the processes and practices of home school interaction. Hamilton challenges teachers to ask of themselves:

* Does my social positioning (gender, ethniciy, linguistic, socio-economic) make it difficult for some families to foster sustained connections, dictating types of involvement?
* Do I, or colleagues, hold stereotypical and homogenous perceptions based on social markers (gender, ethnicity, linguistic, socio-economic factors)?
* How are minority ethnic/linguistic families accepted by established communities?
* How can the enrichment brought to educational settings as a result of cultural and linguistic diversity be understood, appreciated and shared across the wider school community? (2017:313)

These contentions that socially justice approaches to parental engagement must start with teachers’ acceptance and embrace of the political identity work to be (un?)done, chime with Street’s assertion that new theories require us to ‘read ourselves against the grain’ (Street,1997: 51). By this he means not simply challenging dominant ‘ways of knowing’ but living with the psychological consequences of putting under scrutiny our deepest professional desires and fears and coming to know ourselves differently.

**Challenging our practice**

Towards a conclusion we offer our own synoptic reading/s of the literature to characterise the qualities, values, principles, behaviours and actions that might facilitate a more intersectionally sensitive approach to parental engagement with newly arrived families. At the heart of our recommendations is the need to read our teacher (and researcher) selves ‘against the grain’ and to offer reflexive starting points for understanding how the actions and identities of teachers’ and leaders, as key actors within the ecologies of educational practice, might be re-framed towards more inclusive, socially just approaches to parental engagement.

***Home school interactions with newly arrived families are most effective when leaders ensure that:***

* ‘one size does not fit all’ and meeting the needs of the local community broadly and the needs of newly arrived families specifically are an explicit stated priority for the school;
* initiatives and interventions are informed by multi-directional principles and form part of the schools’ ‘vision’ or ‘ethos’ and must be visibly and actively endorsed and supported by the school leadership team;
* initiatives and interventions are carefully planned with full consideration given to resource implications;
* senior roles, responsibilities and commitments in relation to driving initiatives and interventions should be clear and well disseminated to the wider community;
* focused teacher development is recognised and prioritised as a key factor in achieving successful outcomes;
* schools should have a clear sense of what they hope to achieve and a collectively agreed vision of success criteria – ideally both vision and success criteria should be developed collaboratively with parents;
* home school interaction priorities and actions are incorporated into and included in school development plans;
* progress against actions are regularly monitored and progress (and challenges) effectively shared and success celebrated with the wider community.

***Newly arrived families and carers are most likely to feel included in home school interaction when schools:***

* are open, welcome spaces that visibly and explicitly celebrate the diversity of their communities: through actions and behaviours of staff and students; wall displays; welcoming messages in entrance halls and reception areas; roles and responsibilities that are open to and taken up by refugee/m parents in school;
* have good, up to date knowledge of the legal frameworks within which newly arrived families from forced migration contexts operate and the resources and networks (including government, charity and community led) that families and schools can access to provide additional support and guidance;
* have demonstrate understanding and awareness of how education systems in key countries differ from their own and how normalised practices around grouping, assessing, behaviour, defining SEN and transitioning through school phases may differ from country to country and culture to culture;
* can make available a diverse range of language and cultural resources that ensure that home school interaction is accessible, hassle free and a positive experience for all parents;
* recognise and support the basic needs that a newly arrived family may have (keeping warm, keeping clean, keeping well fed, access to school uniform, access to basis equipment etc) that impact on home /school interaction in fundamental ways;
* feel confident that what is beneficial to newly arrived parents/carers/families is likely to be beneficial for all parents/carers/families;
* actively collaborate with newly arrived families (parents and children) in design of home school interaction programme, taking account of the expressed aspirations and needs and wider networks within communities;
* draw on their wider professional and community resources to adopt and ‘outreach mentality’ that provides scaffolded support (resources, peer support, language resources etc.) for home school interaction
* develop home school interaction programmes are context specific and tailored to the needs of specific communities;
* develop models of parental engagement that recognise the important role parents play as partners in children’s learning and involve parents/carer as ‘experts’ in children’s development and as decision makers to avoid the ‘colonisation’ of the home and the role of parents;
* treat home school interaction as ‘knowledge exchange’ activity through which teachers and parents as equal stake-holders work collaboratively to create an optimum environment for young people to thrive as learners and citizens;
* creates ‘third spaces’ for home school interaction, that is to say spaces that bring together ideas and priorities from home and school in dialogue to generate new fruitful conversations about how best to support children;
* afford parents opportunities to gain vocational skills that will support their employability and enable them to gain references may help families to build sustainable, more secure futures that provide the conditions for young people to be more successful in school;
* provide access to whole family activities is likely to yield significant benefit. Schools could provide lists of local places, or facilitate activity in local spaces that newly arrived parents may not be aware, this may also support knowledge, understanding and confidence building about accessing wider community provision and or access and entitlement to local services;
* play an active role in facilitating and support peer to peer support for newly arrived parents/carers to enable them to be inducted in to and informally (or formally?) supported and mentored to become active participants in the school community;
* cultivate high trust environments that enable teachers to be creative and experiment with their practice to evolve responsive, ‘grounded pedagogies’ and to build communities of practice that share new knowledge and expertise to the benefit of both teachers and the wider communities they serve;
* enable families to extend their funds of knowledge and build social and cultural capital that will support achievement of expressed aspirations.

***Home school interactions with newly arrived parents work best when teachers:***

* have opportunities to reflect on their own positionality and how their identities as professionals and representatives of authority as well as their own socio-cultural markers (gender, class, ethnicity etc) play out in their work with families and parents – this is particularly important when the social profile of teachers is significantly different to that of the school community/refugee families;
* have opportunities to explore their own communication repertoires (including their language and literacy identities), the strengths and weaknesses of the communication strategies they currently use to interact with parents and their ideas for developing and extending their work;
* explore the ways that the social and cultural capitals (funds of knowledge) that families bring to their home school interaction may work to include or exclude;
* understand the transition journeys of young people and their families;
* are professionally curious about the cultures and values that parents/carers and families bring to their engagement with schools and have an opportunity to explore, critique and challenge prejudices and stereotypes (including in the UK context a consideration of how colonial legacies play out negatively in contemporary relationships);
* are committed to balancing expressed needs of parents/families/carers with the professional demands and responsibilities of their role as teacher (within legal parameters);
* have an awareness of the way education systems function differently outside their home country and accept that parents/carers/families/young people bring may different values and expectations about education to their encounters with school and that the teacher must build bridges to support successful participation;
* schools have a good understanding of how education systems in key countries differ from their own and how normalised practices around grouping, assessing, behaviour, defining SEN and transitioning through school phases may differ from country to country and culture to culture;
* understand how to work with young people and families who have experienced ‘trauma’ , the impacts of this on a young person’s interactions with school and know when and how to signpost to fellow professionals;
* are empowered to balance the needs of the young person with the ‘norms’ of school practices e.g. when a child’s ‘legal age’ appears at odds with their developmental or social age;
* have some working knowledge of how to work with parents/carers/families of young people who have additional educational need and or who don't speak the official or dominant language/s of the school;
* have opportunities build their pedagogical repertoire to understand the differences between working in a learning context with children and working in a learning context with adults (andragogy);
* explore how best to marry competing priorities, advocate and lobby where local accountability cultures and the best interests of the young person and their families are not well aligned.

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