

“Céad Míle Fáilte”?
Parental Involvement: The Varied
Experiences of Immigrant Parents in
Irish Primary Schools

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of M.Phil, is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abbreviations

A	African
AIM	Accessing Intercultural Materials
BOM	Board of Management
CBP	Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration
CPSMA	Catholic Primary Schools Managers Association
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Education in Schools
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
EAL	English as an additional language
ERB and Ethics	Education in Religious Beliefs and Ethics
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
Gov of Irl	Government of Ireland
IES	Intercultural Education Strategy
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison Scheme
HSE	Health Services Executive
ICIS	International Centre for Intercultural Studies
IILT	Integrate Ireland Language and Training
L	Lithuanian
NASC	Irish Immigrant Support Centre (NASC=Irish word for link)
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCS	National Children's Strategy
NESSE	Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and training
NPAR	National Plan against Racism
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
P	Polish
PRSI	Pay Related Social Insurance
SVP	Society of St Vincent de Paul
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UK	United Kingdom
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

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Abstract

Anne Horan

“Céad Míle Fáilte”? Parental Involvement: The Varied Experiences of Immigrant Parents.

This research aims to explore whether the “Céad Míle Fáilte” (a hundred thousand welcomes) as a popular greeting has been the reality for the immigrant parents as they navigate the Irish educational system and the primary schools which their children attend. It also considers whether newcomer parents are being welcomed into primary schools and recognised as a group who may be experiencing cultural and linguistic barriers which militate against their involvement in their child’s education.

Bourdieu’s work on capitals (1986) is used to examine the linguistic, social and cultural barriers which make it more difficult for immigrant parents to become involved in their children’s education. An explanation of systematic prejudice is proffered in the context of Ireland’s post-colonial legacy. Misrecognition of this group of parents in schools and in the community is discussed, and it is asserted that a lack of immigrant parental involvement serves to place newcomer children at risk of educational disadvantage when compared with their indigenous peers.

Semi-structured interviews with the participant mothers show a deficit of provision due to the lack of political status of the Eastern European mothers when compared to the assistance provided to the African mothers, all of whom came to Ireland as asylum seekers. An urban - rural divide is also evident in the reported ease of contact and communication with teachers and schools.

It is asserted that many challenges experienced by immigrant parents could be alleviated if political will extended beyond the provision of English language support. Relationships between schools, communities and immigrant parents must be improved, and parents welcomed in a new manner, with the acknowledgement that, without their involvement in their children’s education, the children cannot flourish in the same way as their non-immigrant peers.

Chapter 1.

Introduction: Background and Context of Enquiry

1.1 Introduction

Demographic changes which took place in Ireland at the end of the twentieth century and the early years of the first decade of the twenty first century meant that the Irish educational system faced many challenges arising from the enrolment of newcomer children and the presence of their parents in school communities. This chapter outlines the economic reasons for this change in the school going population of Ireland, and briefly explores the author's experiences in a rural school whose student profile changed rapidly. Significant concepts such as diversity, capitals, habitus are discussed as they relate to this thesis.

1.2 Changing Demographics and Changing Educational Needs

Ireland has undergone many well documented social, cultural and material changes since the middle of the 20th century (Darmody et al, 2011, Byrne et al, 2010). Economic recession was a feature of the 1980's but Ireland's economic boom, the years of the Celtic Tiger changed the demographic face of the country. Ireland experienced a large increase in investment from abroad, the lowest corporate tax rate in the OECD, a young well-educated workforce and a level of social partnership and infrastructure investment which was supported by the European Union. Unemployment levels fell, and Ireland experienced an increase in employment, which grew by 77% between 1993 and 2007(OECD, 2009), influenced by a number of other factors. Ireland became a member of the Eurozone, while the European Union itself saw an expansion in 2004 with the accession of Eastern European countries to the EU. As migrant labour became a feature of the EU, Ireland had low levels of personal income tax and an education system which was highly regarded internationally. Ireland became an attractive country in which to live, work and raise a family. This transition from an out-migration to an in-migration society

is often associated by the social and political imagination with Ireland’s transition to a multi-cultural society (Bryan, 2008, Byrne, 2010). The years 2000-2006 involved a large increase in immigration to Ireland as well as the return of a large number of emigrants who were attracted to return to Ireland by the new economic prosperity. By 2007 the immigrant population was approximately 11% of the total population, representing an increase of 60% in 10 years (OECD Review of Migrant Education, 2009). The 2006 census showed 188 nationalities living in Ireland, with the country now having a total immigrant population of 420,000.

By 2016 the number of Irish residents born outside Ireland had continued to increase and stood at 810,406 in 2016, an increase of 43,636 on the 2011 figure. In April 2016, persons born abroad accounted for 17.3 per cent of the population, up from 17 per cent in 2011. The 2016 census shows that non-Irish immigrants from 180 countries arrived in Ireland in the year to April.

Table 1. *Place of birth of Irish residents from countries with largest increases, 2011 – 2016, Census of Ireland.*

Country	2011	2016	Actual change
Romania	17,995	28,702	10,707
Brazil	9,298	15,796	6,498
Spain	7,003	11,809	4,806
Pakistan	8,329	12,891	4,562
Croatia	980	5,202	4,222
Italy	7,146	10,913	3,767
India	17,856	20,969	3,113

Moldova	3,421	6,472	3,051
France	10,070	11,906	1,836
Portugal	2,246	3,866	1,620
Other	682,426	681,880	-546
Total	766,770	810,406	43,636

Many of the economic migrants who came to Ireland during the years of the Celtic Tiger came to Ireland with their families, and this brought about the emergence of a new group of children into Irish primary schools, here referred to as “newcomer children” (Mc Gorman and Sugrue, 2007). A nation whose previous demographic pattern was one of emigration, whose people left home in search of employment, in search of a welcome, Ireland was now in the hitherto unknown position of welcoming migrant workers and their families into workplaces, communities and schools. It is of little surprise that such changes to the countries’ population not only numerically but also in terms of diversity would present challenges for the education system. In what was described by Mc Gorman & Sugrue (2007, p.6) as the “unintended consequences of economic progress” it became apparent that Ireland at that time was ill-equipped to deal with the legislative, policy and social realities that demographic change brought, in areas such as housing, social welfare and educational policy. Schools faced a major challenge with the enrolment of children whose first language was not English.

1.3 Challenges Posed by a Diverse School Population

It has been shown that in 2016 almost 50,000 pupils at primary school level in Ireland did not have English or Irish as a first language (Irish Times, 14 March,2017). When broken down by nationality this data, derived from the 2016 census, showed children from many nationalities

(Table 1) attending Irish primary schools. Although a question on religion was not answered by all respondents, tens of thousands of families indicated that they (and their children) were members of a range of minority faiths, or of no faith. It is clear that Ireland and Irish schools now have a numerically unprecedented immigrant population and it is this diversity that provides challenges for schools because of the ethnic, cultural and religious profile of these children. Habitus is a concept used by Bourdieu (1986) referring to the habits, skills and dispositions possessed due to a person's life experiences. The concept is central to a conversation on the possession or lack of capitals (linguistic, social and cultural) that impact on immigrant parental involvement (Bourdieu, 1986). Religious diversity is not explored in this research.

“Inclusive, high quality education for all students” is the objective of the Irish education system, as stated in the Education Act of 1998 (OECD, 2009). The Irish government provided English as an Additional Language (EAL) support to schools, prepared intercultural education guidelines (2005) and an intercultural education strategy to enhance a whole -community approach. My contention in this thesis is that not all schools have facilitated immigrant parental¹ involvement and that as a result a number of newcomer primary school children are facing challenges not experienced by other children whose parents are engaged with school life.

1.4 My Evolving Personal Interest

My interest in the issue of immigrant parental involvement began when the primary school in which I was working experienced significant demographic change. Previously, this four-

¹ “immigrant parent” is the term used to describe parents of newcomer children. It is a category used solely for the purpose of this thesis. The author recognises that as a descriptive term it is inadequate, as it does not acknowledge the diversity within this group of parents.

teacher rural school had served only Irish children, all of whom lived within the parish boundary. One Ukrainian boy was enrolled in October 2005 (school year 2005-2006) when his father came to work in the locality. In September 2006 the school had four newcomer children, and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) allocated part time hours for the purpose of EAL classes. By the following February, twelve newcomer children in total had enrolled in the school. Two Polish children attending primary schools in nearby villages provided the requisite fourteen children which enabled the employment of an EAL teacher in May 2006. I began my role as an EAL teacher in May 2006, and this continued until I left the school in September 2008 having secured a principalship. I enjoyed this role, and quickly built a relationship with the children and their parents, which in some cases has continued to the present time.

1.5 Critical incidences which influenced my thinking

Over a period of two years I observed day to day practice within the school. I encountered a number of critical incidences which led me to a greater understanding of the challenges faced by newcomer children and their families, and to a consideration of what individual teachers and schools can do to encourage integration. I used these incidents in a reflective, problem solving manner which I considered would help to develop a sense of personal responsibility for my teaching methodologies. As explained by Angelides, (2001, in Shapira-Lischinsky,2011, p649) critical incidences are not necessarily sensational events, but may be day to day minor incidents which impact on a teacher and have significance for that teacher in respect to his / her classroom planning and management. The usage of the term “critical” is explained as meaning “significant” or “relevant” and clearly having the potential to contribute to the evolution of an educational experience (Bruster & Peterson, 2013). These incidents do not have the negative interpretations of the term “critical” as it is commonly used and often

involve ethical conflict, as in the incident described in 1.4.3 where the author was uncertain how to react to a comment made by a class teacher. Feelings of regret and powerlessness perhaps guided me to my later studies as my reflection on these incidents helped me to understand better and to learn from what I had experienced (Hickson, 2011). This exploration of critical incidents was beneficial, as it guided me to identify my feelings at the time of the incident and also to understand how my critical reflection at the time allowed me to use this learning to develop and reconstruct my daily work practice in teaching, as is seen in how I endeavoured to communicate with immigrant parents (Fook, 2002, in Hickson, 2011). During my studies the use of a reflexive journal proved valuable as it helped me to identify major differences in the experiences of two groups of immigrant mothers and to focus my reflections on these differences (Appendix A, Research Diary).

1.5.1 Communication Difficulties

A Polish family with a son of school going age came to live in the area. This child's enrolment was delayed for a year because of his resistance to starting school, and he was accompanied in the classroom by his aunt for a number of weeks. As the class teacher I quickly became aware of how difficult it was for me to communicate the daily needs of the classroom to both child and adult. This was my first realisation that the linguistic capital of the adult could affect the integration of a child into a classroom and school. Through considering and reflecting on this experience I began to investigate alternative methods of communication that enabled me to communicate more effectively with adult members of these immigrant families, thus taking ownership of my teaching (Bruster & Peterson, 2013).

Parent teacher meetings are an important feature of school life, affording an opportunity to parents and teachers alike to discuss a child's progress and to raise issues which either person wants to discuss. In order to communicate her child's progress to one immigrant parent during the parent - teacher meeting I adopted what I called the "smiley face method" to communicate with her. This involved the use of a "smiley face" to indicate that I was happy with the child's progress, a "sad face" to indicate the lack of progress etc. In trying to ensure the best possible communication between home and school I began to translate notes to parents using a free Google Online programme. My reflection and subsequent action made me better prepared for the challenge of effective home-school communication. This methodology became embedded in my teaching.

1.5.2 The Language of the Beginning of Year Ceremony

The start of year Mass in September 2006 was the first school ceremony which included a number of Eastern European children. At this Mass prayers were said in Polish and repeated in English. I was impressed by this, thinking that the Polish families present had been considered when this Mass was being planned. However, a number of years later at a First Holy Communion ceremony attended by large numbers of family members from Poland, all prayers were in English. As I reflected on this, both during the ceremony and again in the days following, I wondered if this change represented inclusion as the children were now able to read and recite the prayers in English? This incident became central to my thinking on inclusion and exclusion in the school community.

1.5.3 Unwelcome being Expressed by a Class Teacher.

In September'07 I was beginning my first full school year as an EAL teacher and visited each classroom and said hello to all of the children. In one classroom, I asked the question "Are

there any children here for me?” To my surprise, and dismay the class teacher replied “No, thank God. And I don’t want any either”. My immediate reaction to these words was to leave the room without any comment. I did not consider it appropriate to challenge the words of the teacher. I was shocked that such a prejudiced view would be held of this newcomer group of children in the school, and wondered what message this was giving to a group of impressionable young children? I also wondered if this attitude was prevalent among other staff members, or indeed in other schools. I later thought that I should have challenged the teacher at another time. I didn’t, and this was a moment lost where perhaps, I could have prevented such comments being made in the future. This sense of regret (Shapira – Lishchinsky, 2011, p 654) stayed with me for a long time, and I consider that it was influential in guiding my later studies.

1.5.4 A Lack of Guidance and Direction from DES.

Although not a critical incident, I was aware that as the EAL teacher in the school it was completely up to me to source whatever resources I could to guide me as I began to teach newcomer children many of whom did not speak or understand the English language. Although the DES was aware of the appointment of an EAL teacher in the school, no communication or direction was sent to the school either directly from the DES or from the Inspectorate. “*Up and Away. A Resource Book for English Language Support in Primary Schools*” (2006) proved invaluable, as did “*Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School*” (2007) both developed by Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT), part of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). “*Up and Away*”, the language support programme which is based on the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks for primary learners and reflects the thematic demands of the primary curriculum provided me with a starting point for my work with newcomer children. My experience of “not knowing what to do” was replicated in the

local secondary school when the first newcomer children were enrolled. I was contacted and asked if I had any suggestions which would help them to welcome these new students. I realised that a large gap existed between policy development, policy and the teachers and schools who were struggling with new challenges teaching children who did not have English as a first language.

1.5.5 Immigrant Parents Overlooked at Official School Gathering

Many of the immigrant parents who had children attending the school experienced linguistic and cultural challenges which seemed to set them apart from the majority linguistic and cultural group. This group of parents walked to and from school together, not conversing with parents of the majority cultural group who were attending the school, and also not mixing with them after school hours in the local playground or in public houses at the weekend. Following a First Holy Communion church ceremony, I went to the school hall where the Parents Association had provided refreshments for the children and their families. There were no Polish families present. I later discovered that the parents were not aware of this event in the school hall. Bourdieu (1986) regards the possession or lack of possession of the various types of capital within the family as significant factors in school participation and in this instance neither the school nor the Parents' Association had attempted to communicate information about this event to the newcomer families who, because of their lack of the linguistic and cultural capital valued by the school community were unaware of this annual event.

1.6 Reflecting on the Impact of these Critical Incidents for my Studies

As I began my studies I realised that immigrant parental involvement and the challenges or barriers experienced by immigrant parents as they interact with primary schools was something that I could research in the Irish context. I questioned whether habitus, cultural background

and linguistic capital affect experiences of parental involvement, which has been shown to be one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement and sustained school performance (Harris & Chrispeels, 2006). Following an interrogation of the literature, in conjunction with reflection on my experiences as an EAL teacher in a primary school in the mid-west of Ireland, I decided to explore the experiences of immigrant parents in Irish primary schools, with the emergent research question “How do immigrant parents experience parental involvement in Irish primary schools?”

1.7 Purpose and Trajectory of Research

This research was undertaken primarily to further explore the author’s observations while teaching in a rural school that underwent significant demographic change. Although there is some Irish research in the area of newcomer children and their families in Irish primary schools, an interrogation of the literature showed a deficit of debate on the impact and experience of migration on education (Devine, 2013). An Irish study discusses how the sudden increase in newcomer students from diverse minority backgrounds occurred in primary schools that were not prepared for the change. No training was available to guide teachers as pupils enrolled with a range of linguistic and cultural differences compared to pupils from the majority cultural group (Darmody, 2011). It is suggested that this dominant cultural group often marginalise the experience of groups who possess different forms of habitus, cultural, social and linguistic capitals and that the formal education system perpetuates inequality between groups

The body of research focussing on the experiences of migrant / newcomer children is growing and much of this has been drawn on in this study. Many studies indicate that institutional barriers within the school system create difficulties for immigrant families. Many school enrolment policies favour families living close to the school, so for immigrant families who

tend to settle in urban areas their children attend urban schools which are characterised by socio-economic disadvantage and high levels of unemployment (Darmody et al, 2010). English language proficiency and the possession of cultural and social capital are further identified as barriers or challenges experienced by immigrant families. Using data from the longitudinal “Growing up in Ireland “study (Wave 3) it is asserted that the immigrant population in Ireland is a heterogenous one, and that there are variations between national groups in child outcomes. This suggests that national background may be a new form of inequality in Ireland.

Schools and teachers reported an uncertainty over how best to proceed in classrooms which now had a cohort of newcomer children (Devine, 2005). The policy vacuum which I had observed in my own teaching is discussed, and it is stated that the management of diversity was seen as a matter for individual schools and not a legal requirement.

Darmody (2011) also discusses the issue of immigrant parental involvement, where parents are often invited to become involved rather than facilitated to become engaged in school life. My research will add to the existing literature in this area by focusing on immigrant parents and their experiences of parental involvement. Ireland is an interesting case study because of the rapid changes that occurred in society and schools. My intention is to allow the voices of parents, the people most directly concerned with the education of their children to be heard (Constitution of Ireland, 1937). I also sought to explore whether all immigrant parents of varying nationalities face similar challenges. In this manner I identify a number of barriers to immigrant parental involvement: cultural, social, linguistic and political, a discussion of which I intend will provide guidance for future study in the area, with perhaps an influence on initial teacher training and professional development for teachers.

Chapter one explores the demographic changes that took place in Ireland during the years of the Celtic Tiger. The authors interest in the topic of immigrant parental involvement is explained, and the impact of critical reflection on her daily work practices is discussed. Chapter two examines the trajectory of educational policy development in Ireland as it concerns immigrant children and their families. A brief account is given of previous experience of diversity in Irish primary schools, and the international framework for inclusive education as it relates to Ireland is outlined. NCCA Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2005) and the provision of resource materials for schools provided some guidance for schools. This chapter also discusses the immigrant parent in educational policy and will show this cohort of parents was not adequately acknowledged in policy documents.

In chapter three, drawing on international literature, the concept of parental involvement is explored, and a working definition is provided which encompasses formal and informal types of involvement (Desforges & Aboucchar, 2003). The work of Joyce Epstein (1991, 1996) on the topic of parental involvement is discussed, together with the newer assertion that the term be replaced by “School, family and community partnership” (2006).

Bourdieu’s theory of capital, which provides a theory of social exclusion, the absence or presence of the various types of capital (linguistic, social and cultural) is discussed and it is asserted that the discontinuity between the capitals possessed by the immigrant family and those valued by schools serve to place the immigrant child at risk of educational disadvantage, and the immigrant mother at risk of being excluded from school activities and unable to participate in the school lives of their children. Barriers to immigrant parental involvement such as linguistic and cultural differences are magnified when the lack of political capital among this cohort of parents is examined. Legislation in Ireland does not recognise the parental

rights and responsibilities of immigrant parents, and, with the exception of those schools which can still avail of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) programme, there are no governmental programmes to alleviate the multitude of challenges faced by immigrant parents. I began to wonder whether if immigrant parents had the right to vote in local and national elections, their political capital would instantly become valuable.

In chapter four I provide an account of the methodologies used as I investigated the experiences of immigrant mothers as they attempt to become involved in their child's education in Irish primary schools. A description is given of the case study which is used as a methodological approach, with semi-structured interviews allowing the participants to tell of their experiences as their children attended Irish primary schools. This social constructivist approach helped the author to focus on the individual mothers as they attempt to navigate the Irish education system. The question central to the study concerns whether immigrant parents are part of school and school community life in Ireland and whether they can experience parental involvement in their child's education, with the following research question being established: How do immigrant parents experience parental involvement in Irish primary schools?

Selected as a result of a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, the sample is comprised of two distinct sets of mothers: the first was Eastern European, living in a rural and small-town setting; the other consisted of African mothers living mainly in Limerick City. A total of nine mothers participated in the study. All of the mothers were interviewed in their own homes, with the exception of one Polish mother, who was interviewed in a friend's house. This friend acted as a translator during the interview.

I describe the pilot interviews, which served to illustrate the experiences of the Irish mothers and provide a basis for comparison with the experiences of immigrant mothers. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and a tape recorder. Field notes were written down immediately after the interview, which were transcribed manually. Coding took place in stages and data was prioritised as I organised themes and identified the issues which would form the basis of the discussion.

At the interview stage of the research it became obvious to me that the two sets of mothers, African and Eastern European reported varying experiences of parental involvement in the schools their children were attending. This was due to the status of the African mothers as asylum seekers which provided access to English language classes and assistance with finding accommodation, etc. This status, associated with the possession or acquisition of the various capitals already discussed, provides a picture of immigrant parents who are being included in school life. This contrasts with the experience of the Eastern European mothers who received no such assistance and report difficulties in communicating with teachers and in understanding daily life in the schools their children attend.

Chapter five provides the narratives of nine immigrant mothers. These mothers live in the Mid-West of Ireland and their children attend primary school, some in rural areas and some in an urban setting. I firstly report on everyday life and background factors such as family structures and resources, educational qualifications and employment both here and in their native countries. Motivational factors which influenced the decision to come to live in Ireland are explored, as are issues such as childcare and government assistance to the African parents, based on their status as asylum seekers.

A short section on school and the wider community deals with issues such as engagement with school, the wider community, teachers and the education system. The transition from preschool to primary school is discussed, as is the everyday task of helping children with homework. Methods of communication between school and home are explored, as is formal involvement with schools and knowledge of, and attendance at, parent-teacher meetings and board of management meetings. It is shown how a lack of the possession of cultural and linguistic capitals militates against the efforts of the immigrant mothers in my research to become involved in and to help their children navigate the educational system in Ireland.

The experiences of the Eastern European and African mothers differ, with the African mothers expressing confidence in their ability to speak the English language and in their knowledge of the education system and how schools in Ireland are run. Some of the Eastern European mothers reveal a lack of understanding of day-to-day happenings in school, giving examples such as not knowing how the other parents would prepare their children for an event such as the raising of a Green Flag, an award for environmental care. They also describe occasions where they have felt unwelcome in school and in the community, and where their children have experienced being excluded from playing with others of their own age. Reluctance on behalf of the African mothers to speak about their backgrounds as asylum seekers is obvious, as is an apparent acceptance of being different and of experiencing prejudice and suspicion.

Cultural and linguistic difficulties which prevent communication between home and school are explored through the lens of capital and the author views the Irish education system as one where inequalities in the area of parental involvement negatively affect the newcomer child and parent. By not acknowledging the challenges experienced by this group of parents some schools place their children at risk of educational disadvantage by denying these mothers the

opportunity to become involved in their children's education in the same manner as mothers of indigenous Irish children. I consider that immigrant parental in Ireland has been failed by educational policy, due mainly to a missed opportunity to highlight the role of the immigrant parent in the NCCA Guidelines document in 2005.

In chapter six, I discuss the key issues which emerged during the semi-structured interviews with the four African and the five Eastern European who participated in my research. Their experiences and perceptions of school and community life are presented and the specific challenges to parental involvement which affect immigrant parents are explored. Challenges arising from the lack of cultural, social and linguistic capitals which are valued by the dominant cultural groups in schools are discussed.

I discuss educational policy in Ireland and how this policy has not benefited all immigrant parents. The different experiences of the African and the Eastern European mothers is of importance as it illustrates the effect of political status which is conferred on asylum seekers. Reference is also made to the lack of political capital possessed by parents who are not eligible to vote in local and general elections. I consider the immigrants who were not approached by politicians during the 2016 General Election (Limerick Leader, 25 Feb, 2016), I contend that as their votes / political status are not viewed as having value there is no perceived onus on politicians to work towards an educational policy which would enable immigrant parental involvement.

In chapter seven, drawing on Irish and international literature and using the experiences and perceptions of the immigrant mothers who were interviewed in this study, a number of conclusions will be made. Experiences of immigrant parental involvement may differ,

depending on a person's possession of linguistic, social and cultural capital. In many schools the capitals possessed may not be valued by the dominant cultural group. Schools may persist in ignoring the challenges experienced by immigrant parents and therefore add to experiences of educational disadvantage for their school going children.

The research provided unexpected evidence of differing levels of parental involvement on the parts of the Eastern European and African parents. The schools attended by the African families have the services of a HSCL teacher, and the advantages accruing to this - English language and cookery classes and the provision of a homework to give some examples. Doras LuimnI, a nongovernmental organisation played a large role in assisting immigrant integration. This research has provided evidence of some immigrant parents, those not receiving such assistance, experiencing a lack of welcome in the schools and communities in which they live.

Looking at policy documents such as the IES (2010) and the National Action Plan against Racism (2010), I contend that the DES and the Government of Ireland need to build on the tenets of the NCCA Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2005) and the IES (2010). Communication policies between home and school need to be developed and adhered to. The role of the immigrant parent in Irish schools today need to be redefined and facilitated. I further contend that curricular obligation with an associated oversight role by Inspectorate would compel schools to further their efforts to facilitate immigrant parental involvement.

Political recognition of this cohort could also mean that the value of their voting power would influence political intervention in policy development in the area of immigrant parental involvement in Irish primary schools.

Chapter 2

Educational Policy: Response to Diversity

2.1 Introduction

The Irish primary education system experienced major change with the rapid, numerically unprecedented enrolment of newcomer children which occurred in many schools in the early years of the twenty first century. This chapter explores the policy response of the Irish government, further to the immediate provision of English as an additional language (EAL) support to these children. A brief examination of the international and national framework for inclusive education is further provided and Irish policy documents as they relate to intercultural education and to immigrant parents are discussed.

2.2 EAL: Immediate but Insufficient Response.

The 2002 census shows the immigrant population in Ireland as 5.8% of the total population (INTO. 2004, p.4). By 2007 this figure had increased to approximately 11% of the total population. The need to respond to this demographic change in Irish primary schools was immediately apparent as large numbers of newcomer children with varied levels of linguistic needs enrolled in schools, being educated alongside children for whom English was their first language. Language and learning needs were quickly identified by classroom teachers, schools and by the DES. Language acquisition became one of the more immediate aspects of intercultural education and the main response by the DES was to provide support for children who did not have English as their first language, via the provision of English language support (Ni Laoire et al ,2011). It was stated that newcomer children are entitled to this support for a period of two years (*Meeting the Needs of Pupils for who English is a Second Language*. DES Circular 53/2007). Recommendations were made for the identification of children in need of

language support, and for teaching strategies such as in-classroom support or withdrawal from the classroom by an EAL or Learning Support teacher. The provision of English as an Additional Language (EAL) support enabled the development of conversational English for children who are deemed in need of and who qualify for, this type of intervention. Schools with fewer than four pupils were offered no additional support and instruction in EAL was to be provided by the Learning Support teacher in the school. Schools with between four and thirteen Newcomer pupils could apply for a grant from the DES to provide EAL support, while schools with more than fourteen Newcomer pupils could appoint a fulltime EAL teacher. This response to a lack of linguistic capital (provision of EAL support for two years) while immediate, was not adequate to the needs of these newcomer children. It has been shown that the development of academic English requires a five -year period of instruction (Cummins, 2001). The DES however in response to the economic downturn in Ireland later reduced funding for this aspect of tuition and the provision of English language support was not extended.

2.3 Cultural Diversity / Newcomers in Irish Primary Schools

Diversity is not new to Irish schools and it is suggested that intercultural curricula while referring to a “new” multicultural Ireland and the phenomenon of diversity are ignoring the historical diversity in Irish schools (Bryan,2008). The Irish Traveller Community long acknowledged as the largest minority ethnic group in Ireland was in March 2017 formally recognised as a distinct ethnic group within the State. Two official languages are also acknowledged, English and Irish, as well as other unofficial languages such as Ulster Scots, Irish Sign Language and Can’t (which is a language used by Travellers). Religious diversity has historically been a feature of the Irish Education System. Denominational schools, under

the control of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland and other minority faiths were established, and a core inclusionary principle of Irish primary education has been that all children of all religions should be taught together in the same school (Stanley Letter, 1931).

In addition to providing political asylum to refugees, the Irish government has, at various times, welcomed groups of people who were fleeing persecution; for example, those from former Yugoslav states such as Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992 during the period of genocide in that country, and in 1999, those fleeing persecution in Kosovo. These were known as Programme Refugees and did not have to go through the asylum process. Hungarian refugees were accepted following unrest in Hungary during the 1950's, followed by Chilean refugees in the years 1973-1974, Vietnamese refugees in 1979, (Intercultural Guidelines, 2006 p11) and Syrian refugees in 2017 / 2018.

Despite the presence of these minority groups it is the arrival of the economic migrant workers and their families who came to Ireland during the years of the Celtic Tiger that is generally regarded as the beginning of multicultural Ireland (Bryan 2008). This suggests that prior to this demographic change at the end of the 20th Century and the early decade of the 21st Century, Ireland was culturally and ethnically homogenous. Diversity is immediately categorised as “different”, as “other”. More inclusive language is used by some researchers who speak of Ireland being transformed to an “increasingly heterogenous country in terms of nationality, language, ethnicity and religious affiliation” (Byrne et al, p.271, 2010). It has to be noted however that when media reports speak of “migrants” this usually refers to groups who are culturally different to Irish people, such as African or Asian migrants, as well as those whose first language is not English, such as Eastern European migrants. The language of many of

these media reports is exclusionary. Migrants from the UK are perceived as being of a culturally similar background and are not regarded as “different” (Ni Laoire et al, p.20.2011).

2.4 International and National Framework for Inclusive Education

The principles of equality, non-discrimination, understanding and respect for diversity underpin all international legislation and policy, which, in turn, have influenced policymaking in Ireland. Since the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, international conventions signed by Ireland have reinforced the concept of intercultural education. This declaration refers to “the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”, and notes that education should “promote understanding, tolerance and friendship” (IES, p. 19). Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights states the rights of parents in determining that their children receive an education and teaching “in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions” (Council of Europe, 1950, as cited in IES, p. 19).

The rights of the newcomer child and family are clearly stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). Article 29 declares that states should ensure that “all segments of society [...] have access to education” and that the education of the child should be directed to “the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own” (IES, p.19). These words are clearly echoed in the Education Act (1998), where the Irish Department of Education states that the education system should respect “the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society” and engage in a “partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and other school staff, the community served by the school and the State” (IES, p. 20). This key act was reflected in many reports and policy documents

which aimed to influence policy development in Irish schools. The 2002 Guidelines on Traveller Education noted that “Young people should be enabled to appreciate the richness of a diversity of cultures and [...] to recognise and to challenge prejudice and discrimination” (DES, 2002, p. 34). In the 2005 Schools and the Equal Status Act (DES & Equality Authority), it is stated that an inclusive school is one that respects, values and accommodates diversity and seeks positive experiences, with a sense of belonging and outcomes for all students. The Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2005) aim to help schools “to respect and celebrate diversity, to promote equality and to challenge unfair discrimination” (title page).

2.5 Intercultural Education and its importance in Primary Schools

The Irish government acknowledged cultural diversity in a number of documents. The White Paper on Education “Charting our Education Future” (1995), building on a three-year consultation process recognises the “growing plurality of Irish society” (p. 35) and gives a commitment to recognising this pluralism (p.75). The Education Act (1998) continued this commitment and placed multicultural education firmly on the agenda for Irish schools, identifying the necessity for schools to respect the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society was outlined (INTO, 2002). The revised Primary Curriculum (1999) recognised the diversity of the pupil population and aims to develop a respect for difference. Intercultural education is the preferred approach to diversity (INTO, 2002) and in celebrating diversity, anti-racism is promoted, and intercultural education is seen as necessary in all schools whether a school population is multi-ethnic or not.

The numerically unprecedented demographic change in Irish primary schools demanded a response from schools and government. Policy initiatives in the area of aiding language acquisition were supported financially by the DES. *Guidelines on Intercultural Education in*

the Primary School were also issued from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2005) with the aim of providing guidance for schools in policy development and planning. The guidelines explore approaches and methodologies which support intercultural education., and the Irish Government facilitated the publication of supporting resources. “*Together towards inclusion: Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School*” (2007) was published by IILT (Integrate Ireland Language and Training Board). This aimed to assist in auditing current provision and practice in schools in the area of diversity and to identify and implement future developments in a school. “*Up and Away*” (IIIT,2006) a resource book for English language support in primary schools was published. These resources were supported by the issuing of DES Circulars 53/07 and 15/09 which dealt with meeting the needs of pupils who were learning English as a second language.

The NCCA Guidelines on Intercultural Guidelines (2005) perceive intercultural education as being relevant to all children, not only those who have newly arrived in Ireland and defines intercultural education in terms of the following two principles

- “Education which respects, celebrates and recognised the normality of diversity in all areas of human life. It sensitises the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life encircles all of us”. (NCCA, 2005, p3)
- “It is education which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination and promotes the values upon which equality is built” (NCCA, 2005.p3)

These principles are relevant to all children in Irish primary schools and have long been recognised as such. Indeed intercultural education is seen as a synthesis of the learning from multicultural and anti-racist education approaches in use internationally from the 1960s to the 1990s (p.3) As expressed in this NCCA document the term interculturalism has its basis in

the belief that people and schools become personally enriched by “incoming into contact with and experiencing other cultures, and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other” (p.3). In Ireland the approach to cultural diversity is one of interculturalism and intercultural education, an approach which through the creation of respect for and dialogue between the different cultural groups in school and in society, has an aim of achieving and developing a sustainable way of living together (O’Connor & Fass, 2002). The revised Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) is regarded as being an intercultural curriculum, and aims to support intercultural education in improving knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values. It is integrated with all subjects and with the general life of the school and should provide the child with a “real world” focus. Language is recognised as central to the development of intercultural competencies. The Guidelines document (NCCA, 2005, p5), a response to the changing population in primary schools embraces the aims of this earlier curriculum and expresses the need to form a “school culture that is welcoming, respectful and sensitive to the needs of all children”. The Intercultural Guidelines aim “to contribute to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society based on a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity is [sic] valuable” (NCCA, 2005.p5). These aims, while reflecting the goals of a fully integrated multicultural education, proved ambitious. Funding for the training of teaching staff was not provided by the DES to assist schools in achieving these aims. While the necessity for support regarding English as an Additional Language is accepted by the DES, there has been criticism that vital anti-racist practice in schools was not supported (Kitching, 2010). It is argued that the educational wellbeing of newcomer children involves not only the acquisition of English language skills, but an education which recognises the “totality of their personal, social and cultural background” (Devine, 2011, p75). Wellbeing is seen as being dependent on recognition of newcomer children as persons who need to be

validated and supported in school. (Devine, 2011.p85). This validation and support are in turn dependent on adequate parental involvement, or the principle of “wellbeing” loses its meaning.

2.6 Newcomer Parents in Educational Policy

The 2005 Guidelines on Intercultural Education refer to “teachers, school managers, school support staff and policy makers” (p6) as those with an interest in education. As the guidelines do not make specific reference to parents (of the majority demographic group or of immigrant parents), an opportunity was missed to make schools and teachers aware of the value of parental involvement among the population of immigrant parents. A whole school culture needs parental involvement to be “welcoming, respectful and sensitive to the needs of all the children” (NCCA, p.6).

In discussing school planning, the NCCA guidelines (2005) focused briefly on the involvement of parents and of the wider community. Policy makers acknowledged the need to improve school contact with all parents, but these did not go far enough in emphasising the difficulties parents may experience in approaching their child’s school. National (ESRI,2010) and international (Desforges & Abouchaar,2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Garcia, 2002) research regarding the impact of parental involvement on a child’s education were not acknowledged in this document. Although recent government policy in Ireland acknowledges and accepts its responsibility to all children resident within its jurisdiction, one may ask whether the parents of newcomer children are considered to be part of the cohort of “those with a responsibility for and interest in primary education” (NCCA, 2005, p6).

Language is mentioned as a challenging issue for parents from minority ethnic groups or for parents whose first language is not that of the school. Issues such as cultural difficulties are not mentioned. Immigrant parents may not be aware of the expectations of Irish primary

schools in the context of parental involvement. The guidelines suggest that opportunities be identified where parents can support the school (e.g. language support, translation and homework clubs), but there is no emphasis on the role of the school in supporting parents. Not all schools have attempted to bridge the gap caused by cultural and linguistic differences. The development of a communication policy in the school and between school and home is a recommendation (Intercultural Guidelines, 2005 p30) which is not followed in all schools. Parents who do not understand how schools in the host country operate cannot provide the support to their children that is expected in primary schools (Darmody, 2011; Turney & Kao,2009). Thus, equality of access and participation as envisaged in the *Education Act 1998* is further compromised as the needs of immigrant parents are not adequately acknowledged. The role of parents is accorded more importance in the Intercultural Educational Strategy (IES,2010) of which one of the key components is partnership and engagement among relevant bodies in education. It is a goal of the strategy to encourage and promote active partnership, engagement and effective communication between the school and groups of people, including the parent stakeholders.

2.7 Summary

This chapter discusses the immediate response of the DES to the rapid demographic change in Irish primary schools, the provision of EAL support to newcomer children. While necessary and timely, it is argued that a two-year provision was inadequate (Cummins,2001) and that more could be done to aid the development of academic English.

Examining the history of diversity in schools and outlining the International and National framework for inclusive education, it is clear to the author that the tenets of such policies have not always filtered through to all primary schools and that the immigrant parent is not always facilitated in becoming involved in the education of his /her child.

Chapter 3.

Parental Involvement

3.1 Introduction

There is a broad body of literature on the complex issues of parental involvement (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Croxier, 1999; Fan & Chen,2001, Seginer,2006; Epstein,1996,2006, Goodall & Montgomery,2014), Desforges & Abouchaar,2003). In this section of the literature review attention will focus an exploration of the concept of parental involvement, in both its formal and informal aspects, as described in this definition used where the concept is described as “taking many forms 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 fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participating in school events; participating in the work of the school; and participating in school governance” (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p 4). Both formal and informal aspects of parental involvement are beneficial in influencing a child’s educational outcome. Informal parental involvement can be described in terms of parent’s educational attitudes and behaviours, the provision of a home environment conducive to learning, and the communication of parental beliefs and aspirations (Feinstein et al, 2006 in Harris & Goodall, 2007, p.20). This research focuses on the formal aspect of parental involvement which occur when parents become involved in school -based activities such as parent teacher meetings, in parents’ associations, in school Boards of Management and on how immigrant parents are enabled to become involved in their child’s education.

In the second section of this chapter emphasis will be placed upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) which is of importance to this study as his theory of social reproduction is used to explain the social, linguistic and cultural challenges faced by immigrant parents as their children attend school in a host country whose educational system is very different to that left behind. The absence or presence of the various types of capital work either to the advantage/disadvantage of immigrant parents in their efforts to participate in the school lives of their children. Having considered this theory of capitals this part of Chapter Two will then focus on the extraordinary political challenges which affect immigrant parents many of whom do not have a political voice as they are not Irish citizens who have the right to vote in local and national elections.

3.2 Parental Involvement and its Significance for Education

Parental involvement has been shown to be one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement and sustained school performance (Harris & Chrispeels, 2006). Such involvement in children's education from an early age has been shown to have an effect on educational achievement which continues into adolescence. Data from the National child development study (2007) found that very high parental interest (measured through the use of a survey), is associated with better exam results compared to the results of children whose parents show no interest in their child's educational outcomes (DCSF,2008).

The work of Joyce Epstein (1996, 2006) has been influential in research into the concept of parental involvement, providing a typology which identified types of involvement in a child's education in school and at home. Parental educational attitudes and behaviour which have an

effect on children's levels of educational attainment and attitudes to school have been identified and they include at home pre-school parenting which provides for the physical wellbeing as well as the intellectual stimulation of the child. Recently the focus in international literature is upon a realisation that schools and parents must move from an atmosphere of giving of information (on the part of the school) to one of a sharing of information between school and parents, working together to benefit the pupils of the school. It is suggested that the term "Parental Involvement" be replaced by "School, family and community partnership" (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014).

3.3 Challenges faced by immigrant parents.

From this literature came further recognition of a multi-faceted model of parental involvement and an acknowledgement that involvement or engagement is not the same for all parents. It is recognised that "not all parents are the same, have the same needs, face the same barriers or share the same conceptualisation of parental engagement" (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Immigrant parents face barriers to parental involvement due to their lack of cultural and linguistic capitals (Turney and Kao, 2009), and it is stated that this lack of capitals can affect a parent's ability to support their child's education (Reay, 1998). Discontinuities such as these between the competencies and dispositions which children bring to school and the dispositions valued in schools may be factors in educational disadvantage experienced by immigrant children and their parents.

3.4 Bourdieu's Theory of Capitals and Schooling

The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) has been influential in studies of the relation between students' capacity to participate in schooling and the role of parents in supporting that participation. The core of this theory is that students with economic capital and a more valuable

social and cultural capital participate more fully in school than do their otherwise comparable peers with different, less dominant and less publicly valuable forms of social and cultural capital that may not be recognised by the dominant group in society. In the study of parental involvement among immigrant families, a parent's capability to become involved in his/her child's education and life in school is often a consequence of the parent's possession of, or lack of capital. Capitals, economic, cultural, social and linguistic possessed by the dominant group in society support a habitus or way of life that compliments the social and cultural processes of the school (Bourdieu, 1984. Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Bourdieu (1986) regarded cultural capital / resources inherited from and activated within the family as a significant factor in school participation and success. His work identified three variants/types of cultural capital. The first type identified exists in the sets of meaning and modes of thinking inherent in a person. The accumulation of this type of cultural capital begins in early childhood, where the investment of time by parents and other family members serves to sensitive the child to cultural distinctions. Secondly, he identifies cultural capital in the institutionalized state, which includes educational qualifications, and thirdly, Bourdieu speaks of cultural capital embodied in an objectified state which involves the provision and availability in the home of cultural goods or items such as books, artefacts, dictionaries and paintings (Reay, 2004). For the immigrant parent, cultural capital and knowledge of the educational system is vital for accessing the rich resources the school has to offer parents. Immigrant parents who do not possess these types of capital are at a disadvantage as their children attend primary school in Ireland (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997 in Wright, 2010).

3.5 Factors which Hinder Immigrant Parent Involvement

The many factors which influence school achievement have been explored to establish their relevance to the experiences of immigrant parents (Turney & Kao, 2009). These factors which can be understood in terms of Bourdieu's Theory of Capitals (1986) include socio-economic background, parents' educational attainment, family structure, ethnicity and parental involvement in the education of the child. Of these, parental involvement is the factor most strongly related to attainment (Harris & Goodall, 2007). A number of issues which make parental involvement difficult have been identified, such as work commitments and being unable to obtain time off work to attend school meetings (DSCF, 2008). This 2008 study also found that children of parents with the poorest grasp of literacy and numeracy were at a greater disadvantage academically compared to children of parents with good literacy and numeracy skills

Family socio-economic status (SES) factors have been shown to be consistent negative predictors to parental involvement, suggesting that economic resources are crucial in parental ability to become involved in their children's preschool classrooms and primary schools (Turney & Kao, 2009). Other perceived barriers to parental involvement include the following: the English language ability of the parents; inconvenient meeting times; lack of childcare; safety going to school; not feeling welcomed by the school; problems with transportation; language problems; inability to obtain time off work; not being informed of interesting things happening in the school (Harris & Goodall, 2007). It was concluded that immigrant parents face substantial barriers to involvement in their children's preschool classrooms and schools. Lower levels of involvement may be interpreted by teachers as an indicator of the extent to which parents care about their child's educational outcomes. Irish research (Bleach, 2010) has shown the need to keep parents informed of their child's learning and to ensure their

involvement in decision making within schools and the education system. Moreover, it is considered that immigrant parents remain on what is described as the margins of the “home school interface” in this regard (Darmody & McCoy, p146, 2011). Language as a barrier to participation emerged as a persistent theme in McGorman & Sugrue’s study (2007). The focus for the development of parental involvement is seen as lying in the provision of English language classes for immigrant parents.

The challenges experienced by immigrant parents were highlighted by the teachers interviewed in Mc Gorman and Sugrue’s 2007 study. They indicated that the inability to communicate with some parents who do not have English as their first language seriously hampers the work of the school. This Irish study was undertaken in the greater Blanchardstown area, Dublin 15, enabled by funding from the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Science to St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra. This area of Dublin which experienced what is described as dramatic demographic shifts also experienced resultant changes in school enrolment, teaching and learning. The study was designed to provide a picture of then current “realities” as encountered in the daily lives of principals and teachers. What made this work of particular interest to me was the inclusion of the voices and experiences of some of the immigrant parents whose children attended school in the Dublin 15 area. A key recommendation of the study was that strategies be put in place to increase parental involvement in the educational lives of students. It was suggested that the English language deficit of newcomer parents should be a priority for government, as this would have the effect of giving confidence in the English and integrating parents into the life of the school. Development of such courses in English are seen as being a “necessary policy milestone on the road to diversity and inclusion” (McGorman and Sugrue, 2007, p80). Kitching (2006) also reported that parental involvement becomes more difficult when parents do not speak the language of the host country or school. This may be

regarded as a lack of involvement, and these parents are often criticised for not caring about their children's education. Other cultural capital challenges can be noted in the various issues arising, as parents feel uncomfortable visiting schools, and have difficulty understanding notes sent home from schools. These factors are identified as negatively affecting parental involvement/participation. Parents who possess the type of social and linguistic capital acknowledged by the school and community find involvement in their child's schooling easier than parents who experience difficulties with the dominant language and methods of communication. Parents with linguistic difficulties do not feel confident interacting with staff in their child's schools (ibid, 2007). International research has also identified discomfort levels among immigrant parents with an unfamiliar and perhaps intimidating school system. The perception that they are not wanted or welcome in school has been identified among immigrant parents (Brilliant, 2001). This work will discuss educational policy in Ireland at a time of rapid demographic change and conclude that the immediate governmental response of providing EAL teachers for newcomer children was not sufficient.

3.6 Habitus as a Challenge to Parental Involvement by Immigrant Parents.

An understanding of habitus (the lifestyle, values and dispositions of particular social groups that are acquired through the experiences and activities of everyday life) is particularly relevant to interpreting the experiences of immigrant parents. To understand and then to alleviate the challenges faced by immigrant parents as their children attend primary schools in Ireland, schools need to acknowledge some parents' lack of or inability to activate various capitals. Immigrant parents may lack experience of the particular forms of schooling, values and culture valued by the dominant group in society. A lack of the linguistic ability and specific vocabulary valued by a dominant group may serve to set a group apart from school and community. These are factors which can prevent parents from expressing their opinions in a manner recognised

and accepted by schools. Schools expect active parental involvement, where middle class parents are at an advantage compared to parents without the linguistic or social capital desired by schools (Lareau, 2003). This is a key dimension of cultural capital across social fields and can affect a parent's ability to support his/her child's education (Reay, 1998). It is suggested that social class provides cultural capital when it increases parents' compliance with the dominant standards in school interaction. In the same manner, all forms of social or cultural capital do not have the same value in a given field, and many atypical or non-traditional types are not recognised, and are thereby excluded by the host society or school (Lareau and Horvat, 1999). This is the habitus described by Bourdieu (1990) who envisioned habitus as a living history, an "amalgamation of the impact of a certain society on an individual's past, condensed into their predisposition for the present and the future" (Costa and Murphy in Grusendorf, p7, 2016). This present research is concerned with immigrant parents who may find themselves in this position, in possession of habitus which can be described as "an agent of continuity and tradition", a family history and culture of importance to family, but which is not valued by the schools their children attend.

3.7 Lack of Capitals and Experiences of Educational Disadvantage

Challenges arising from social class, economic resources and ethnicity all combine to place some immigrant families, parents and children at risk of experiencing educational disadvantage, which is described in the 1998 *Educational Act* as "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevents students from deriving appropriate benefit from education and schools" (32.9)". Factors such as language barriers, a lack of understanding and information as to the day-to-day organisation of a school, and the expectations teachers have regarding parental involvement (Turney & Kao, 2009) are some of

the challenges experienced by immigrant parents and are relevant to the following definition by Kellaghan (2001) who defines educational disadvantage in terms of

- (i) “discontinuities between the competencies and dispositions which children bring to school and the competencies and dispositions valued in schools, in addition to
- (ii) (ii) factors conceptualised in terms of three forms of ‘capital’ (economic, cultural and social) which influence the development of the competencies and dispositions” (p. 3).

These definitions reflect the theories of Bourdieu (1986, p.17) who speaks of the notion of cultural capital as a hypothesis which has made it possible “to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions “ I consider the work of Bourdieu (1986) to be of particular relevance to the cohort of newcomer parents in primary schools in Ireland at present. Cultural and linguistic challenges being experienced serve to distance this group from the day-to-day life of a school community and these parents are placed at a disadvantage when attempting to navigate the educational system, schools and communities of which their children are now a part (Turney & Kao, 2009, McGorman & Sugrue, 2007).

The problems faced by the newcomer community are described by Irwin (2009), who states that “most especially the issue of class identity or socio-economic status or resources is one which cuts across the issue of intercultural rights or lack thereof. In education, problems of culture and of class all too often intersect to the disadvantage of ‘immigrant’ or ‘newcomer’ child” (p.9). Similarly, it has been stated that factors such as ethnicity, length of duration in the host country and marital status, combined with social class, all have an effect on parental involvement in a school, and are linked to the possession of cultural capital, which provides confidence, assertiveness and knowledge of the education system in the host country (Reay,

1998). Ethnicity has been found to complicate the workings of cultural capital, making it difficult for minority ethnic parents to comply with the standards of home school relations and parental involvement expected by schools (Reay, 2004). It has been stated that different forms of cultural capitals (language, culture, school-specific knowledge and skills) are dependent on the context and society in which they have been acquired and may be devalued in the immigrant context (Darmody & McCoy, 2011 in Darmody et al, 2011,p147). Language difficulties and cultural differences can be problematic for the immigrant parent as they attempt to access information from school and to become involved in their children's education. Difficulties may arise as they attempt to communicate with teachers or try to access outside agencies. These difficulties may have an impact on educational outcomes of immigrant children in the receiving country (Darmody & McCoy, 2011)

Bourdieu (1986) speaks of the importance of social and cultural capital, which refers to the networks of social relationships which can be accessed, and also to the embodied knowledge and abilities which enable this access. The support of family and friends is a valued resource, and the presence or lack of such affective relationships can prove to be a source of support or deprivation for people. None of this bodes well for those newcomers who lack the social graces, or what Bourdieu calls the "social capital", to negotiate life in a new country and an unfamiliar education system. Many lack the support of extended family, as evidenced by Share and Kerrins (2009) and my research has provided evidence of one family where the maternal grandfather came from Poland to care for sick children.

3.8 Social Capital and the Immigrant Parent

A parent's involvement in their child's schooling is often conceptualised as a form of social capital (McNeal, 1999, Yan & Lin, 2005) which influences the school experience and outcomes of a child. Parental involvement gives a message to children that education is important, gives the parent access to information about a child's performance in school, and thus allows them to intervene if necessary. This in turn may result in the child him /herself placing more value on education. The effects of the various barriers to parental involvement faced by immigrant parents is alarming in light of the recognition of the importance of parental involvement in building school specific social capital and in influencing achievement and behavioural outcomes. (Turney & Kao, 2009)

Lack of the type of social capital valued by the dominant cultural group in a school can affect formal parental involvement in school life. Although election to Boards of Management and representation on the Parents' Council/Association of schools are theoretically available to the parents of all children attending a school, many immigrant parents are not aware that they can become involved in life of a school in this manner, being what Reay describes as, in terms of social class identities, "cultural outsiders" (2004). In terms of the politics of schooling and of decision-making within schools, newcomer parents are at a disadvantage compared to parents who are part of the host community. Written notes such as notification of meetings, are frequently in the English language, which may be read but not understood in the home, and therefore, this cohort of parents is unaware of the opportunity for involvement in the school community. (Turney & Kao, 2009). For parents who are in the early stages of language acquisition, the language used may be too difficult to understand. Parent-teacher meetings are another aspect of school life which provide difficulties for those immigrant parents in Ireland with little or poor English linguistic ability. Often, schools are dependent on parents bringing

another parent to meetings to act as a translator. Occasionally, newcomer children themselves are required to act as translators for their parents, which may cause difficulties in discussions of academic progress or behavioural issues (Smyth et al, 2009).

3.9 Cultural and Economic Capitals Combined

Economic/financial resources combined with cultural capital, have an even further effect on how parents feel disempowered from involving themselves to varying degrees in a child's education (Reay, 2004). The possession and activation of capital or economic resources also varies between individuals and is a determining factor in parental involvement among immigrant parents. Parental socio-economic status has a mediating effect on parental involvement and on student achievement. The negative impact of lower socio-economic status economic status can be found through material deprivation experienced by children and their families and through activities and behaviours to education (Sacker et al., as cited in Harris & Goodall, 2007). When exploring the topic of parental involvement among immigrant parents, the correlation between SES and ethnicity, and differences in levels of parental involvement may be differences related to SES. Minorities experience a social world far different from that enjoyed by members of the dominant group or host country (McNeal, 1999). In the educational arena, minorities are underrepresented in textbooks, and schools may have fewer resources for newcomer children than are available for the dominant group in the school. Issues such as this shape one's valuing of education. Poor and minority parents are less likely to be involved in school-based activities and less likely to initiate meetings with teachers. In the arena of social/cultural capital, resources within the home tend to be lacking among minorities, poor people and households headed by a single parent (McNeal, 1999). It is further observed in a discussion of parent-teacher meetings that schools privilege certain types (middle-class) family culture and discourse, leading to the construction of a type of parental involvement which excludes parents who are missing the social and cultural capital needed to comply with the

educator's idea of the ideal parent role (Bakker & Dennessen, 2003, (Lareau,2007; O'Brien 2008).

3.10 Emotional Capital and Parental Involvement

Developed from Bourdieu's forms of capital, which show how a family/social class group may invest in the education of their children is the more recent concept of emotional capital, children and involvement. According to Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital refers not only to the relationship between social groups and the educational system, it also refers to the importance of family to cultural reproduction, (Reay, 2000). Primarily transmitted through family, cultural capital influences modes of thinking, dispositions, meanings and lifestyle. These dispositions are judged and valued against those of the dominant social group, and this is where the link arises between possession of cultural capital and a family's ability to interact with a school.

Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual framework (1986) Nowotny developed the concept of emotional capital, which she describes as "confined within the bounds of affective relationships of family and friends and encompasses the emotional resources you hand on to those you care about" (Reay,2000.p 572) For Reay, emotional capital, refers to the emotions, both positive and negative which influence a mother's involvement in his/her child's schooling (Reay, 2000), and the emotional resources passed on from mother to child through processes of parental involvement. Allat (1993, p. 143 as cited in Reay,2000) describes an example of emotional capital as "the way mothers devoted their skills gained from their formal education to the advancement of their children", further acknowledgement of the role of the mother.

While this form of capital is not possessed solely by mothers, it is accepted that emotional capital, is more the province of women than men (Reay, 2000). Bourdieu, too, highlighted the

role of the mother in affective relationships, and, although he did not use the term “emotional capital”, he wrote of the work of a parent which “generates devotion, generosity and solidarity”. This work he attributed “more particularly to women, who are responsible for maintaining relationships” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 68, as cited in Reay, 2000). This form of capital includes the importance of a parent communicating his/her feelings and aspirations regarding a child’s future.

Lacking the dominant form of maternal capital that would enable them to engage more fully with their children’s school has been shown to be a factor counteracting parental involvement among Irish working-class parents (O’Brien, 2004). It was shown that mothers who were of different classes and cultural positions than the dominant group in society performed intense emotional care for their children. However, these efforts may not be recognised or acknowledged by schools. It is considered that possession of or lack of capital may militate against a mother’s ability to perform emotional care in education. Difficulties in accessing material, social and cultural resources are identified as barriers to activating emotional capital for care (O’Brien, 2008). It has further been noted that that while the desire for academic success for their children may be prominent among immigrant families, they may lack the knowledge of how to achieve this success. The cultural capital possessed is often not recognised in the receiving country (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995 in Darmody et al, 2011). In a study of Mexican-American families it was also found that their aspirations for their children were as high as those of European-American families. However, these Mexican-American families had little comprehension or knowledge of how to help their children attain these aspirations (Azmitia *et al.*, as cited in Nieto, 2004). The emotional care expended by immigrant mothers does not translate into academic success due to linguistic, cultural and social challenges to parental involvement in their child’s schooling.

The challenges experienced by immigrant parents were highlighted by the teachers interviewed in Mc Gorman and Sugrue's 2007 study; they indicated that the inability to communicate with some parents who do not have English as their first language seriously hampers the work of the school. Parental involvement becomes more difficult when parents do not speak the language of the host country or school. This may be regarded as a lack of involvement, and these parents are often criticised for not caring about their children's education (Kitching, 2006). It is important that the factors which influence parental involvement be understood. Minimal participation by immigrant parents in their child's education may reflect barriers to parental involvement, rather than a lack of interest in a child's schooling (Darmody & McCoy, 2011). The emotional capital expended in preparing lunches and uniforms and ensuring that the child has the necessary items for a day in school may not be regarded as parental involvement. This form of misrecognition of emotional and caring labour means that those doing it are "denied the full status of a full partner in social interactions, as a consequence of institutionalised patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem" (Fraser, 2000). More needs to be done by schools to alleviate the barriers being experienced by the immigrant parent. Irish primary schools who have the services of a Home School Community Liaison teacher have made efforts to assist immigrant parents through the provision of English language classes, cookery classes, homework clubs. Mothers in my research have spoken of the value of these classes.

3.11 Political Capital as an Extraordinary Challenge to Parental Rights

In applying a theory of capital to help understand immigrant parental involvement, the author considers the lack of political capital to be the greatest challenge affecting the efforts of immigrant parents in becoming involved in the school life of their children. The Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration (CBP, 2004) stresses the importance of equal access for immigrants to institutions, goods and services, as well as their active participation in the democratic process. In Ireland, as in other EU states, this is facilitated by citizenship of the host country. Naturalised Irish citizens share the same rights and responsibilities as Irish citizens by birth or descent (ESRI, 2012). These citizens have equal access to social services such as social welfare, health services, housing services and education. This equality of access is not extended to those immigrants who have not yet fulfilled the habitual residence conditions, which requires proof of residence in Ireland and a proven link to the country. This greatly disadvantages them in facilitating their children's education. My contention is that these immigrants who are not entitled to vote in local and general elections are not regarded as "important" in political circles. An article in the "Limerick Leader" newspaper (25th February, 2016) reports on the recent General Election where almost 10,000 new Irish citizens were voting for the first time. The voting power of the 300 new citizens registered to vote for the first time in Limerick was not recognised, and "Very few [of the new Irish citizens in the Limerick area] have been approached by canvassers or candidates and there seems to be a misconception that people who look or sound different could not be eligible to vote". (Doras Luimni). The lack of political capital, not being able to vote in local and general elections means that the voice of the immigrant parent is not seen as important politically. I contend that these challenges, in their totality must seriously impede the involvement of immigrant parents as partners and stakeholders in their children's education.

3.12 Summary: Capitals and the Reproduction of Inequalities

Demographic change throughout Europe and, specific to this research, in Ireland has brought cultural, linguistic and religious diversity to Irish primary schools. It has been found that due to differences in capitals possessed by immigrants and those valued by schools in the receiving countries newcomer children are often disadvantaged (Heckman, 2009). The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) is of importance to this study as his theory of social reproduction is used to explain the social, linguistic and cultural challenges faced by immigrant parents as their children attend school in a host country whose educational system is very different to that left behind. The absence or presence of the various types of capital work either to the advantage/disadvantage of these immigrant parents in their efforts to participate in the school lives of their children.

Educational disadvantage is a feature of life for newcomer children and their families. Immigrant parents lose much of the value of their cultural and social capital through the migration process and may have limited fluency in the language of the host country. These parents are “often pushed to the margins and invited to become involved when seen fit by the schools” (Darmody, 2011.p225). Research has shown little evidence of equal partnerships between schools and parents and it is stated that schools play a role not only in education but in making children and parents aware, implicitly and explicitly, of what is valued in the host society (Darmody, 2011). Studies have defined social exclusion in relation to education and work, and although many of these studies concern young people, I consider they should also address the plight of the immigrant parent as s/he attempts to encourage and assist children attending Irish primary schools. Room (1995) in Fangen (2010) developed a concept of disadvantage among young immigrants which focuses on the multi-dimensional aspects of social exclusion material. Using the research question “What is it that contributes to social

exclusion of young adult immigrants in different social settings?”, findings were made in the areas of educational, labour market, spatial, relational and socio-political exclusion.

Social Theorists have used the term “new social exclusion perspective” as a way of analysing the more heterogenous multicultural and complex society of the 21st century (Body-Gendrot, 2002) , and involves instances of excluding or expelling a person from a community as well as denial of access to those deemed “outsiders”. It is this denial of access that I see as problematic in the life experiences of immigrant parents in relation to their children’s primary education in Ireland.

The work of Bourdieu (1986) is used to show how concepts of cultural and linguistic capitals and habitus serve to reproduce the values of the dominant group (Darmody, 2011), making social exclusion a reality for many. The ways in which such inequalities become institutionalized was also discussed. In discussing immigrant parental involvement, it was shown that parental involvement was of importance to the educational outcome of the child and in schools where this involvement is not facilitated, I consider that newcomer children are at a disadvantage compared to parents who possess the recognised and favoured types of capital.

Described as the “central familial endowment rooted in social class values” (Darmody, 2011, p226), cultural capital influences the transmission or reproduction of the values of the dominant group whose cultural capital informs what is most valued in the educational system. As a result, students and parents from a dominant group are best able to navigate the system, thereby placing minority groups at a disadvantage. Because the educational processes favour those possessing similar cultural capitals, “outsider” groups possessing different forms of capital,

such as migrant children and families may be subjected to symbolic violence. (Bourdieu, 1973 in Darmody, 2011, Reay,2004, Bryan, 2008).

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines and discusses the decisions made during the course of this study into immigrant parental involvement and the experiences of some parents as they attempt to become involved in their child's education in Irish primary schools. This methodological information is intended to give information on the different phases of the research from my observations as an EAL teacher in 2006-2008, to readings of national and international literature during my EdD studies, finding participants for the research and analysing the data.

4.2 Research Question

My observations of a group of immigrant parents who appeared to be on the margins of the school community, together with my reflections and readings on the topic of parental involvement and barriers to parental involvement which may affect some groups of parents, led to the emergence of the research question. How do immigrant parents experience parental involvement in Irish primary schools?

The intention in this research is to foreground the voices of immigrant parents and to offer portrayals of inclusion / exclusion as experienced in rural and urban Irish primary schools, in the daily interactions of teachers and immigrant parents, of school communities and immigrant parents, as perceived by immigrant parents. I seek to determine whether this cohort of parents is enabled to become involved in their children's education and if all immigrant parents face similar challenges, as not all parents share the same cultural and social capitals, which are factors that affect parental involvement in education. Is immigrant parental involvement facilitated? This facilitation is what I understand "inclusion" to mean.

4.3 Population, Participants and Sampling Techniques

The population I wanted to target for the study was the cohort of immigrant parents who came to Ireland during the first decade of the 21st century, and whose children attend primary schools in the mid-west of Ireland. The sampling method used was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling, the use of one participant who recruits other interviewees from their social network, is a useful technique when carrying out research with what is described as “hard to reach groups” such as ethnic minorities (Shagheghi, Bhopal & Sheikh, 2001 in Ellard Gray, (2015). where I identified two individuals from the target population of both Eastern European and African mothers. One was a Polish mother who was known to me through other immigrant parents whose children had attended the school where I taught EAL. This mother agreed to be part of the study, and it was arranged that we would meet and that the interview would be conducted in her home. Around that time, I made the acquaintance of an African lady living outside of a major town in the area. She was also willing to assist me in my research. Having interviewed these two mothers, they were then used to identify other members of the target population. (Robson, 2001). The criteria used in selecting participants was that they would be immigrant parents with children of primary school age. An ability to converse in English was important to me. All but one of the interviewees had this fluency in English. She subsequently introduced me to four African mothers who had children in primary school and were willing to participate in my study. Her contact with these mothers occurred through a Christian church of which they were all members. This group of participants was also very welcoming to the author.

Table 2. *The research sample.*

Nationality	Pseudonym
Polish	Kornelia
Polish	Olga
Polish	Margit
Polish	Krisztina
Lithuanian	Magdolna
African	Maria
African	Erzsebet
African	Edina
African	Eva

4.4 Theoretical Perspective and Methodological Approach

Constructionism, as an epistemology, allows for the construction of meaning, which comes into existence “in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). The constructionist view concerns the world of meanings in which we all exist, and it is stated that “the melange of cultures and subcultures into which we are born provides us with meanings. These meanings we are taught, and we learn in a complex and subtle process of enculturation. They establish a tight grip upon us and by and large shape our thinking and behaviour throughout our lives” (ibid p79). In this ethnographic study, the theoretical perspective involves a phenomenological approach which attempts to identify, understand, describe and maintain the subjective experiences of the participants in the study (Crotty, 1998,

p. 83). The research explores cultural understandings through the immediate personal and social experiences of a number of individuals who have left behind home and family to make a new life in Ireland. This interpretative approach is linked to the work of Max Weber, who suggests that an explorative methodology such as this is based on “Verstehen” – understanding (Crotty, p. 67). While using this approach it is necessary to reflect and report on the views of the observer rather than those of the researcher thus, setting aside his /her own experiences and observations (Creswell,2009, Cohen, Mannion et al, (2007)). This reflexive challenge became a feature of my research. However, having examined a number of methodologies, it became clear that a social constructivist approach would be best suited to this study, having a focus on the individual and how individuals construct and make sense of their world (Robson, 2011). Social constructivism is an interpretive framework whereby individuals seek to understand their world and develop their own particular meanings that correspond to their experience (Creswell, 2013). Meanings are formed through interaction with others (Creswell, 2013) and as such is referred to and linked with interpretivism.

Table 3. *Outline of theoretical and conceptual framework leading to research design.*

Research Question		
How do immigrant parents experience parental involvement in Irish primary schools?		
Contextual Background		
Demographic change		Educational policy
Epistemology		
Constructionism		
Theoretical Perspective		
Interpretivism		Phenomenology
Conceptual framework		
Capitals		
Methodology		
Qualitative	Case studies	Semi-structured interviews

The theoretical perspective also involves the use of a methodology which enables the collection and analysis of data without imposing the researcher’s presuppositions on the data. This is why semi-structured interviews were the instrument chosen. Initially, I considered using a questionnaire as a method of data collection, enabling me to survey a large number of immigrant parents. The case study approach was chosen, as it allows for storytelling research into these experiences, for data to be collected so that features of the phenomenon can be explored and for interpretations of immigrant parental involvement to be put forward (Bassey,

2008, p. 47). This, therefore, is a set of case studies of individual parents from differing national backgrounds who have one feature in common: they are all immigrants who have children attending Irish primary schools. Their narratives together, with concepts from the literature and quotes from interviews, will represent the experiences of these parents (Graeme et al., 2006).

4.5 Instrument: The Semi-Structured Interview

Having considered the advantages and disadvantages of structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, I decided that data collection would occur through a series of semi-structured interviews. This methodology was chosen because I thought it would serve as a less formal approach than a structured interview and would provide a friendly and non-threatening way by which to obtain information from people who were acquaintances or who were unknown to me. I had control over the questions, and, while eliciting the responses to pre-arranged questions, was able to expand on a topic and change the direction of questioning if I believed it would help the interview. Furthermore, the sequencing of questions, their wording and the amount of time given to topics could be adjusted during the interview itself (Robson, 2011). This approach was useful as I already had a personal relationship with two of the participants, and they appeared to feel relaxed during the interviews. The interview schedule included introductory comments (which were translated into Polish and read by this group of participants), a list of topics and key questions which were to be asked to each participant, in addition to closing comments, which were common to all interviews. Biographical information was gathered during the early section of the interview. In a casual and friendly manner, information was gathered as to family and family structure, employment, level of education and contact with other people both within the school community and outside of it. The participants were able to provide information regarding their current experiences and, where appropriate, their experiences when their children first attended primary schools in Ireland

(Creswell, 2009). The responses given to the questions did, to some extent, guide the direction of the interview, but the key questions were asked of each participant.

4.6 Piloting

Two Irish parents were interviewed. One of these was my sister, who had two children in primary school located in another part of Ireland. This was the first pilot interview and was used to ascertain whether the questions served the intended purpose. The other Irish parent was also known to the author, and lived in the mid-west of Ireland, where the study was based. Both mothers spoke confidently, and the interviews showed that the questions were relevant to the subject under examination, parental involvement. The interviews lasted approximately 35 minutes. These pilot interviews served to illustrate the experiences of Irish parents and provided a basis for comparison with the experiences of immigrant parents. The pilot interviews also allowed me to attain familiarity with the Dictaphone and tape recorder, to focus on time management and to give further insight into the research agenda itself (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

4.7 Data Analysis

Each of the semi-structured interviews was recorded using both a Dictaphone and a cassette recorder. This was done to ensure that a copy of the interview remained if one copy was lost or destroyed in any way. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim. Stopping, rewinding and listening to the tape recorder I wrote each word as it was spoken by the participants. Gaps in the conversation were marked with a series of dots (e.g.....). Sentences and phrases were written as spoken, including grammatical mistakes and phrases used. Following transcription of each interview I read over my field notes and wrote them in pencil onto the typed copy of the interviews. I also included any thoughts I had during the interviews. This was done either the evening of the interview or the following day. This was to ensure the notes and comments were written at a time when I had clear recollection of the interviews. As the interviews were

recorded in two different formats, the recordings provided a data record and an audit trail which would allow for the data to be verified.

4.8 Coding

This section of the chapter is intended to demonstrate my approach to analysis of the data. Thematic coding is used as a constructionist methodology (Robson,2011), as it enables the examination of how events, realities and experiences are the result of discourses within society. Initial coding took place during the reading of the transcribed data. From the first reading of the transcribed data I looked for similar experiences and events being reported by more than one mother. Continuous reading of the data and comparison of the various interviews together with a consideration of the literature all helped to organise the emergent themes and all data relevant to these themes was collated. A descriptive code (single word / phrase / sentence) was written in the margin. Further reading and analysis of the data identified similarities and differences in the responses of the interviewees. It has been stated that this coding “generates the bones of your analysis. Integration will assemble those bones into a working skeleton”. (Charmaz,2006, p.45 in Saldana, 2008).

The following themes were identified and would form the basis of my discussion.

- Perceived fluency in the English language (linguistic capital)
- Communication with school (to include social capital, cultural capital and knowledge of the education system in Ireland.
- Suspicion / prejudice experienced either in school or in the wider community
- Doras Luimni, the difference in assistance given to African and Eastern European parents.
- The importance and use of the Home / School / Community Liaison Scheme.

The final stage in my data analysis was to prioritise the following topics:

Possession of the various types of capital

Perceptions of welcome in schools and in the wider community, to include evidence of suspicion and prejudice experienced by participants

Differences in assistance given to the African and the Eastern European parents. I wondered if this is a result of a rural / urban divide or as a result of the African parents having the status of asylum seekers?

The apparent lack of political will by government and elected officials to recognise the difficulties faced by immigrant parents as they live in communities in a new country and attempt to navigate the Irish primary school system appeared as an emergent theme.

4.9 Research Ethics.

The ethical guidelines specified by the Research Ethics Committee of St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra were followed during this research. The strategy of reasonably informed consent (Cohen et al,2007) was applied. A letter to the Polish mothers (Appendix 4) was translated from the English version (Appendix 2). This was done by Kornelia's husband who also translated the introductory words to the interview session (Appendix 5). The purpose of these letters was to ensure that the participants understood the purpose of the research. Information was given about the purpose for recording the interview.

Of particular importance to this study was the issue of confidentiality. Participants were guaranteed that they, their children and the schools attended by their children would not be identified in the study. To further emphasise this, participants were made aware that a record would be kept only of first names, addresses and phone numbers. Indeed, in many of the interviews I did not know the surnames of the mothers I spoke to. Deidentifying their names through the use of pseudonyms instead of participant's names was a strategy used and explained to each mother. I decided to use Hungarian names as pseudonyms, to further reflect

the diversity existing in a small county town. The Hungarian seamstress who provided these names did not have a family and was not a participant in the study.

Snowball sampling, the method of sampling employed did of course mean that others were aware of a participant's involvement in the study, and therefore placed limits on confidentiality, each participant having been referred by another (Ellard Gray et al, 2015). The mothers were assured of confidentiality in the finished research. The data in its recorded and transcribed forms were to be destroyed after the period of the research.

4.10 Summary

In this chapter I have described the decisions and methodologies I chose when undertaking this doctoral research. The study has an exploratory and reflexive agenda and provides the real-life experiences of the immigrant mothers who participated in the study. I have detailed the processes of analysis which guided my interactions with the data.

Evidence is found of both inclusionary and exclusionary practices, each of which are described in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Findings: Exclusion and Inclusion

5.1 Introduction

As described by Darmody (2011), European countries now confronted with a greater mobility of people are characterised by a more varied and cultural demographic than in earlier years. So, it was in Ireland and in Irish primary schools in the early years of the twentieth century. The immigrant parents newly arrived in the receiving country face what is described as a specific power dynamic, resulting from the possible lack of capitals valued by the dominant cultural group in a school and community. With the status of immigrant, their cultural and social capital are often not recognised, resulting in inequality and discrimination among groups (McGinnity et al, 2006 in Darmody, 2011). The curriculum in Irish primary schools may be more relevant to indigenous pupils than it is to those with a migrant background, and indeed the educational system in any country reproduces the values and culture of the dominant group, which informs what is most valued in the educational system.

Those with middle class habitus are described as having a sense of the game or feeling like a “fish in water” (Bourdieu, 1991, p127). For those with habitus and capitals not valued by the school difficulties may arise as children and immigrant parents attempt to navigate the Irish primary school system and to establish themselves as partners in the home-school interface.

Darmody (2011) considers that newly arrived immigrant parents may not be familiar with the educational system in Ireland and may not be able to make informed choices about school enrolment. This lack of the valued social and cultural capital explains the difficulties experienced by Karolina who neither received nor sought information about enrolment in

primary schools. Similarly, Olga's daughter attended her first day in school without a uniform, and other children attended without books.

The mothers in my study came to Ireland either as economic migrants or political asylum seekers. During the interviews it became apparent that the African mothers in a large town and the Eastern European mothers in a more rural area had different experiences of interacting with schools. The transition from preschool to primary school is explored, as well as the everyday task of helping with homework as these suggest how schools' interaction with the families of newcomer children are affected by the possession of or lack of cultural, linguistic and social capitals. Parental involvement opportunities for this cohort of mothers is described through a description of key issues such as engagement with the school, the teachers and the education system. Methods of communication between school and home are explored, and formal involvement with schools, knowledge of and attendance at parent-teacher meetings and Board of Management meetings will be discussed in the light of a lack of social and linguistic capital which would ensure that the immigrant parent is aware of opportunities for parental involvement.

This chapter offers an account of the narratives of nine immigrant mothers who have come to live in the mid-west of Ireland and who have children attending Irish primary schools. I briefly explore background factors such as family structures and resources, in addition to educational qualifications and employment here and in the country of origin in order to provide information which will give an understanding of the experiences of these mothers, many of whom are affected by cultural, social and linguistic barriers resulting from immigration.

My findings will be presented in three main sections.

1. Possession of or the lack of the various types of capital by the sample mothers and the impact of capital on parental involvement
2. Mothers' perceptions of welcome in schools and in the wider community, to include evidence of suspicion and prejudice experienced
3. Variation in assistance available to the African mothers than is available to the Eastern European cohort

5.2 Information about the mothers who participated in the study

Table 4. Details of family background

Name	Country of Origin	Motivation for coming to Ireland	Length of time in Ireland	Employment Status in Ireland	Employment status of husband
Kornelia	Poland (P)	Economic migrant	7 years	Factory worker	Engineer
Olga	Poland (P)	Economic migrant	5 years	Pre-school assistant	Unemployed
Margit	Poland (P)	Economic migrant	9 years	Housecleaner 1 day a week	N/A
Krisztina	Poland (P)	Economic migrant	9 years	Factory worker	Lorry driver
Magdolna	Lithuania (L)	Economic migrant	10 years	Factory worker	Factory worker

Maria	Cameroon (A)	Asylum seeker	12 years+	Chef	Store manager
Erszebet	Zambia (A)	Asylum seeker	7 years +	SNA	Unemployed
Edina	Guinea (A)	Asylum seeker	8 years +	Unemployed	Unemployed
Eva	Ivory Coast (A)	Asylum seeker	12 years +	Unemployed	Computer engineer

5.2.1 Nationalities of the Mothers and Motivation for Coming to Live in Ireland

The most common reasons that the Eastern European mothers (n=5) gave for coming to live in Ireland were social and economic. Standards of living were perceived to be better in Ireland than in their country of origin. All four African parents came as asylum seekers.

Kornelia (P) and her husband were both working as construction engineers in Poland, but, as Kornelia explained, “it was harder and harder”, and “the money was definitely better here”. Her spouse moved to Ireland following a successful job interview. Three months later, Kornelia and the children left Poland and came to Ireland to live, where her husband had found work as an engineer. She considers that her husband has “great work, because it is related to his education”. Kornelia herself feels that she “has no luck”. Although she is working in a local factory, she would prefer to have work as an engineer, the area in which she is qualified.

Olga (P) and her husband were both working in Poland, she as a German teacher and her husband in a mobile phone shop. Because the “economic situation was hard in Poland” and “the wages weren’t good for us,” the family decided to come and live in Ireland. Olga is now working in a local preschool, and her husband is unemployed. In spite of this apparent downturn in job opportunities, Olga is happy to live in Ireland. This is similar to Kornelia’s expression that the conditions were becoming more difficult in Poland, and that the family’s financial situation would be better in Ireland. I did not ask any questions as to whether the family were in receipt of social welfare payments, and the information was not volunteered.

Margit (P) reported working one day per week as a house cleaner. In Poland, she worked in a shop. The decision to live in Ireland was made because of the perception that there would be a greater opportunity to find work here. This family is dependent on social welfare payments, although, again, the question was not asked. Margit volunteered the information in a further conversation after the interview ended. Krisztina (P) and her husband came to Ireland because of better job opportunities and better wages. Krisztina is working in a factory, and her husband is a lorry driver. An older daughter (19) works in the same factory as her mother. Meanwhile, Magdolna (L) and her husband both work in factories, she in a factory manufacturing medical appliance and he in a food factory. She also reported that financial considerations were the reason they came to Ireland: “Money, money. There was no work. If there was work, you get just to [...] exist, no life”.

The experiences of the Eastern European women (n=5) contrasts with that of the African mothers who came to Ireland as asylum seekers. Most of these African parents were well educated. All four were reluctant to reveal their reasons for coming to Ireland (i.e. that they had come as asylum seekers). Maria (A) initially reported going from Cameroon to Germany for educational purposes. She met her husband in Germany. She reported that they migrated to Ireland to study, but, because they did not have Irish as an academic subject, they were unable to do any further university courses. It was only when the author asked why they settled in this area that she was told, “When you come here as an asylum seeker, you don’t decide where you are going to go. You can’t decide. They move you from one town to another. You might choose a place, but I never [chose] Limerick”. Maria worked as a teacher in Cameroon and reported having studied accounting and finance. She now works as a chef. Her husband has worked as a store manager for 12 years. Her standard of

education is much higher than her present employment would suggest.

When asked why she decided to leave Zambia and come to Ireland, Erszbet replied, “because of some [...] am [...] social issues and stuff”. (This was a reference to coming to Ireland as an asylum seeker.) Erszbet (A) has a degree in social care from Limerick Institute of Technology and works in a school for children with special needs. Her husband is unemployed at present. Edina (A) came to Ireland from Guinea as an asylum seeker, “because of problems there”. (Again, there was reluctance to state that she came to Ireland as an asylum seeker.) A student in Guinea, she completed a course in healthcare when she came to Limerick but has not found work. Her husband is also unemployed. Again, some reluctance was obvious when speaking about their background. Edina reported not knowing what work her husband did in Guinea, as she met him in Ireland. Eva (A), meanwhile, came from the Ivory Coast in Africa. An asylum seeker, she came to Ireland when “the war broke in the Ivory Coast, and it wasn’t really safe; and I had my Leaving Cert done, so I just left the country”. Having worked as a shop assistant in recent months, she is now unemployed. Eva’s husband is a computer engineer, and she is proud to state that they are self-sufficient, with “no help from the social [services]”. Her husband is able to provide everything they need.

5.3 Experience and Work in Ireland: The Value of Linguistic Capital

Migrants who have settled in Ireland tend to be well-qualified and highly skilled, although not always in employment commensurate with their qualifications (OECD, 2008, as cited in IES, 2010, Barrett et al 2006 in Byrne et al 2010). For many of the mothers in this study, there was a mismatch between their educational qualifications and work in their

country of origin when compared with the work they now have in Ireland. Working below their skill level they are in receipt of lower pay than Irish mothers in similar employment. It has been shown that linguistic capital is a key issue in terms of employment and labour market integration with migrants from non-English speaking countries experiencing higher levels of labour market disadvantage than migrants from English speaking countries (Barrett & McCarthy, 2007 in Byrne, 2010). With the exception of Erzsebet (A), who previously worked in a restaurant and who trained to be and obtained work as an SNA when she came to Ireland, the other mothers are working in low-paid jobs or are unemployed. Notable among these mothers is Maria (A), who worked as an English teacher in Africa. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Maria's experience in Ireland has indicated that her skin colour has been a barrier to gaining employment. Maria trained as a chef when she came to Ireland and gained employment in that sector. As she expressed it, "I thought of going in a profession where my skin type will not be a hindrance. I [chose] cheffing, because it is what you put on the counter that matters: it's not what you look like or what your accent is". Her choice of employment was a means of avoiding prejudice.

Table 5. Educational qualifications/work experience of mothers.

Mother's name	Education and work experience in country of origin	Employment in Ireland
Kornelia (P)	Construction engineer	Factory worker
Olga (P)	German teacher	Works in a preschool
Margit (P)	Shop assistant	Cleaner 1 day a week
Krisztina (P)	Shop assistant	Factory worker
Magdolna (L)	Factory worker	Factory worker
Maria (A)	Teacher of English	Chef
Erzsebet (A)	Restaurant worker	Special needs assistant (SNA)
Edina (A)	Student	Unemployed
Eva (A)	Shop assistant	Unemployed

5.4 Linguistic Capital and its association with cultural capital.

For Immigrants coming to live in a new country the ability to be understood, to communicate in the language of the host country is important for all aspects of everyday life, from speaking with shopkeepers and neighbours to communicating with official bodies such as schools. These nine mothers came to Ireland with different levels of competency in the English language, and all of them distinguished between their competencies when they first came to this country and their abilities now with respect to spoken English (Turney & Kao,2009).

Table 6. *Length of time in Ireland.*

Name	Length of time in Ireland, in years
Kornelia (P)	7
Olga (P)	5
Margit (P)	9
Krisztina (P)	9
Magdolna (L)	10
Maria (A)	12+
Erzsebet (A)	7+
Edina (A)	8+
Eva (A)	12

Two of the African mothers, Maria and Erzsebet, were both English-speaking when they came to Ireland as asylum seekers. Erzsebet is from British-colonised Zambia, where English is the official language. She did not mention any difficulties in communicating with people in Ireland. Maria, however, who is also English-speaking, reported difficulty with understanding the Irish accent, being very certain that “I didn’t have a language barrier; it was just the accent”. Edina, from Guinea, and Eva, from the Ivory Coast, both came to Ireland as French-speakers, unable to speak the English language. They received English classes through Doras Luimni, an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation working to support and promote the rights of all migrants living in Limerick and the wider mid-west region. Subsequently, they did not have any difficulties communicating with the English-speaking local community. The mothers from Eastern Europe all learned basic English when they were going to school in their home countries. None came to Ireland confident in their linguistic ability, but they reported

that practice and the necessity to speak English on a daily basis helped them to become more fluent. Magdolna from Lithuania came to Ireland with what she describes as basic English. Practice in speaking the language has led to an improvement, and she is now confident when conversing. However, in reference to colloquial English and to the Irish accent, Magdolna asserted that “Irish people talk different to us”. The Polish mothers all report having had an understanding of the English language when they first came to live in Ireland. All, with the exception of Margit, reported that they later felt confident when communicating. A translator was used in the interview with Margit. Margit estimated that she understands 80% of a conversation but claimed that she is able to send text messages and can understand written notes from school.

In a further reference to practice as being of importance in improving fluency in the English language Kornelia describes her first year in Ireland when she lived in an area where there was a large Polish community, and fluency in English was not important. The family later moved to an area with a much smaller Polish community, and where they did not know anyone. The “first three months were very, very hard, because of my English. I had no English”. The difficulties this caused in everyday activity such as grocery shopping was highlighted. Kornelia spoke about a day when she left the butcher’s shop with tears in her eyes: “I was so afraid to say one word”. She remembers that, although the butcher was kind and tried to help her, “I was heart-blocked, and couldn’t say any one word; it was very hard”. Kornelia started using English “because I had no choice; I had to”. Now, Kornelia feels very comfortable speaking English. In a somewhat similar manner, Olga stated that, when she first came to Ireland, her English “wasn’t so good”. Although she did not report taking English classes, she claims that, now, “my English is much better”. Krisztina found it difficult to communicate during her first year in Ireland. As an example, she stated that she found it very difficult to talk

to teachers, as her English was “so very bad. I had a problem with speaking”. Again, practice and the necessity to speak English led to an improvement in her ability to communicate, but she considered her proficiency in English “better, but not good”.

Closely linked to a person’s linguistic capability is their ability to read and understand information about school, school life and the education system in their host country.

It is common for a school to communicate with parents by means of notes which are sent home via the children. For some parents, however, this is not as straightforward as it may seem. The Eastern European parents interviewed all reported varying levels of difficulty with this method of communicating. This results from both not being able to read and translate the notes into their own languages and not understanding the content of the notes. Notes / letters are sent home regularly, and, while Kornelia (P) reported being able to read the notes, she also revealed that she does not know how different events are celebrated in the school. Although Kornelia received a note from school telling her about the raising of a Green Flag, she did not understand that parents were also invited to attend. Asked to bring a light snack, her children brought fruit juice. Other children brought homemade cakes and buns. Kornelia said to me, “I think I felt a bit silly; I really did not understand properly”. As she explained, “I always have information, but sometimes, because I am not from Ireland, I don’t know how it looks”. As a result of the lack of social and cultural capital which would enable her to understand occasions such as this, Kornelia feels that, as a parent, she is “not right, not good enough”.

Magdolna (L) also reported having difficulty with understanding the context of notes. She can read the notes, but revealed that “the teacher gives a note, and does not explain”. As an example, Magdolna described a day where she received a note informing parents that there

would be a “Fun Day” at school on an upcoming Friday. As the children usually wear tracksuits in school on Friday, this is what her daughter wore that day. However, the other children wore different clothes, neither the school uniform nor the school tracksuit. When Magdolna spoke about this to the teacher, the teacher replied that a note had been sent home. In reply, Magdolna observed, “It’s not written that they can dress how they want. It just says, ‘Fun Day’. How can I know about this?” Inadvertently referring to a lack of social and cultural capital, Magdolna speculated that “Maybe Irish people know more, or they have children, cousins, going to school, and they can understand what the note means”.

Olga (P) receives a letter from the school explaining forthcoming events. There is also a text message service in the school, which acts as a reminder about these events. When Olga’s daughter started school, Olga found this method of communicating a bit difficult, and she had to use a dictionary to check the vocabulary, study the words and then translate each word into Polish. As Olga’s fluency in English has improved, these notes are not problematic now. Margit (P) also has difficulty with reading notes from school. She is happy to receive written communication, because she is able to use a dictionary and translate the notes into Polish. Margit does not speak English fluently, and required a translator to conduct the interview with me. Krizstina (P), meanwhile, revealed that, when she receives a letter from school, she needs somebody to help her translate it. Her 19-year-old daughter is usually available to help in this way. These experiences differ from those of the African parents. Maria, Eva and Erzsebet receive newsletters, notes and texts which inform them of school events. They did not report any difficulties with this method of communication. French-speaking Edina is now able to read English, so notes do not pose a problem for her.

5.5 Cultural / Social Capital and Mothers' Experiences of Children's Transition to Primary School

For all parents, the transitions especially from preschool/playschool to primary school is a time of change (Jackson and Warin, 2000). For parents who now live in a new country, there is a great deal of information to be gathered and processed as regards what school to select, finding out about uniforms and school books, and so on (O'Brien, 2008). The arrival of immigrant families into a school community means that they will be "outsiders" in terms of knowing how the school system works (Bryan et al, 2010 p. 277). This is the situation a number of the immigrant parents in my research found themselves.

For the group of African mothers, all of whom are English speaking, there was no problem in accessing information on enrolment procedures. This information regarding uniforms, booklists, school opening and closing times, and so on, was made available when the parents approached a school, and no parents reported difficulty in reading or understanding the documentation.

Eva (A) and Edina (A) reported having concerns about the linguistic ability of their children, and worried whether they would be able to communicate with the other children in school and with the teachers. Because English was not her first language, Eva's youngest child experienced a language barrier, and was unable to play with the other children. Although Eva was worried about her daughter at this time, she reported that the difficulty passed in approximately three months. Eva described this as the child needing time to "settle in". Currently, her daughter speaks English well, and "she has an Irish accent". Edina (A) reported that she sent her daughter to a private crèche, where she learned English. This was during the time Edina was involved with Doras Luimni. This helped, as "with the other kids, they learn quickly".

The experiences of some of the Eastern European mother's contrast with those of the African mothers. For the Eastern European mothers, their own linguistic and communication abilities, as well as an obvious lack of communication with parents of other children in the school, created difficulties when the time came for their children to leave preschool and attend primary school. For Kornelia (P), preschool was a happy experience. Initially, her daughter found it difficult to settle into the routine of a new place and cried every morning. Kornelia was not worried about the safety of her children, as she trusted the teacher ("everything with preschool was fine,") but she did worry until her daughter settled into the school. It was easy to find a primary school, as, in rural Ireland, the child usually attends the nearest school. However, because Kornelia's children attended preschool in another village, no information was received in regard to enrolment, and Kornelia was at somewhat of a disadvantage compared with the parents of other children starting school, who had received this information from the local preschool. Because she had observed schoolchildren who lived near her house, Kornelia found it easy to obtain the uniforms, but this indicated a lack of communication with the school and with other parents in the community. It was only on the first day of school that she was given the booklists by the children's teacher.

In contrast to Kornelia's experience, Magdolna's (L) daughter was in a crèche, and it was through the teacher there that a list of schools in the area was made available. Information about uniforms and booklists came with enrolment. Krizstina (P) and Margit (P) both approached the school when it was time for the children to go to school. They were given information regarding uniforms and booklists. Reading these documents proved difficult, but, by using a dictionary and visiting shops with the booklists, they were able to buy what was needed. Olga considers herself fortunate in that she had family who had lived in the area in which she settled,

and who had knowledge of the education system in Ireland. Olga's (P) daughter went to playschool in Poland, and, although the girl had no English when starting primary school in Ireland, Olga reported that she learned English very quickly. Olga's uncle had lived in the area previously, and his two children had attended the local school. From this uncle, Olga reported obtaining information about the school and the school uniform. However, arising from Olga not having the necessary cultural or social capital, the "knowing what to do" her daughter did not have a uniform on her first day in school. This also provides evidence of a lack of contact with the school and with others in the school community. Once Olga understood that a uniform was necessary it was provided for the next day.

5.6 Homework: A Daily Challenge

Homework and helping their children with homework can be daunting for many parents. Homework and other learning activities in the home associated with the formal curriculum have been identified as being of importance (Epstein,1991). I wondered how immigrant parents coped with this, and what advice, if any, was given to these parents by the school. Experiences differed among the mothers interviewed. In some families (Maria (A) and Magdolna (L)), both parents are working, and the children avail of paid after-school care. The homework is done during this time. Maria checks the homework every evening, but Magdolna does not have time do this. To facilitate childcare, Magdolna works an evening shift, from 4pm to 12 midnight (Reay 2001, OBrien,2008). At present, she only sees her daughter in the morning, when she gives her breakfast, dresses her and takes her to school. Magdolna reports not knowing how much homework her daughter gets. This is perceived to be the responsibility of the teacher in the "after-school crèche". In her own words, "If I have time, I open the schoolbag, and I check what's in there [...] the notes". For Magdolna the economic pressure

to pay a mortgage as they buy their home militates against her ability to fulfil the traditional performance of care work as her daughter attends primary school (O'Brien, 2008)

Edina's (A) children also attend a homework club provided by the school under the HSCL scheme. The parents were given a choice of activities, including sport and art. Edina chose the homework club, which is attended by her three children. Edina feels that this club is a good one for her children to attend, because the homework is supervised, and she does not have to worry about whether she is helping the children in the correct manner. Eva (A), meanwhile, is confident that she is "able to help with the homework all the time". Independent learning is important to her and she identifies topics on the Internet which help in the children's learning. Erzsebet (A) also reported being able to help her daughter with homework but stated that she was not given any information about the school's expectations in this area of learning.

This is another area of school life where the experiences of some of the African and the Eastern European mothers differ. Margit (P) and Krizstina (P) received no instruction from the school about the children's homework. Margit reported that she is able to help "sometimes", whereas Krizstina has an older daughter (19) who is able to help her younger siblings. Krizstina herself observed that she is unable to help. Nobody in the school spoke to these two parents about homework and the school's expectations in this area, while the school's homework policy was not explained to them. Homework is written into a homework journal every day, and the parents understand the amount of work that is to be done each day. This is the situation in the school their children now attend, and also in the schools the children have previously attended.

Kornelia (P) and Olga (P) receive a letter from school each week outlining the homework to be given. Kornelia is not always able to help her children. She understands the work to be

done, translates it to Polish and explains it to the children. Kornelia checks the homework, “but, if I am confused, I have to ask my husband to help”. She is happy with the advice given in school: “We have very good help with that, because we get instruction on how to help kids to learn”. Olga (P) reported being confident in her ability to help her daughter with homework, and explained that, “If I have any problem or if I want to know something – for example, how to pronounce words – I go to the school, and the teacher helps me [...] and then [...] I can help my daughter”. For those mothers who do not possess the cultural capital, the “knowing what to do”, which would enable them to help their children with homework, lack of information and instruction from the school means that they are unable to help their children with this homework, as they do not understand procedures in this area in the same manner that Irish parents can.

5.7 Perceptions of welcome or disapproval in schools and in the wider community.

This section explores whether or not this set of immigrant parents feels welcomed into the communities in which they now live (Bryan, 2008). Interactions between the mothers, other parents and members of the wider community are described. The Eastern European mothers and the African mothers described their experiences differently, but a picture emerged of mothers whose main social interactions are with members of their own communities, and not with members of the Irish community. Kornelia (P) reported meeting other parents, usually Irish parents, when she drops her children to school. The early-morning rush means that time is short, as people go to work, and “everybody disappears very quickly”. After school and on weekends, she meets parents and other children in the local playground, where the children all play together. Kornelia reported not feeling comfortable talking to some parents, but stressed that this would be similar in Poland, as a person does not necessarily feel comfortable with everybody. She talked

about an incident where her son was unhappy in school in Ireland for approximately four months, due to being bullied by one particular child. Kornelia was aware that her son was experiencing some difficulty but did not know what the problem was. When she approached other parents and enquired if they knew anything about why the boy was upset, she found that many parents knew that her son was being bullied but did not tell anyone in the school about it. Surprised that nobody approached her about the situation, she stated, “I cannot understand why the mothers [and] the pupils know it, and the teachers didn’t know, why nobody said to the teacher something had happened”.

Kornelia described this as the one “bad story” she had about the school, but she observed that “it’s about the community, really”. A worry for Kornelia is that her children will “be pushed out from the community”. When asked if she felt that she was part of/belonged in the community, Kornelia answered, “not really”. Her children have experienced attitudes which show that members of the local community are uneasy about the newcomers in the area. Kornelia described a time when her daughter became aware of comments that were being made about her to other children. “We are not from here, so my girl was hearing from her friend’s grandmother, ‘Don’t talk to, don’t play with, strangers’”. This grandmother had been a neighbour of the family for four years. The children played together in school and in the local playground. Kornelia explained this as relating to the issue of employment: “that we come in, working, and take the place of Irish people. So, not everybody understands our situation. That’s it”.

Kornelia’s personal experiences have influenced her ambitions for the children. As a qualified engineer, she has not been able to find work in Ireland. She works in a local factory, describing this work as follows: “I am not doing what I want. My work is very hard and boring [...] it’s

not physically hard; it's just hard for me, because my brain is dying there. So, I don't want to push my kids to be a doctor or a lawyer. They have to do in life what they want to be happy. I hope they will do something what will give them pleasure". These experiences led her to express that she hopes her children "will be happy, and honest with themselves [...] I hope they don't have to do what the community wants [...] I hope they will be happy and [...] healthy, nothing else". Being very aware of social and emotional problems, Kornelia is unsure whether school will prepare the children for life. She considers that "life will be a lot harder than the school". These comments provide further evidence of Kornelia's feeling of being outside of the community, and of being different and not being welcomed.

Magdolna also reports not feeling welcomed in the community. She brings her daughter to school in the morning and works each day from 4pm to midnight. This means that she only meets other parents when dropping off her daughter to school. Magdolna reported mixed experiences of her interactions with these parents. Some parents are very friendly and offer to meet to have tea or coffee. Other parents are not so friendly. Magdolna gets the impression that this is because she is not Irish. "Some don't like the foreign[ers]. They look like [...] oh my God, what [are] you doing here? They still can't believe that we are the same people, here, living, working, paying taxes, etc" As she only meets other parents in the morning, she does not feel confident talking to them. A little uncertain, she says that, "maybe when they talk to you, they are friendly [...] after they go to another friend, they say, 'she's that [...] that]'. I don't know". Work and the desire to spend whatever time possible with her children means that Magdolna does not have time to go out, to go walking and to meet her neighbours, so her circle of friends consists of her work colleagues. Here the lack of economic capital compounds feelings of exclusion because there is not time for social activity.

For both Krisztina (P) and Margit (P), contact with other parents or with members of the Irish community is limited. As their children go to school by bus, there is no daily visit to school, dropping off or collecting the children. They meet Irish parents “sometimes, only sometimes”. They reported that the other parents they meet are mostly Polish. Unlike these four Eastern European parents, Olga (P) reported having contact with many parents. As she goes to work in the morning, her opportunity to meet other parents, both Irish and Polish, comes at three o’clock, when school finishes. Olga is on the Parent’s Council in the school, and, through that, has contact with other parents. Olga stated that she is very happy in Ireland: “I enjoy each day in Ireland, and I love this country, and I love the people. They are very nice”.

The African mothers interviewed reported having a wider network of family and friends than the Eastern European mothers and have made many friends through their Christian church communities. Perhaps because of their linguistic capital, their social capital is greater than that of the Eastern European mothers. Eva (A) brings her children to school every morning and meets other parents for “a small chat”. Noteworthy is the fact that these other parents are of different nationalities, from Poland, Ghana and Nigeria. The Eastern European parents report friendships only with other Eastern European parents. Conversations with parents are “very comfortable”, and Eva feels at ease. She has always found people “very friendly, very nice”. When further questioned, she stated that she had made many friends, of Irish and other nationalities. For Edina (A) also, parental contact is mostly with non-Irish parents, from Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya. In an atmosphere / ethos of welcome and inclusivity the school provides cookery and computer classes for parents, and a parent room gives an opportunity for people to meet and converse. These processes of inclusion help in facilitating the parental involvement of immigrant mothers, and for Edina this is where she meets parents of other

children in the school. Outside of school hours, Edina does not have contact with other parents. Attendance at parent / teacher meetings is facilitated by the provision of a waiting room and an adult to supervise the children while parents speak to the teachers.

Through membership of a Church community Erzsebet (A) knows many of the parents in the school which her daughter attends and meets them daily. Her experiences with the Irish community have been positive. On first arriving in Ireland, she spent three years in Sligo, where the people she met were very friendly. Her experiences in Limerick were the same, and she has made “loads” of friends, both Irish and African: “I don’t know if it’s my personality, but it’s easy for me to just meet with people. And then, we meet up in church, because our boss is Irish, and most people there are Irish, so it’s easy. And it’s just nice”.

Work commitments however mean that Maria (A) does not meet other parents, as it is her husband who brings the children to school each day, and Maria later collects them from the childminder. Maria describes not feeling welcome in the community in which she lives. In Africa, Maria taught English in a French school. When she came to Ireland, she trained as a chef and has been employed as a chef for the past year. Maria describes how she found it difficult to obtain accommodation when the family first came to Ireland and wanted to move out of the hostel where they had been placed. Being refugees, people did not want to rent accommodation to them, but she approached Doras Luimni, which helped in the search for a home. Maria reported that there were not many African families living in the area 12 years ago, and that this may explain why people did not want to rent accommodation to them. Although many of her friends faced suspicion and prejudice, Maria reports that she has not been a victim of these. This comment is a contradiction of her reports of difficulty in finding

accommodation, and of choosing a profession where people would not be aware of her colour and provides me with evidence of a social desirability effect, where Maria demonstrates her desire to fit into the community in which she lives (Turney & Kao, 2009 p.267).

Maria considered it important that her children are aware that suspicion and prejudice does exist and may be displayed towards them. Speaking about these sentiments, she indicated that these “will never be wiped out”. Maria seems to be very accepting of the fact that she and her children are viewed as being different to others in the community. When her children tell her that their friends say certain things about them, Maria’s reaction is to explain to the children about “being different”. The expectation that suspicion and prejudice may be directed towards her children was again reiterated when Maria stated that “Things like that happen, always happen. And it’s good when the kids are aware of this around them. They will happen”.

What emerged from this section of the interviews was a picture of a number of immigrant parents whose interactions with the Irish community in which they live are limited. Contact with parents at the school gate is with parents from other minority groups, and there is no report of social interaction with any Irish parents. The African parents appear to be more accepting of this situation and did not report feeling unwelcome in the same manner as did the Eastern European mothers.

5.8 Feelings of Confusion and Caution, and Occasional Welcome

Perceptions of welcome / unwelcome experienced in the wider community are replicated when the mothers speak of the schools their children attend. There are no obvious African V Eastern European differences to be observed here. Mothers in both communities provide a variety of responses with respect to feeling welcome. Maria (A) when asked if her children are welcomed in the school, replied, “Ammm [...] I would say yes”. I was surprised that Maria showed some

reticence in this reply. It differed from her earlier response when we discussed whether the children had any experience of being viewed as different: “You always meet things like that. When stories come back to you at home, when a child comes and says, ‘This child said I am this, you tell your child about being different’”. She further reported that, “when the child is away from home, they have to face it. You can’t stop it. Things like that happen, always happen. And it’s good when the kids are aware of this around them”. This shows an acceptance of being “different”, and Maria’s expression of confidence in the school perhaps reflects this acceptance. The other African mothers Erzebet, Edina and Eva report feeling comfortable with teachers and school and say that their children have never experienced any kind of prejudice in school. Eva feels very comfortable when she is talking to the teacher. She told the author, “The school [...] I really like that particular school. The principal, she is [...] there is no [attitude of one person being] superior to the other one [...] there, all are equal. It does not matter where they come from. It makes everybody much more comfortable. I am very happy”. This expression of equality and acceptance in the school gives further evidence of an ethos of inclusivity being fostered by the staff of this city school.

Kornelia (P) reported feeling confused when her children initially started in school as she did not know the teachers and met a number of different people. When the children were in Junior Infants, she met the teachers daily, as she left the children at the door of the classroom, and Kornelia knows that, if she wants to meet the teacher now, she can make an appointment to do so. In the early years of her children’s schooling, Kornelia did not feel comfortable talking to the teachers: “Because of English and because of [...] ah [...] different culture [...] I didn’t know what I should do [...] I didn’t know what was proper”. Now, however, she feels “very comfortable”. Olga (P) also experienced a language barrier which made her feel uncomfortable talking to the teacher when her daughter started school. The teacher however

made her feel very welcome, and Olga was able to stay in school with her daughter for the first two weeks.

Magdolna (L) feels uncomfortable talking to her daughter's teacher, not because of a language barrier, but because the teacher is busy in the morning, and does not have time to talk to parents or to explain the content of notes. As Krizstina (P) is working, she only meets the teacher at parent-teacher meetings. She finds the teachers very friendly, and her English has improved since she first came to Ireland, when, she reported, her English was very poor. She explained that, for the first year that her children were in school in Ireland, she found it difficult to talk to the teachers, even though she was encouraged by the class teacher: "First year was very bad, because my English was so very bad. I had a problem with speaking, but that teacher knew I was not very good. She helped me". This teacher left the school two years after Krizstina's children started there.

Margit (P) reported feeling comfortable talking to her children's teacher. Although she does not have much practice in speaking English, she reported that she understands 80% of what the teacher says to her. Margit and Krizstina's children started primary school in another area. Margit has the perception, shared by Krizstina, that the teacher in the first school did not welcome Polish children: "Many parents, Polish parents, see the difference in how she looked at Irish kids and how she looked at Polish kids". It is different in this second school, where "here, we don't see the Polish or Irish. No". It is obvious from remarks such as these that teachers and schools differ in the degree of welcome offered to newcomer children and their families.

5.9 Formal Involvement in School Life

Formal involvement of the parent in school requires a wide range of behaviours which provide the parent with information about issues such as school policies and rules, the curriculum and general expectations on the part of the school (Epstein,1996, Desforjes & Aboucchar,2003). In Ireland this equates to knowledge of and possible membership of a school's Board of Management. Another source of information and a method of participating in school life is through membership of a school's Parents' Association. My research has discussed levels of comfort felt by parents when they meet their child's teachers on an incidental, casual basis. This section focuses on the experiences of these mothers as they interact on a more formal basis with the school their children attend and with their children's teachers.

5.9.1 Parent -teacher meetings

All of the mothers with whom the author spoke have had good experiences with parent-teacher (P/T) meetings. Kornelia (P) and Olga (P) both attend the meetings and find them beneficial. As they are given appointment times for the meetings, they arrange childcare with family or friends. Margit (P) expressed very little about parent-teacher meetings. When asked if she can talk to the teacher, if she feels comfortable going to the meeting, she replied "Yeah, yeah". Using a translator, Margit revealed that she brings the children to the meetings with her. It is not clear whether she brings the children to the parent-teacher meeting because she does not have someone to look after them or because she needs her boys to act as translators.

Krisztina (P) attends P/T meetings, and also calls to the school if she or the teacher requests a meeting at any other time. This would be requested by means of a note. An older daughter minds the younger children during these meetings. Difficulty in obtaining time off work prevents Magdolna (L) and Maria (A) from attending parent- teacher meetings. Either Erzsebet

(A) or her husband attends the P/T meetings. They find the meetings comfortable, and she described them as being “just friendly talk, just normal talk”. Their daughter is minded by the “after-school people” while her parents attend the meetings. Edina (A), meanwhile, has regular meetings with the school, which also contacts her if the children are experiencing any difficulty with school work. This is in addition to three monthly reviews, where they hear how the children are progressing. Either Edina or her husband attends the meetings, and the other stays with the children. Eva (A) also attends parent-teacher meetings regularly. There are three meetings per school year, and a play area is available for the children, where they are supervised while the parent speaks to the teacher.

5.9.2 The Parents’ Council and the Board of Management

Six of the nine mothers interviewed were aware that there was a parents’ association in the school their children attended. Only one of the mothers interviewed, Olga (P), is actively involved in the Parents’ Council, through which she has contact with many other parents in the school, and she reports that this has led to increased opportunities for her daughter to meet with and play with her friends. When asked if they were aware of a parents’ association in the schools their children attended, Margit (P) and Krizstina (P) replied that they “don’t know”, and Magdolna (L) was unsure whether or not one had been established. Kornelia (P) has been approached by other parents about being a member of the parents’ council and has been asked to participate to represent the many “foreign people”. By describing herself as one of the many “foreign people” Kornelia is demonstrating her own perception of being outside of the dominant cultural group in the school community. She describes her non-participation and lack of confidence as resulting from a lack of the linguistic and cultural capitals valued by the majority of parents in the school “I don’t believe in myself, and I don’t believe that I will feel good with English. I am afraid that I will not be able to understand, and I am afraid that I will not be able to speak, and that they will not like my ideas”. Only one of the Eastern European

mothers had attended meetings of the parents' association, and in the case of the African families represented in these interviews, it is Maria's husband who attends. The other African mothers are aware of the school having a parents' association, but neither parent attends.

Table 7. *Involvement with parents' council.*

Name	Aware of parents' council	Attends meetings
Kornelia (P)	Yes	No
Olga (P)	Yes	Yes
Margit (P)	No	No
Krizstina (P)	No	No
Magdolna (L)	Unsure	No
Maria (A)	Yes	Husband attends
Erzsbet (A)	Yes	No
Edina (A)	Yes	No
Eva (A)	Yes	No

Both communities represented in this research have similar experiences in this area of parental involvement. In the pilot interviews, I spoke to two Irish mothers. One is involved in the parents' council in the school her child attends, acting as secretary for the group. The other mother reported having "no interest in going to the meetings". The parents' association is a voluntary group, in which all parents can become involved. The Board of Management is considered to be the employer of all staff and is the body responsible for the day-to-day running of the school. Parents need to be elected as parents' representatives to the BOM. Immigrants parents need to be made aware of the presence of parents' associations and of Boards of

Management. Communications from school to home need to be explained orally to parents who may not be able to read notes written in English or who may not, due to a lack of social capital, understand the content of these notes.

5.9.3 Awareness of a Board of Management in the School

Olga (P) is the only Polish parent interviewed who knew what a Board of Management (BOM) is or what the function of a BOM is. This is because she is an active member of the school's parents' council. She has, however, never attended a meeting regarding the formation of a BOM. The other three Eastern European mothers were not aware of the existence of a Board of Management in the schools, and asked "What is this?" This again illustrates another difference between the four African and the five Eastern European mothers. Of all the African parents, only Edina was unaware of the school having a BOM. Again, none of them have attended a meeting regarding the formation of a board, although Eva reported receiving communication about the board, and spoke of voting for the election of members. All parents are entitled to be represented on, or to be a part of, the board of management of the school their child/children attends. Regarding the Eastern European mothers, it is possible that their lack of knowledge is a result of their inability to read and to understand communications from the school.

Table 8. *Awareness of Boards of Management.*

Name	Aware of Board of Management	Attends meetings/Involved with BOM
Kornelia (P)	No	No
Olga (P)	Yes	No
Margit (P)	No	No
Krizstina (P)	No	No
Magdolna (L)	No	No
Maria (A)	Yes	No
Erzsbet (A)	Yes	No
Edina (A)	No	No
Eva (A)	Yes	No

5.9.4 Attendance at School Plays/Concerts

All schools now feature many performances in which children participate. Parents are invited to come to the school on these occasions. All the mothers interviewed attend school events such as concerts and plays, and all expressed their pride and enjoyment at observing their children perform. Krizstina (P) commented on how well-prepared the children always are. This pride was also evident when the author interviewed Olga (P): “Oh yes. I love these. Each time, I am there”.

5.10 African mothers receiving assistance not available to the Eastern European cohort

It emerged during the semi-structured interviews that the African and Eastern European mothers, while all being immigrants, had different experiences to report, particularly in relation to assistance the families received when they first came to live in Ireland. The obvious difference of living in urban / rural areas and the availability of a Home School Liaison scheme in primary schools comes to the fore, but the greatest difference lies in the status of the African mothers as asylum seekers, and the benefits that appear to accrue to that political status.

Edina (A) and Eva (A) attended English classes provided by Doras Luimni. Maria reported getting advice and assistance from this organisation in finding a house to rent. The family had difficulty finding accommodation due, Maria thinks, to their African background. When the African families first came to live in Limerick they lived in hostels or residential institutions provided by the State under a system known as “Direct Provision”, which is intended to provide for the welfare of asylum seekers and their families as they await decisions on their asylum applications. Direct provision meets the basic needs of food and shelter directly, rather than through cash payments. For Maria, as for the other mothers who came to Limerick as asylum seekers, help and advice was available from Doras Luimni. Founded in 2000, the organisation’s title represents an open door welcoming those newly arrived in Ireland. Advice, information, legal services and support are available. Doras Luimni also provides intercultural awareness training for organisations which work with migrants, and it aims to provide participants with the necessary knowledge to work effectively in supporting clients from migrant communities.

Doras Luimni has been offering basic English classes since 2000. These classes were availed of by Edina (A) and Erzsebet. People are also directed towards further training, as was Edina (A), who attended classes with VTOS (a vocational educational training body) once her English classes were finished.

Assistance such as that given to asylum seekers in the Limerick area was not available to other migrants, such as the Polish and Lithuanian mothers interviewed. Kornelia (P) and the other Polish and Lithuanian mothers were not provided with English classes and arrived into communities without assistance from government agencies or from organisations such as Doras Luimni. The lack of such assistance could be a contributory factor to the Eastern European mothers not expressing confidence in their linguistic competency.

5.11 Summary

The findings from the semi-structured interviews with nine immigrant mothers were reported on in this chapter. Firstly, the chapter dealt with everyday life and with background factors such as family structures and resources. Motivational factors which influenced the decision to come to live in Ireland were explored, as were educational qualifications and employment both here and in their native countries.

The importance of cultural and linguistic capital, or the lack of same is identified as central to the ability of the immigrant parents in this study to engage with school and the wider community. Reflecting on Kornelia's reasons for not becoming part of the Parent's Association in the school, it became obvious to me that her lack of confidence in her ability to contribute to the group was directly connected to her lack of the valued form of linguistic capital and can perhaps be described as a form of cultural capital.

The transition from preschool to primary school was explored, as was the everyday task of helping children with homework. Methods of communication between school and home were detailed, as was formal involvement with schools, knowledge of, and attendance at, both parent-teacher meetings and board of management meetings. The experiences of the Eastern

European and African mothers differed, with the African mothers expressing confidence in their ability to speak the English language and in their knowledge of the educational system and how schools in Ireland are run. Some of the Eastern European mothers revealed a lack of understanding of the day-to-day happenings in school, giving examples such as not knowing how the other parents would prepare their children for an event such as the raising of a Green Flag.

Occasions where mothers felt unwelcome, and where their children experienced being excluded from playing with others of their own age were described. Two of the Polish parents in particular spoke of their perceptions and experiences of not being welcomed in school by the teachers. There are reports of a perception that Polish children are treated differently to Irish children in a particular school. Reluctance on behalf of the African mothers to speak about their backgrounds as asylum seekers was obvious, as was an apparent acceptance by one mother of difference and of experiencing prejudice and suspicion.

The African parents spoke favourably of the assistance of Doras Luimni. This organisation gave information about local shops and facilities, provided access to English language classes for adults, gave advice re further education, and on a practical level helped in the search for accommodation when families were ready to leave the government provided housing. No such assistance was available for the Eastern European parents. This seemed very unfair to me, in particular when I considered the disadvantage experienced by parents, and therefore by their children, given the lack of linguistic and cultural capital that made every day experiences such as the transition from preschool to primary school challenging in ways not experienced by the Irish parents and families in the school community. Assistance available to one immigrant group should be available to all. One's country of origin, political status and the location where

one lives should not determine the ease or otherwise with which a family feels comfortable in a new community.

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the response of schools to newcomers and the failure of educational policy in some schools to recognise the role of the immigrant parent and the challenges, (linguistic, cultural and social), experienced by these parents as they attempt to support their children in Irish primary schools. I will also consider the challenge posed by a lack of political capital. While acknowledging the assistance given to the African mothers because of their status as asylum seekers, I ask if political will for greater immigrant parental involvement would be present if newcomer parents had the right to vote in local and national elections. Political will could lead to a curricular obligation on schools to further immigrant parental involvement, and thus provide the newcomer child with the advantages which accrue to parental advantage (Harris & Goodall, 2007).

6.2 The Changing Educational Landscape in Ireland

In this dissertation, I set out to explore the perspectives of newcomer parents, are they welcomed into primary schools and recognised as a group that might experience cultural and linguistic barriers negatively affecting their involvement in their child's education? The cultural identity of these mothers makes them "different" from other mothers in a school community. Rather than acknowledging this difference, they are often denied the respect due to them by schools which treat them in the same way as they do indigenous parents, thereby ignoring the linguistic and other challenges faced by the immigrant parent.

I specifically sought to explore whether schools were making a genuine attempt to alleviate the difficulties caused by cultural and linguistic barriers which counteract their involvement in their child's education. Newcomer or immigrant parents were therefore, the focus of this study,

which involved semi-structured interviews with nine immigrant mothers, all of whom had children enrolled in primary school. Two migrant groups were included in the study: five eastern European mothers who lived in rural and small-town Ireland, and four African mothers who lived in a city and whose children attended urban schools. The data from the interviews presented a picture of varying levels of inclusion experienced by the two groups of parents. Greater levels of support were available to the African mothers, due to their status as asylum seekers and to the presence of an HSL scheme in the schools their children attended.

6.3 Key issues

The findings of the empirical part of this research point to a number of key issues in the experiences of these immigrant mothers, as well as the challenges they face in the educational, social and political arenas. The findings are discussed in terms of four main areas, all of which point to barriers to parental involvement that are reported in the literature, as already discussed:

1. Schools and the role of educational policy in welcoming the newcomer
2. Parental involvement and the specific barriers experienced by the immigrant parent who lack the linguistic and cultural capitals possessed by the dominant cultural group in their schools and communities.
3. Perceptions of welcome in schools and in the wider community, to include evidence of suspicion experienced by participants.
4. The difference in assistance given to the Eastern European and the African families and mothers who participated in my study

Using the lens of capital explicated by Bourdieu, I discussed specific barriers to immigrant parental involvement. The voices of the mothers in my study provided a description of their experiences.

I discussed a concept of political capital as an extra challenge to parental rights and to parental involvement by immigrant parents and I also consider the significance of cultural nationalist leanings as an explanation for racism and prejudice which is experienced by some of the mothers in this study within the community.

6.4 Reticence and Social Desirability

During the interviews with the immigrant mothers, a degree of reticence was observed in the answers of the African mothers in particular, none of whom volunteered the information that they came to Ireland as asylum seekers. One of the mothers reported not knowing what work her husband did in Africa. She explained this by stating that they met in Ireland. This management of information could be because of prejudices already experienced due to their status as asylum seekers. Three mothers, in particular, including two Eastern European mothers (Kornelia (P) and Magdolna (L)) and one African mother (Maria), all reported their perceptions of prejudice in the community. These perceptions are related to everyday life, to work and to living in a community comprised of mainly Irish people. Because of their openness in speaking about prejudice, I draw on these interviews in order to describe occasions of suspicion and prejudice.

Maria (A) was aware of prejudice and suspicion toward her and towards her children, including the difficulty of securing rented accommodation when her family first came to Limerick. Nevertheless, she reported being happy living in Ireland. An effusive reply was given by Olga (P) when she was asked to describe her family life here in Ireland. She replied that she lives in Ireland with her husband and daughter, adding, “we have pets, a dog, guinea pigs and fish. I enjoy every day in Ireland, and I love this country, and I

love the people. They are very nice". In reflecting on the data from the semi-structured interviews, I wonder if this response, and that of Maria, who reports being happy to live in a place where her children may suffer discrimination, was subject to a social desirability effect (Turney & Kao, 2009 p.267), as indeed may be reports of parental involvement by the mothers. Wishing to fit into communities, and for the sake of their children these mothers may be exaggerating contact with other mothers and may be willing to accept the difficulties they experience as they attempt to navigate the Irish education system and communicate with school and teachers. I cannot be definite either way about this supposition.

6.5. Schools engagement with newcomers

Although the rate of demographic change in primary schools in the late 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century was unprecedented numerically, changes in Irish society had occurred previously. Chapter ? has discussed the arrival into Ireland of groups such as refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosova, Hungary, Chile, Vietnam, Bosnia and Syria.

For the newcomer children who were enrolled in Irish primary schools in the early years of the 21st century, linguistic needs were quickly identified as a priority, and English language acquisition became one of the more immediate aspects of educational provision that would facilitate the inclusion of newcomer children in the daily life of a school. The DES responded by providing support for children who do not have English as their first language, by providing English language support teaching, and also directed that newcomer children are entitled to this support for two years (as per Circulars 53 /07 and 15/09, which address the needs of children for whom English is a second language).

Initiatives in the area of aiding language acquisition were supported financially by the

Department of Education and Science (DES) and Guidelines on Intercultural Education in the Primary School issued from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, with the stated aim of contributing to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society based on a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity are valuable (NCCA, 2005, p. 5).

The DES has been criticised for not providing for critical anti-racist practice in schools (Kitching, 2010), given that schools should have done more to develop an awareness of, and the promotion of, the non-tolerance of hostility, prejudice and racist behaviour in classrooms and among wider school communities. Situations such as those which arose for Kornelia (P) (where a school friend of her daughter was advised “not to play with strangers”, and where the parent body was aware of her son being bullied, although nobody approached school staff to report the matter) could have been minimised if greater efforts had been made in the area of intercultural education. Maria (A) has reported that her children have on occasion returned from school and told her about remarks concerning their African backgrounds that other children have made to them. Experiences such as these provide evidence of hostility and racism which is hidden under a layer of general acceptance. These newcomer children were part of a school community but experienced suspicion and prejudice on a regular basis (Myers (2003), Rutter, (2003), Tomlinson, (2005), Devine et al (2008)).

Many Irish primary schools have children enrolled who do not have English as a first language and who receive tuition from an EAL teacher. Their mothers may have similar difficulties with English, but this was not considered by many of the schools attended by the children of the mothers in this study. Many of the immigrant mothers had difficulty reading and understanding communications from schools. The Eastern European

mothers all reported difficulty with the usual method employed by schools when they wished to communicate with home – written notes. Some of the mothers used a dictionary to translate individual words. Although Margit and Krizstina have both lived in Ireland for a number of years, Krizstina still needs help to translate the notes sent home, and Margit uses a dictionary. Olga, Kornelia and Magdolna are now able to read written communications, but also report not being able to understand the context of the school notes. In Magdolna’s words, “Maybe Irish people know more, or they have children, cousins going to school, and they can understand what the note means”. She was referring to a “Fun Day” in the school, for which her daughter was not appropriately dressed, because Magdolna herself did not realise that the children could wear “ordinary clothes”. Her daughter wore the school tracksuit and was not dressed in the same manner as the other children. Schools cannot assume that these immigrant parents can decode the cultural context of notes sent home.

For these mothers who are not enabled to understand notes sent home from school, the resultant feeling must be one of inadequacy. Many schools are not demonstrating that they are making a genuine effort to communicate with immigrant parents. Referring to a celebration in school when she did not understand that she was expected to attend and to provide home-baked cakes and buns, Kornelia stated, “I always have information, but sometimes, because I am not from Ireland, I don’t know how it looks”. Not being able to understand notes led Kornelia to observe that, as a parent, she feels that she is “not right, not good enough”. By not explaining or translating notes for the mothers of newcomer children, schools are misrecognising the cultural needs and the identity of these mothers. Ensuring that notes are translated, or that a mother understands what is expected by the school, enables the children to participate fully in school events. Many schools need to attempt to engage with immigrant

parents as equal partners, and they also need to ensure that both the curriculum and social interactions are inclusive, taking account of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

6.6 English Language Support: Differences in Assistance

All of the participants in the research made a clear distinction between their competency in the English language when they first came to live in Ireland and their fluency and capacity to be understood in oral communication after spending a number of years in the country. Two of the African mothers were English-speaking, and one of them reported not a language barrier, but difficulty in understanding the Irish accent. The other two African mothers had French as a first language, and received English classes through the services of Doras Luimni, an organisation working to inform migrants of their rights, and providing assistance for migrants in Limerick and the wider mid-west region. These English classes greatly helped, and both mothers are now fluent in the English language. This was when I first became aware of the significance of the assistance from Doras Luimni given to these African mothers,

The Eastern European mothers, although they had learned English when at school in their home countries, all reported difficulty in communicating with Irish people when they first came to the country. Practice and the necessity to use the language increased fluency. However, one of the Polish mothers became emotional when she spoke of her early days in Co. Limerick, when she was living in a new part of Ireland, without the support of a Polish community. She spoke of a day when she left the butcher's shop in tears: "I was heartbroken and couldn't say any one word – it was very hard". Krizstina (P) and Magdolna (P) both reported being able to speak basic English when they first came to Ireland, but again indicated that practice and the necessity to speak English in shops and in school led to an improvement in their ability to communicate with others who did not speak their language. Although these mothers are now confident of their

ability to speak and understand spoken English, the adjustment to living in a new country would have been much easier if they had received access to English classes such as those provided by Doras Luimni. Location should not be a barrier to accessing classes in English, and increased fluency in English would certainly help parents to converse/communicate with schools, and thus help their children.

A clear priority for educationalists, policy-makers and individual schools should be to help immigrant parents gain fluency in the English language. Edina (A) is the only mother who reported that the school had provided English language classes for parents. Enabling parental involvement by helping immigrant parents to increase their fluency in the English language should be best practice in all areas, and available to all, not only those living in Limerick (who can access the services of Doras Luimni). This should be a policy matter for politicians, providing a better way forward for immigrant parents and their children. If it was and was effectively implemented at school level it would indicate a genuine welcoming of these new members into the community

6.7 Doras Luimni's Role: The Importance of Support.

Doras Luimní as already discussed (6.4.1, 6.7) is a non-governmental organisation which works in Limerick city and the immediate surrounding area to provide support to asylum seekers and refugees and migrants through personal advocacy, integration development and advocacy campaigns at local and national level. For a number of years, concluding in 2013, Doras Luimni oversaw the Limerick Reception Project in Limerick City, a project which collaborated with local organisations and agencies to mainstream the provision of services.

The project carried out a number of actions including:

- Providing assistance, information and support through the Limerick drop-in centre.

- Providing direct support to asylum seekers living in three direct provision hostels in Limerick and one direct provision centre in Clare.
- Co-ordinating English language provision with the VEC for migrants living in Limerick City and in County Limerick.
- Delivering language and cultural orientation classes.
- Planning and delivering training to build the capacity of asylum seekers and refugees.
- Providing family and school supports.
- Running social activities to address isolation and encourage integration.

Other agencies which were involved with the project include the VEC, the HSE, Citizens Information Service, Department of Social and Family Protection, Jesuit Refugee Services, Clare Immigrant Support Centre, Limerick City Child Care Committee and the New Communities Partnership (www.pobal.ie/Funding_programmes/European_Refugee_Fund/Doras_Luimni.ie).

Although this specific programme concluded in June 2013, Doras Luimni still works to provide advice and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees. My study showed the African mothers received assistance through the provision of language classes, through advice and information about local shops and accommodation and the provision of cultural orientation advice. No assistance such as this was available to any of the Eastern European mothers who participated in my study. For the African parents their political status as asylum seekers meant that Doras Luimni intervened when Maria was unable to secure rented accommodation, helped Edina with English classes and with further education opportunities. No such assistance was available for the Eastern European mothers I spoke to during this research. For Kornelia (P) whose first experience of living in Ireland was in a part of the country with a large Polish community the move to West Limerick was difficult. Now she was dependent on her self-reported very basic

English, with no organisation to provide English language classes or to help her find a job. I consider this to be unfair treatment of the Eastern European mothers, who because of a lack of the political status afforded to asylum seekers, and the geographic significance of where they chose to live in Ireland are unavailable to avail of the assistance available to the African mothers living in Limerick.

6.8 Changing engagement

It is necessary that in school's procedures need to be put in place to allow for equal treatment for all, irrespective of nationality, culture, etc. It is possible that a group within a school may need distinct treatment to allow it to flourish. Schools have to be aware of the challenges faced by immigrant children and their families and take steps to facilitate the role of immigrant parents in their children's school life. The immigrant parent who is unable to understand the content or context of communications ("notes") from schools or teachers is not able to respond in a manner valued by schools.

In the educational arena, schools have a responsibility to help recognise the cultural identities of not just newcomer children, but also of their parents. In practical terms, this means validating, stimulating and recognising their cultural differences, while providing supports when needed. Schools must attempt to help immigrant parents to overcome the challenges they face in a new country, with a different education system to that which they have experienced themselves, and often with the added challenge for both student and teacher of an unfamiliar language. In Ireland, the DES has provided the Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2005) and explored approaches and methodologies which are suitable for intercultural education (e.g. Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School (2007)). In spite of these initiatives, the parents in this study experienced many barriers as they attempted to become involved in their children's primary school lives

This has not become a reality in the experience of most of the parents in this study. In an Ireland which claims to offer “a hundred thousand welcomes”, a “céad míle fáilte”, to tourists, it has become obvious that a similar welcome is not always extended to the newcomer children and their parents who are now part of many school communities. All school communities need to reach out to these parents and extend a genuine welcome. Immigrant parental involvement in primary education needs to be facilitated in a manner relevant to the immigrant parent, thus affording Newcomer children the advantages that are reaped when parents understand the education system and are enabled to help and guide their children.

6.9 Lack of welcome in the community

The lack of welcome is also evidenced in the words of Magdolna (L) and Kornelia (P). Magdolna in describing her perception of not being welcomed in the community reports that some parents are not very friendly. She says that “Some don’t like the foreign[ers]. They look like [...] oh my god, what are you doing here? They still can’t believe that we are the same people, here, living, working taxes, etc”.

Bryan (2008) considered that following the economic recession of the 1980’s many Irish people became suspicious of immigrant workers, fearing that their children would not experience prosperity while immigrant workers found employment, or had access to social welfare in Ireland. The experiences of Maria (A), Magdolna (L) and Kornelia (P) also reflect these sentiments, and provide evidence of immigrants being treated with suspicion in the communities they have chosen to live in.

6.10 Social Isolation while Living among the Irish in Ireland

For many of the mothers involved in the research, both African and Eastern European, their social interactions are mainly with members of their own communities, and not with the Irish among whom they live. Kornelia (P) reported that she does not feel part of the community in which she has lived for eight years, and where her children go to school. This feeling of social isolation is largely because her children have had experiences which show that some members of the local community are uncomfortable with the newcomers now living and working in their neighbourhoods.

An awareness of people having a distrust of immigrants was also articulated by Magdolna (L). She reports interactions with Irish mothers which are permeated with unfriendliness. Magdolna gets the impression that this is because she is not Irish, stating that “some people don’t like the foreign”. This reaction has been noted by Espenshade et al. (1996), who suggest that “economic interests seem to be the main reason for the increase in opposition to both legal and illegal immigrants, in the US and elsewhere” (p. 457).

6.11 Immigrant Parental Involvement: Specific Barriers,

The importance of parental involvement in the education of the child has long been recognised (Harris & Chrispeels, 2006, Fenster et al,2006 in Harris &Goodall, 2007). Discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, various types of parental involvement are identified, particularly through the work of Joyce Epstein (1996) whose typology of parental involvement indicates a number of practices such as learning activities in the home, communicating with the school, volunteering in the school / classroom, and involvement in the decision-making processes of the school. Activities such as these are seen as necessary for the educational achievement of

the child. However, for some immigrant parent these activities are inaccessible because of a range of inequalities which are particular to their status as immigrants, namely a lack of linguistic, social and cultural capitals that are valued by the dominant cultural group in the educational system.

School-based involvement in their child's education offers the opportunity for parents to influence academic and behavioural outcomes (Turney & Kao, 2009). Barriers to this type of participation deny immigrant children the advantages provided in an educational system where many parents, especially those with insider cultural capital, have access to information about their child's achievement, and are then able to intervene when a child is struggling academically and socially. An involved parent sends the message that education is important, and consequently, their children are more likely to value education themselves (Domina, 2005). Domina finds that immigrant parents may want to be engaged in their children's schools but have limited direct involvement because of challenges – linguistic, social and cultural – which make it more difficult for immigrant parents to become involved in their children's education than it is for many Irish parents.

Material and economic disadvantage are challenges which can be experienced by Irish and immigrant parents alike. However, when these challenges are compounded by social, cultural and linguistic differences, it is the immigrant parent who faces further disadvantage as he/she attempts to support the child in primary school. Election to Boards of Management and membership of parents' associations gives an opportunity to parents to become involved in decision making in schools. This opportunity proves elusive for parents who do not understand the content or context of written communications from schools. This group of parents may

also include Irish parents with poor levels of literacy, but my research is focused on immigrant parents only.

A lack of economic capital was mentioned by only one of the mothers in my study. Financial difficulties which may arise as children attend school are mentioned by Hadja (A), who speaks about the lower levels of financial support now available from the Department of Social and Family Affairs for parents of primary school-aged children who experience financial hardship. In receipt of an annual grant of 100 euros per child, she is very happy that the school her children attend helps with the financial cost of each new school year, when books and uniforms have to be provided.

6.12.1 Cultural Capital and Knowledge of the Education System

A lack of cultural capital and local knowledge is a significant barrier when it comes to accessing education. The early days in primary school are significant in the lives of children and parents. Finding one's way around a new environment and educational system is always a challenge, not only for children, but also for parents. Immigrant parents require considerable skills and support to successfully navigate the many aspects of school life. Meeting teachers and other parents, attending parent-teacher meetings and keeping up to date with the many events which are part of school life, and in which their children are involved, may prove very difficult for all parents, but especially for those who are new to the country and have no experience of schools in Ireland. Describing primary school as a critical period for long-term educational outcomes, Turney and Kao (2009) found that, although schools and teachers are important in a child's education, the child's parents are key in determining their child's experiences.

For the immigrant parent, cultural capital and knowledge of the education system is vital for accessing the rich resources the school has to offer children. One of the earliest challenges to be faced is when the time comes for a child to leave preschool and attend primary school. While discussing the transition from preschool to primary school with the mothers in my study I became aware that here was another area where the experiences of the African and the Eastern European mothers varied greatly. The African mothers did not report any challenges relating to their experience of children starting primary school. Neither did they report any difficulties in reading and understanding communications from the school. This may be a result of the advantages reaped by their linguistic ability (aided for some by Doras Luimni) and a social network based on the Christian churches which they attend, or it may be another example of the reticence already observed when they were asked about their reasons for coming to live and work in Ireland. A desire to “fit in” with the environment in which they are now living may explain the non-reporting of difficulties that were reported by the Eastern European mothers. This research does not provide an answer to this question.

For the Eastern European mothers in this study, the lack of communication with other parents in the school community and the lack of appropriate information from the school combined to create difficulties. For one mother (Kornelia) whose children attended preschool in another nearby village, no information about primary school was available. The usual practice of primary schools making enrolment forms available through preschools did not apply here, as the children were not attending the preschool in the village. Having observed children in the community, this mother was aware of the school uniform, and was able to buy it, but it was only on the first day of the school year that she obtained enrolment forms and the booklist. In contrast to this experience, Magdolna (L), whose child attended a crèche in a small county town, was given a list of primary schools in the area, and, once the decision was made regarding

which school the child would attend, she contacted the school for enrolment forms, and was given information about school uniforms and textbooks. Olga (P) reported that she was familiar with the local primary school, as her uncle and his family had lived in the area previously, and his children had attended the school. However, this sense of familiarity was misplaced, as Olga's daughter attended the first day without a school uniform. Olga bought the uniform immediately and it was worn by her daughter the following day. Krizstina (P) and Margit (P) both approached the primary school, and were given booklists, which they took to the bookshops. They both used a dictionary as they attempted to translate and understand the documentation provided by the school. For these Eastern European mothers, a lack of cultural capital, the situation of "not knowing" what to do with the booklists, created difficulties at this important time in school and family life, slowing down the process of preparing their child for the important step of beginning school.

6.12.2 The Importance of Linguistic Capital

Not being able to speak the language of the school environment is another significant barrier to education. Language is a natural facility for communicating and those who do not share fluency in the language of a school and community are at a disadvantage in their daily lives. Concerned with the additional barriers specific to immigrant parents that prevent them from participating in their children's schools at comparable levels to participation among indigenous parents, this research discusses unique challenges associated with an unfamiliarity with the English language, the culture of the host country and the schools in that country. The teachers in McGorman and Sugrue's study (2007) spoke of the inability to communicate with parents who have little or no proficiency in the English language and reported that it hampered their work as they attempted to communicate with this group. Kitching (2006) similarly reports that his study showed that almost half of teachers interviewed regarded their communications with

EAL pupils' homes as being of lesser quality than communication with Irish parents' homes (McDaid, 2010).

This paucity of communication may lead schools and teachers to suspect that immigrant parents are not interested in their child's education. However, it has been shown that such parents, while lacking fluency in English, the language of the majority of primary schools, do indeed feel concerned and interested in what happens in their children's school day. O'Brien (1987, 2004) states that parents may lack the form of dominant cultural capital that would enable them to engage fully with their child's school. This was stated in relation to working-class parents, but it is relevant also to the plight of the immigrant parent whose children attend Irish primary schools. A lack of linguistic capital places some immigrant parents at a disadvantage when they attempt to interact with schools and teachers. One of the parents in McGorman and Sugrue's (2007) study revealed that the single largest barrier to parental involvement is the lack of English language proficiency among immigrant parents and suggested that language classes might help. This parent contended that it is not that parents do not want to come to school and become involved, but rather that they feel uncomfortable, or perhaps even inferior, due to their abilities in relation to spoken English (p. 101).

Interestingly, in this study Maria (A) spoke of the task of understanding accents being a challenge, while, referring to the use of colloquial English and the Irish accent. Magdolna observed that "Irish people talk different to us". As already mentioned, Kornelia vocalised strong feelings when she first came to live in a new community. Unable to speak English, she left a butcher's shop in tears. Even though this shopkeeper tried to help her, she was "afraid to say one word". How much more difficult must it have been for her to engage in continuous communication with the school her children attend?

The challenge, however, need not be persistent or chronic. For Krizstina (P), the first year during which her children were in school was very difficult for her, but now, as her spoken English has improved, she finds it easier to speak to the teachers. This reflects the research of Turney and Kao (2009), who in their study found a correlation between the length of time spent in the US, English language ability and parental involvement among the parents in their study. It was also found that parents whose first language was not English were disadvantaged in terms of their involvement, but, with adequate supports and sensitive teachers, the problem is remediable, as is shown by the experiences of the African mothers in my research.

A negative relationship between the immigrant parent and his/her involvement in school life is to the fore when the parent attempts to translate and understand communications from the school which are usually in the form of a note. Cultural and linguistic differences make it difficult for the immigrant parent to understand both the content and the meaning of these notes, as we have observed in relation to how Kornelia (P) did not understand how the school intended to celebrate the raising of a Green Flag.

We are reminded here that literacy has a wider cultural significance. Magdolna spoke of the time her daughter was the only child wearing a school tracksuit at a school “Fun Day”, while the other children wore ordinary clothes. If the note had been explained to her by the teacher, her daughter would have been dressed in a suitable manner. The length of time she has spent in Ireland has enabled Kornelia (P) to feel more comfortable when she meets the teachers, revealing that her earlier feelings were “because of English and because of [...] ah [...] different culture [...] I didn’t know what I should do [...] I didn’t know what was proper”.

These remarks are relevant to Reays (2004) argument for a broad understanding of cultural capital, the absence of which affects a parent's ability to support his /her child's education.

6.12.3 Engagement with Teachers: Parent-teacher Meetings

Not being able to engage with teachers and the school is another significant barrier to education. A common method of informing parents of a child's attainments academically and socially is at the annual or biannual parent teacher meeting. The literature suggests that there are sometimes linguistic difficulties whereby schools may be dependent on other parents, or even children, to act as translators during the meetings, but this was not reported as an issue by the mothers interviewed in this study, who all had good experiences with parent-teacher meetings. They found the meetings beneficial, and surprise was expressed at how well the teachers knew the children. It is also possible for all of the mothers to request a meeting if they have any concerns about their children, outside of the time of these scheduled meetings. Only one mother (Margit (P)) brings the children to the meetings, but it is unclear if this is because she needs a translator or because she has no one to mind the children. Difficulty in obtaining time off work to attend parent-teacher meetings was given as a reason for non-attendance by two mothers, but this factor could affect attendance by indigenous parents also (Turney & Kao, 2008). A further, larger study would be necessary to compare attendance at these meetings by indigenous parents and the immigrant parent population and would elicit evidence to show if particular barriers are faced by immigrant parents that affect participation in this aspect of school life.

6.12.4 Not always feeling welcome in a less formal setting

Not feeling welcome can be a barrier for some parents, especially for parents who may have reason for feeling excluded. Contact between parents and a teacher is not confined to formal

parent-teacher meetings. The reported ease in communicating with teachers at parent-teacher meetings is not repeated when questions are asked about meeting teachers in a less formal manner. As reported by Brilliant (2001), Harris & Goodall, 2007, some parents (in this study, most notably the Eastern European mothers) have the perception that they are not always wanted or welcomed by schools. Krizstina and Margit (P) described their experiences in the first school their children attended in Ireland. They reported feeling that the teacher they were dealing with did not welcome Polish children. Krizstina compared this with the school her children now attend: "Here, we don't see the comparison being made between Polish and Irish children". Magdolna (L) reported feeling uncomfortable talking to her child's teacher but explained this as being because the teacher is busy in the morning and does not have time to talk to parents.

6.12.5 Helping Children with Homework

If a parent is unable to help their child with his / her homework this very expectation will present a barrier for some parents. Completing homework with a child is normally a time when school activities and home activities meet. There is evidence of the Eastern European and the African mothers having different experiences with regard to assisting their children with homework. As one would expect, the mothers who had English as a first language or who had developed fluency in the language did not report having difficulty helping their children with their homework. Two of the African mothers were confident in their ability to help their children, although Erzsebet mentioned that she was not given any information about the school's expectations in this area of learning. In two of the families represented in this study, both parents were working, and the families availed of after school care, where the children

completed their homework. Maria checks the homework each evening when she comes home from work. Edina's children attend a homework club provided by the school under the HSCL scheme. The homework is supervised, and so Edina feels that does not have to worry about whether she is helping the children in the correct manner.

Magdolna (L) also avails of paid after-school care for her children, and she reported not knowing how much homework her daughter receives, as she works an evening shift from 4pm to midnight. Magdolna does not open and examine the contents of the schoolbag regularly – only if she has time. At this time, she searches for notes from the teacher and school. Two of the Polish mothers whose children attend schools in a county town receive no information about the homework that is given to children in different classes, and no guidelines as to how to help their children. One of these mothers is able to help the children “sometimes”, whereas Krizstina reported being unable to help her children but having an older daughter who is able to help her younger siblings with homework. The children of the two other Polish mothers attend school in the village where they live. This school sends home a letter each Monday, letting the family know what homework is to be given that week. Olga is confident in her ability to help, and revealed that, if she does not understand, she will ask the teacher. Kornelia is less confident and uses a dictionary to help her understand the work, translating it to Polish and then explaining it to the children in Polish.

Experiences of the parents in the study vary and once again it became obvious to me that the task of helping children with homework was easier for the African parents who possessed the linguistic capital to understand the work that needed to be done. A school's homework policy should be available to and explained to all parents. For mothers who do not possess the linguistic or cultural capital that would enable them to understand a school's expectations regarding homework, it seems obvious to me that schools should explain homework policy and

expectations to all parents. Expectations should be clearly explained, along with guidelines regarding working independently, and advice should be given as to the length of time to be spent doing this work. Some immigrant mothers are being denied the ability to help their children in the same way Irish parents are able to, and therefore, they are denied the benefits reaped not only by the child, but also by the parent who might otherwise experience the child's learning first hand. Again, I refer here to the Intercultural Guidelines (2005), which did not include immigrant parental involvement as a concept of importance to the success of newcomer children in primary schools. This framework represents a missed opportunity for the DES to draw attention to the important role to be played by the parents of this group of parents, who are affected by a lack of linguistic and cultural capitals which could enable them to navigate the Irish education system.

6.12.6 Formal Engagement with the School

All of the above stated barriers combine to create further barriers in terms of formal engagement and the challenges that this poses to immigrant parents. As previously explored in the Chapter Three discussion on definitions of the concept of parental involvement, both formal and informal aspects of parental involvement are beneficial in a child's educational outcome. The formal aspects of parental involvement occur when parents become involved in school-based activities, in parents' associations and in school boards of management, where such formal structures are in place, as they are in Ireland. Participation in school events, the work of the school and school governance is viewed as an intrinsic part of parental involvement (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 4). Therefore, if, for some reason, parents, both Irish and immigrant, are not enabled to become involved in the schooling of their children, the children themselves suffer from a deficit of educational provision.

During this research, the author found evidence of a situation where the immigrant parent is denied the opportunity to become involved in these aspects of school life. While membership of the parents' association in a school is possible for parents of all children, only Olga (P) was actively involved in this group. Another Polish mother had been asked to attend meetings, but was reluctant to do so, as she was not confident in her linguistic ability, afraid that she would not understand the context of what would be said and that others might not like her ideas. The other Eastern European mothers were unaware whether or not such a group existed in the school. Only one Polish mother was aware that a school has a board of management, having this information because she is involved in the parents' association in the school. The other mothers asked, "What is this?" Again, there was a difference in the information available to the African mothers. Only one was unaware of the school having a board of management, although none of this group had attended a meeting about the formation of a board. This is another example of a lack of appropriate communication between the school and the immigrant parent. The Eastern European mothers either did not receive information about these meetings or did not understand the letter that they received regarding the meetings.

Although unaware of opportunities for formal involvement in schools through membership of boards of management and parents' associations, all of the mothers in this research spoke of visiting their children's schools to watch the children perform in school plays and concerts. It was their children's involvement that made their mothers aware of these school activities. The mothers all expressed pride at seeing their children perform at school events such as these or at events such as the Peace Proms, a cross border choral initiative.

6.13 Political Capital as an Extraordinary Challenge to Parental Rights

For immigrant parents, the lack of political capital they possess counteracts their efforts to become involved in the school life of their children. The recent 2016 General Election in

Ireland led to almost 100,000 new Irish citizens voting for the first time. It is to be expected that politicians would recognise the voting power of such a large group. For this reason, the 300 new citizens registered to vote for the first time in Limerick City were reminded by Doras Luimni that “there is power in their vote” (Limerick Leader, 25th February, 2016). However, of significance to the author’s assertion that these immigrant parents lack political capital are the following observations: “Very few [of the new Irish citizens in the Limerick area] have been approached by canvassers or candidates and there seems to be a misconception that people who look or sound different could not be eligible to vote. Ireland has changed, and we now live in a diverse country comprised of people from a wide variety of backgrounds. We hope to see that diversity represented in politics in the near future” (Doras Luimni). Civic participation involves the confidence to represent one’s community and one’s interests, giving further opportunities to participate in the political arena and to lobby for change in the area of education.

6.14 Summary

This chapter discussed the experiences of some immigrant mothers living in Ireland, asking the question “Are they experiencing welcome?” Following a short description of the changes which came about in the Irish educational system due to the unprecedented immigration which occurred in the last years of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, I addressed the challenges which face Irish primary schools as children are enrolled with varied levels of linguistic needs and abilities. Many of these children do not have English as a first language. The DES responded by allocating teachers for English as an additional language to support children in their first two years in primary schools. Policy development in this area was explored, and it was noted that, despite the publication of Intercultural Guidelines in 2005, and of subsequent policy documents such as the IES (2010), there is still evidence of challenges and barriers to inclusion. The immigrant mothers interviewed for this study faced challenges

relating to the lack of possession of the capitals, linguistic, cultural and social which are valued by the dominant cultural group in schools and in the community. The lack of linguistic capital leads to the obvious problem of communicating with schools, teachers, parents and members of the wider school community. Informal contact becomes limited and for some parents the opportunity to discuss a child's progress at a parent teacher meeting is unavailable because they do not understand the language of the school. For some immigrant mothers this lack of linguistic capital further hinders understanding of written communications or "notes" from school, and places them and their children at a disadvantage compared to other mothers in the school.

Problems experienced when communicating with teachers and schools were compounded by a lack of cultural capital, many of these parents having no knowledge of the Irish education system. Chapter 5 has provided evidence of these problems. Lack of information in a manner which could be understood by immigrant parents has led to non-attendance at an event such as a school organised Holy Communion Party, and indeed has meant that not all parents are aware of the presence of a Parent's Association and a Board of Management. Some of the mothers in the study are being denied the opportunity to participate in school events, the work of the school and school governance. This involvement is an intrinsic part of parental involvement (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Experiences of suspicion and prejudice were found to be common in the community and, to a lesser extent, in schools. Among the communities in which the mothers in this study lived, evidence was found of a mistrust of the "other", the "stranger. Kornelia (P) and Magdolna(L) reported a perception of not being welcomed in the communities they now live in. Magdolna reports experiences of suspicion and distrust being displayed towards her by parents she meets

in school every morning. For Krizstina (P) and Margit (P) the perception is that their children were not welcome in the first school they attended in Ireland. Initially all was well, but when one teacher left the school, the mothers found themselves isolated, and felt that their children were not treated in the same manner as were Irish children. Following a change of location and a new school for the children, both mothers are now happy with school and how their children are treated as “not different

During this research it became obvious to me that the group of African mothers received assistance because of their status as asylum seekers. Evidence was given of help with accommodation, of the provision of English language classes, and of further education opportunities. Because their children attended school in a city area, in schools which had Home School Liaison services, the mothers had access to classes held in the school. Hadja was able to take part in English language and cookery classes, and her children could attend a homework club organised by the school. Assistance provided by Doras Luimni was not available to the Eastern European mothers in my study and their children attended rural and small-town schools which did not have a Home / School Liason Scheme in place. Although I contend that their status as asylum seekers was an advantage as they came to a new country, this does not equate to a political willingness to further immigrant parental involvement. Indeed, it only highlights the lack of thinking with respect to the collective action of the state agencies and voluntary groups when it comes to the particular needs of immigrant families. Many of the challenges experienced by immigrant parents could have been alleviated if political will had extended beyond the provision of English language support for children and had also considered the immigrant parent.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Céad Mile Fáilte?

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this final chapter is to present the broader implications of the findings and to draw conclusions from the study by critically examining the emergent issues. During the year and a half, I spent teaching as an EAL teacher I got to know a number of the parents of the Newcomer Children I was teaching. It was my perception at that time that these parents were on the margins of the school community, not mixing with parents of the largely Irish school population. In my study I sought to investigate this observation, wondering if this isolation was a result of suspicion exhibited towards the immigrant parent or because of barriers to integration created by immigration. I also wondered if the effect of these barriers was remediable.

Bourdieu's *Forms of Capital* (1986) was used to examine how challenges such as a lack of economic, linguistic and cultural capitals create barriers to immigrant parental involvement and negatively affect these parents' participation in the school community.

An exploration of the research question, "How do immigrant parents experience their parental involvement in Irish primary schools?" has led to a number of conclusions, all of which together highlight how a large number of immigrant families, living among indigenous communities in urban and rural settings exist in isolation from their Irish neighbours. The evidence presented in Chapter Five through the stories of the mothers who participated in this study provides a strong case for arguing that the picture of inclusion and exclusion is mixed. Some of the mothers interviewed, namely the Eastern European mothers, report many challenges as they attempt to navigate the Irish primary education system and become involved in their children's schooling. However, there is also evidence that the African mothers in this

research received special treatment because of their status as asylum seekers, an example of this being the provision of English language classes and access to further education. The voices of the mothers in this research tell stories of inclusion and hospitality, but for some there are stories of exclusion and of not feeling welcome in schools and in communities. Attempting to get clear on the levels of exclusion, while acknowledging the otherwise good work of inclusion, has been one of the challenges of this research.

Outlining demographic changes in immigration to Ireland in the early decade of the twenty-first century Chapter One discusses the reasons for this numerically unprecedented change which led to the new, largely multicultural nature of Irish primary schools and the need to understand, recognise and respect the other cultures and languages now part of these schools. Educational policy documents were produced by national educational agencies to respond to demographic changes, but these policies, while in other respects enlightened, have ignored the importance of immigrant parents in their children's education, and therefore, not all immigrant parents are being *enabled* to take an active role in their children's schooling.

As a result of reflecting on my own experiences as an EAL teacher and listening to the voices of the immigrant mothers who participated in my research I have concluded that the educational system and some primary schools could do more to enable immigrant parents to take an active role in their children's schools. I further conclude that attitudes of suspicion that are being displayed in the community towards some immigrant families and their children should be constructively addressed through the school system. Ireland's long history of emigration has not created sufficient empathy towards people who have left home and country behind. Rather, many of these new immigrants are treated with suspicion in the communities in which they live. A lack of political capital further adds to the barriers to parental involvement experienced

by immigrant parents. Legislation in Ireland is concerned mostly with Irish citizens, who are protected by the Irish constitution. Such protection of one's rights is not afforded to immigrant families to the same degree as Irish citizens.

This chapter will bring together my observations in a rural school and community with the relevant literature I have explored and most importantly, alongside the voices and perceptions of the immigrant mothers who so graciously participated in this research. Overall the research explored a number of themes, which provided the critical lenses to help further explore the subject matter and advance my thesis. As such this chapter is structured around a number of themes; A Lack of Capitals; A Patchwork of Inclusion and Exclusion; Current National Policy on Immigrant Parental Involvement and the Need to Change; Curricular Obligation; Political Status furthering Inclusion.

7.2 Educational Response to Diversity

The demographic change in the school going population in the first decade of the twenty-first century meant that many schools experienced a numerically unprecedented diversity in pupil enrolment. In this research I have argued that Irish schools were not prepared for the arrival of these students (Smyth et al,2009) and consequently these children attended schools where curricula remained unchanged and overt and hidden curricula perpetuated the values of the host school, with the result that many parents of these newcomer children do not feel the same sense of belonging to a school community as do their Irish counterparts.

This research, while discussing the issuing of Guidelines for Intercultural Education (2005) and other school related documents is however concerned with the parents of the Newcomer children who are now attending Irish primary schools. While the Intercultural Guidelines (2005) aim to form a "school culture that is welcoming, respectful and sensitive to the needs of all children" and to "contribute to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society

based on a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity is valuable” (NCCA, 2005, p5), the DES did not provide funding to train teachers to assist schools to achieve these aims. Notably, the DES and the Intercultural Guidelines failed to acknowledge the importance of the immigrant parent in the school life of newcomer children and therefore suggestions and guidelines for working with them were not included. By not highlighting the importance of immigrant parental involvement, the Intercultural Guidelines (2005) failed Newcomer children whose parents lacked the linguistic and cultural capitals which would enable them to support their children in primary schools. Recognising this, the OECD in 2009 recommended that schools make extra efforts to ensure that immigrant parents are involved in their child’s school lives. Among suggestions arising from the OECD are those concerned with partnership and engagement. It was recommended that immigrant parental involvement be encouraged and that the HSCL scheme be enhanced through professional development to enable teachers and schools to support immigrant families. It was further recommended that local community services for immigrant parents be encouraged. A clear and definite suggestion was that schools must ensure that immigrant parents can make better-informed decisions about their children’s education (IES,2010, p. 30). However, there is little evidence that partnership and engagement have become a reality in the years since the 2009 OECD review. The question arising from this study concerns whether positive change can be achieved. Can immigrant parents expect to receive a welcome into all primary schools, and receive the help they need to be involved in their children’s education? For many of the immigrant mothers in this research parental involvement can be thwarted by the lack of the cultural, linguistic and social capitals enjoyed by the dominant cultural group in schools. Many schools which are not acknowledging the challenges to parental involvement experienced by immigrant mothers are contributing to experiences of educational disadvantage by their children. Immigrant mothers who are not adequately supported in their efforts to communicate with schools as they attempt to navigate

the educational system and schools in Ireland are being effectively denied the important opportunity to be involved in their children's education to the extent that their belonging is frustrated and their identity as their children's primary educator remains unrecognised.

7.3 The Effect of a Lack of Capitals on Immigrant Parental Involvement

A person's habitus is the manner in which the culture of a group is internalised in an individual and is absorbed from early childhood. This habitus is closely linked with a person's possession of what Bourdieu (1986) calls "capitals" including economic, cultural and linguistic capitals. Habitus and the possession of capitals, together with knowledge of the education system in the receiving country (in this instance, Ireland), all influence participation by immigrant parents in their child's education. It is important for families and children that teachers directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously facilitate the activation of good social and cultural capitals in schools. However, this does not happen in all of the schools attended by the children of the mothers in this study. Immigrant parents may be different with respect to the capitals they possess when they arrive in a country or school or the capitals they have not activated (particularly linguistic and cultural). They may be unable to participate in a manner expected, recognised and valued by schools. In these cases where a lack of cultural capital is evident the vital connection between capitals that would allow newcomer children the opportunity to benefit from parental involvement in the same manner as do children from the dominant host group is broken. Significant for the Eastern European mothers is their lack of linguistic capital, which would help connect them to other important capitals. As a result, they are unable to access information from schools about enrolment policy and are unable to read the written communications that are the usual method schools employ when informing parents about school events. These Polish and Lithuanian mothers are receiving notes from schools which are not being translated into a language they understand, also lacking the relevant cultural capital or local knowledge that would enable them to understand the content of these notes. As

such they are at a disadvantage compared to Irish parents and are often unable to adequately prepare their children for the whole school experience.

7.4 A Patchwork of Inclusion and Exclusion

The stories of the immigrant mothers who participated in this research have provided evidence that some schools are not dealing with the changing demographics among the parent body within the school community. There is however, also evidence that some schools are, giving rise to what I describe as a patchwork of inclusion and exclusion. Urban schools, attended by some of the children whose mothers were interviewed in this research, were involved in the HSCL scheme. These schools provide EAL classes, cookery classes for parents and homework clubs for children. Children are supervised in a playroom while their parents attend parent-teacher meetings. The African mothers in this study all received assistance and advice from Doras Luimni. English as an Additional Language classes were provided where necessary and help was given when families were searching for accommodation. Life is different for the Eastern European mothers whose children attend primary schools in rural Ireland. While these mothers claim that their ability in spoken English has improved since they first came to Ireland, no effort within the community to provide English classes was reported. Schools persist in sending notes home from school in the language of the majority (i.e. English). This in itself fosters an unhealthy assumption of a homogenous school community. There is also evidence of mothers using a dictionary to translate these communications but still failing to understand the cultural and social context of the information in this note. As a result, children are at a disadvantage, as in the case of the child who attended a Sports Day wearing the wrong clothing. Because of a lack of the cultural capital which would help these mothers to understand the written word, as well as the message contained in notes, Kornelia (P) stated “As a mother I feel not good enough”. This is an indictment of a school community and provides an example of the tension between inclusion and exclusion that is a reflexive challenge for this research.

When immigrant mothers are being treated in this way it places their children at a disadvantage socially and academically. My research indicates levels of inequality in an area where there is an unambiguous onus on the State to do more - immigrant parental involvement. The location of the schools that children attend should not make a difference to the opportunities available for parental involvement. Change is necessary to allow these children to experience the same advantages gained by children whose mothers are facilitated in becoming involved in their children's education. Schools and teachers need to extend a genuine welcome to immigrant mothers, as well as to their children, in other words a genuine "Cead Mile Failte" needs to be extended.

7. 5 Evidence of Experiencing Isolation and Suspicion in Schools and Communities

Some of the mothers in my research report getting other communications from school written in a language they do not understand. This means that they cannot become involved in the daily life of a school. It has been shown in this study that cultural and linguistic barrier are often ignored by schools and teachers. Non-recognition of the challenges faced by parents in attempting to become part of our schools and communities does little to bridge the gap between newcomers and indigenous people. The lack of effort to communicate effectively with immigrant mothers is linked to a general lack of understanding of the challenges faced by immigrant parents in school and within the wider community within which they live. I argue that without the adequate capitals to negotiate the Irish educational system the perpetuation of the challenges to immigrant parental involvement will continue.

This research has provided evidence of some immigrant parents experiencing suspicion and a lack of welcome within the school community. Many immigrant parents report having friends only of their own nationality. The African mothers report knowing mothers of all nationalities, but for some the friends are from other African countries. For the Eastern European mothers

especially, the lack of the relevant linguistic capital has meant exclusion from school organised events such as a celebration after a First Holy Communion ceremony.

Many schools are not doing enough to enable immigrant parental involvement and help overcome barriers (economic, linguistic and cultural) that influence how, and even whether, immigrant parents interact with school and teachers as they attempt to become involved in their children's education. International research discussed in Chapter Three has shown that parental involvement is a key factor in securing higher student achievement and sustained school performance (Harris & Chrispeels, 2006). The effects of such involvement are known to continue into secondary school and adulthood. This research has illustrated a group of immigrant mothers who, while reporting attendance at parent teacher meetings and the enjoyment of their children's performances in school, were mostly unaware of opportunities for involvement in parents' associations and of the existence of a board of management in the schools their children are attending. It's safe to say that if parents can't read notes from the school, they are unlikely to influence the running of the school.

7. 6 Current National Policy and the Need to Change.

In Chapter Two I discussed the relevance of the international rights framework for helping to shape policy in national contexts. By ignoring the importance of communication with, and involvement of, the immigrant parent, some schools risk placing newcomer children at a disadvantage. The IES (2010) was drawn up following a commitment given by the Irish government at the World Conference against Racism (2010). It was developed as part of the National Action Plan against Racism (NAPR) and in recognition of the significant demographic changes which were being reflected in Irish primary schools. The purpose of the strategy is to further advance intercultural education in Ireland. It was influenced by many

international reports and agreements and has a stated aim to “support and improve the quality, relevance and inclusiveness of education for every learner in our schools” (IES, 2010, p. 4).

The IES reports that teachers have highlighted the need for continuous professional development (CPD) in their efforts to integrate migrant and native students while still respecting diversity amongst children and their families. Little CPD has been provided for teachers and school staff where the schools experienced demographic change. Intercultural Education in the Primary School Guidelines (2005) stand in isolation. The economic downturn experienced following the years of the Celtic Tiger has meant that funding was not provided for EAL classes for parents. In fact, the DES decided that EAL classes for primary school pupils would end for newcomer children after a period of two years. This ignores evidence that conversational English is developed after two years, whereas it takes five years for the development of academic English (Cummins, 2011).

Although the Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010-2015 (2010) highlights partnership and engagement as tenets in the strategy, progression in relation to the involvement of immigrant parents in their children’s education has not resulted from this strategy. As an example, it was intended under the IES that the state would make money available for the provision of English language classes for adult immigrants. This proposal, together with Home/School Liaison projects, has been affected by the economic downturn of the early years of the 21st century. This is a further indication of the lack of political will among the education partners to further immigrant parental involvement. The IES, intending to build on the work that followed the introduction of the intercultural guidelines claimed that interculturalism is “about thinking, planning and doing things differently, conscious of diversity and the need to create intercultural learning environments” (p. 52). The “concerted

and evolving change of attitudes” (p. 57) sought by the IES should have worked to the advantage of immigrant parents. This has not been the case, as evidenced in the stories of the parents interviewed in this research.

7.7 The Failure of National Policy in Ireland to promote Immigrant Parental Involvement

Intercultural Guidelines (2005), issued by the Department of Education, fail to mention the role of the immigrant parent in the changing landscape of diversity and interculturalism in Irish primary schools. This was an opportunity missed – an opportunity to make teachers aware of the many barriers faced by this group of parents as they attempt to help their children who are attending primary schools. The result of this failure is that some immigrant parents, depending on their linguistic ability and the location of the schools their children attend, are better placed to experience parental involvement than are immigrant parents living in other areas.

The trajectory of international and national policy documentation provides clear direction for schools. This, however, has not resulted in a positive response from all primary schools. The difficulties experienced by immigrant parents as they attempt to support their children in school are not addressed. As a result, certain complicating factors, such as cultural and linguistic challenges, are not identified, and all serve to distance the immigrant parent from the everyday happenings of primary schools. Furthermore, not all schools have developed an effective communication policy between school and home, and many parents are struggling with dictionaries as they attempt to understand communications from schools.

7.8 Curricular Obligation as an incentive to enhance immigrant parental involvement?

A further impetus to the facilitation of immigrant parental involvement would be provided if the DES placed emphasis on this involvement in a manner similar to that provided by the curricular obligation placed on schools by the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) is an ongoing initiative in Irish primary schools and requires the setting of targets and measurement of outcomes in these curricular areas. This strategy meant that schools spend a large number of hours planning, monitoring and evaluating various aspects of curricular subjects (e.g. writing genres in literacy). Drawing up a three-year plan, the majority of schools have now improved standardised testing results in literacy, numeracy and in one other subject, selected by schools. Reflecting on my personal experience and also from observations during this research, I have found no evidence of similar strategies or initiatives in the area of intercultural education. Without political pressure in the form of direction from the DES, there is no onus on schools to enhance the participation of immigrant parents. Intercultural guidelines provided a framework, and, as such, there is no accompanying curriculum and no associated inspection from the DES in the form of the Inspectorate. Such inspection could lead to increased communication between the school and the home of the newcomer child, helping in the journey towards inclusivity. Inspection of efforts towards genuine interculturalism would urge schools to work towards the ideal of “creating an inclusive society as they [providers of education] represent the main opportunity for young people of migrant and host communities to get to know and respect each other” (EU, 2008, p. 3, as cited in IES, 2010, p. 57).

Consultation between educational partners, teachers and parents is ongoing in the curricular area labelled Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics (ERB and Ethics). As a curricular subject, and therefore open to assessment by the DES (i.e. the Inspectorate), ERB and Ethics aims “to foster a respect for, understanding of, and empathy with members of

different religions, beliefs and worldviews” (NCCA, 2015, p. 3). The vision is for a “pluralist and values education which can enable teachers to support children in our schools to live in and contribute positively to a diverse world” (p. 6). Through this subject, children will be enabled to develop the attitudes and skills necessary to become part of an inclusive school community, which may be characterised by linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Children will be encouraged to grow in self-respect and respect for others. Values learned in this curricular area will perhaps transfer to the everyday life of the school. These values, integrated with those encouraged in the Intercultural Guidelines (2005), have the potential to transform relationships between the school and immigrant parents. The curricular obligation and the subsequent accompanying assessment by the Inspectorate that the proposed subject ERB and Ethics will bring to schools has the potential to change attitudes towards immigrant parents, both within the school itself and the wider community. It is timely that the DES works to enable the involvement of the immigrant parent in their child’s education, and to be active participants in the education system at school, regional and national levels (DES, 1995, p. 4). Immigrant parental involvement is hindered by the many obstacles to involvement faced by this group, and, unless there is an obligation on schools to further participation and pressure to realize this obligation there will be no felt need on behalf of schools to change practice in this area.

For teachers in a school community, such change should enable recognition of the rights of immigrant parents, without whose involvement in their education the children cannot flourish in the same way as their non-immigrant peers. There is reason to hope that this curricular obligation, once met, would serve to enhance immigrant parental involvement by working to alleviate the challenges created by a lack of the social, cultural and linguistic

challenges which make it difficult for this cohort of parents who are now part of Irish school communities.

7.9 Political Status, Capital and Political Will.

For the African mothers their political status as asylum seekers provided access to the services of Doras Luimni. It is reported that assistance was given with some everyday issues experienced when one moves to a new community or country. Where do I do my shopping? How do I find accommodation when it is time to move from a hostel? Can I get help to overcome linguistic difficulties? Can I send my children to preschool? Edina (A) attended English language classes and a VTOS course. Now, as the school her children attend has a HSL scheme she can avail of English and of cookery classes. The children attend after school classes, where there is a homework club providing supervision and assistance. Maria had difficulty finding rented accommodation in Limerick. With intervention from Doras Luimni this problem was overcome. Inclusion was made possible by State and non-governmental agencies.

As already highlighted the Eastern European mothers did not receive such assistance. Linguistic difficulties persist, as does evidence of a lack of contact with parents of Irish or other nationalities. The African mothers report a wider group of friends, due to workplace friendships and through membership of a Christian church community. While all immigrant parents are worthy of the same assistance it appears from this research that African families, because of their status as asylum seekers receive special treatment not available to other immigrants.

In addition to discussing the value of this political status as asylum seekers I have noted the lack of political capital possessed by all immigrant parents who are not Irish citizens (2.12). It

is certainly worth speculating again whether some immigrants' needs are being overlooked not out of ignorance or a lack of resources but rather because there is little political will to bring intervention to individuals or groups who are not Irish citizens. Would there be political will for greater immigrant parental involvement if these newcomer parents had the right to vote in Irish local and general elections? If the voices and votes of these parents counted in local and national politics, perhaps schools would feel obliged to make all possible efforts to communicate effectively with immigrant families. One can only wonder.

7.10 Conclusions and Recommendations

While this research set out to investigate the experiences of parental involvement of two groups of immigrant mothers I was not expecting to find the differences reported in the assistance that is available to both groups and the consequent opportunities for parental involvement in the schools their children attend. For the African mothers their political status as asylum seekers provided their initial accommodation and access to the services of Doras Luimni which resulted in the provision of English language classes and other assistance not available to the Eastern European mothers whose experiences indicate a lack of the linguistic and cultural capitals valued by the schools their children attend. Location and political status, or lack thereof, should not be a determining factor in the provision of assistance to immigrant families. There are after all plenty of good directives in this area arising from policy on interculturalism and international best practice.

Intercultural Education Guidelines (2005), functioning as a framework, did not address the need for parents to be involved, irrespective of linguistic and cultural difficulties. In many cases, schools and teachers fail to recognise and respect the particular difficulties and the rights to inclusivity of these newcomer children and their parents, and little effort is made to bridge the very real cultural gap between school and home.

Examples of suspicion being demonstrated towards newcomer children and their parents were discussed in this research. I consider that proactive change is necessary and must be brought about politically and socially if Ireland is to be a genuine place of welcomes. In the case of primary schools, I argued that if efforts to facilitate immigrant parental involvement were given status similar to that of curricular change with an associated oversight by the DES Inspectorate, schools would make greater effort to facilitate immigrant parental involvement in all schools, not for those families who live in and whose children attend school in an urban setting which have an HSL scheme in place.

International and National Policy provided a roadmap to enable schools to deal with the unprecedented demographic change experienced by Irish primary schools at the beginning of the twenty-first century. A lack of political recognition and political will has created a situation whereby the immigrant parent is not always valued in schools. The African mothers in this research, because of their political status as asylum seekers had very different experiences of welcome and inclusion, particularly in schools, than the Eastern European mothers. Surely all immigrant families are worthy of the same assistance.

Change in school policy towards immigrant parental involvement is necessary. The necessity for change is identified: "IES is about thinking, planning and doing things differently, conscious of diversity and the need to create intercultural environments. It requires respect for difference and a concentrated and evolving change of attitudes" (IES, 2010, p. 57). It's about the creation of a "new, ongoing "We"" (Modood, 2011). For some of the immigrant mothers in the present research, it would mean that they could become involved in their child's education. Immigrant parents are also stakeholders with a vested interest in their children's

education and wellbeing. In this more equal scenario, efforts would be made for communications from schools to be translated into the language spoken at home, at least during the early years of school attendance. An awareness of difference could encourage some teachers to take the time to explain the context of notes to those parents lacking the cultural capital to understand the relevant context, and not take it for granted that we all share the same cultural capital.

For the immigrant parent, a genuine welcome and parental involvement are possible. In light of the lack of political will to encourage inclusion and diversity, the responsibility falls on schools and school communities to further immigrant parental involvement, and thereby alleviate the associated educational disadvantage experienced by newcomer children. The final words of the IES are worth repeating here: “It is the efforts of the single school/institution which matter” (p68). In the schools which do exert this much-needed effort, it may become possible that immigrant parents will experience a “céad míle fáilte” and that the rhetoric of the Irish welcome will finally be more than a slogan or a platitude.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Research Diary

This is an account of field notes and comments I included in notes written shortly after the interviews were conducted and transcribed. In this document I have also included field notes and comments I made during the transcription, when my memory of the interviews was fresh. These field notes guided the direction of the data analysis. (Watt, D. 2007, On Becoming a Qualitative Researcher: The Value of Reflexivity)

Field notes / impressions formed during the interviews.

Pilot Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as pilot interviews. The main purpose of this pilot interview was to assess the suitability of the questions, to check if they would elicit answers relevant to the study. It served to check the format of the questions and to give an approximate length of time for the interviews. I ascertained that the questions were properly formatted and decided not to change them. This first interview, with an Irish mother, took twenty minutes, but I anticipated that further interviews might be more time consuming with mothers who might not have fluent English.

Pilot Interview 1. Irish mother

When I was reviewing the interview, I noted that this mother seemed very interested in the children's wellbeing and happiness. Her responses seemed to be very child centred, as the happiness of the children was mentioned more than once. As regards ambitions for the children's future, she expressed the wish that "they would make the best of themselves in life and use the opportunities they have".

Pilot interview 2: Polish mother. Later included in the study as Interview 1

In my field notes I marked this interview as confirming the barriers and challenges to immigrant parental involvement I had identified in the international literature (Turney & Kao,2009).

In response to a question “Will you begin by telling me a little about you and your family here in Ireland?” Kornelia took the opportunity to talk about the communication difficulties she experiences when she came to live in the West Limerick area. This was quickly followed by the observation that she found older Irish people friendlier than her own age group. I marked the later passage in the transcript where Kornelia mentioned that an older teacher in the primary school was nicer to the children than younger members of staff.

I noted my surprise at this information being offered so readily, writing... “she was in a hurry to say this...important to her.”

I also noted how she considers that her husband has great work because it is related to his education. She herself “has no luck”

Concern for the children is uppermost...she places a lot of confidence in the playschool supervisor. Worried when the children started school, because she felt their English would not be good enough, Kornelia did not appear to understand that it is normal for children to experience a period where they do not speak the language although they can comprehend.

There was an awareness that Kornelia and her family were from a different cultural background. She says “Because of a different culture. I didn’t know what I should...I didn’t know what was proper”

Childcare issues are apparent. The lack of a network of friends meant that Kornelia's grandfather came from Poland to look after the children one winter when they had a lot of childhood illnesses.

An asterisk (*) is on the margin next to the passage about lack of information surrounding enrolment. Similarly, about Kornelia not being told they could help with homework. A lack of the dominant cultural capital in the community showed on the occasions when Kornelia was not aware of the correct manner of joining in school celebrations and I marked as significant the passage where Kornelia says she feel she is "not good enough" as a parent.

These incidences provide evidence being shown of parental involvement not being facilitated. I was horrified when I re-read the section of the interview when Kornelia spoke of her hopes for her family. She hopes the children will not have to do what the community wants "I don't want to push my kids to be a doctor or a lawyer". I immediately compared this with the words of the Irish mother in the pilot interview that her children "would make the best of themselves in life and use the opportunities they have".

Early in the interview evidence was provided of suspicion and prejudice being shown to the family. Kornelia says she does not feel part of the community "not really". I identified as significant the report of a grandmother telling a little girl not to "play with strangers".

I was surprised so much was said in this interview. Barriers to parental involvement as described by Turney & Kao (2009) were described. At the time I thought that this interview confirmed all I had read on the challenges faced by immigrant parents as their children attended primary schools in Ireland.

Following a conversation with my supervisors it was decided that as this interview was rich in data that was relevant to the study the interview would be used as part of the study, not as a pilot.

Interview 2. Olga, a Polish mother

My first impressions of this interview, during the interview itself and again while I was transcribing was the eagerness shown by Olga to say how good life for her is in Ireland. In answer to the opening question “Tell me a little about you and your family here in Ireland?” Olga told about her husband and daughter, and then “We have pets, we have a dog, we have guinea pigs and fish, and I enjoy each day in Ireland, and I love this country and I love the people, they are very nice”. Again, when talking about the school she reported that “everybody knows each other and the teachers are great. We don’t have any problems with the school, and even if we have something, the problems are solved. And I’m really happy with the school here”.

Asked about attending events in the school Olga replied “It was really nice”...”I love each event in the school” ...

I noted in the margin...perhaps Olga is an enthusiastic person? Again I made the same note as Olga tells me that “I don’t worry about nothing. Everything is ok, everything is correct”.

Evidence of Inclusion was presented as Olga accompanied her daughter in the classroom for the first two weeks...I wrote the word “Welcome” into the margin. This is where Olga herself learnt her first English words. While Olga self-reports her lack of linguistic capital in the English language when her daughter started school and her use of a dictionary to translate notes from school, there are signs of inclusion when she tells that if she had a problem with English, e.g. not knowing how to pronounce words, the teacher helped her.

Interview 3. Margit, a Polish mother

I have few field notes on this interview. The two big issues emerging are Margit's lack of contact with Irish people, and a definite report of her perception that Polish children were not welcomed in the school her children attended previous to this one. Margit needed a translator during the interview, and reports using a dictionary to translate notes from school.

I have marked a passage where Margit says that she can ask the teacher everything. Of the previous school she said "We not have good memory".

Interview 4. Krisztina , a Polish mother

Krisztina acted as a translator for Margit, and both interviews were similar in some of their content. She reports that while she has contact with Polish parents, she meets Irish parents "only sometimes".

A comparison is made between this school and the one her daughter attended previously. She shares Margit's perception of Polish children in that school being treated differently to Irish children. She further reports that the class teacher did not make her feel welcome. Again, a comparison is made with a teacher who had left this first school and who was "very friendly". A further expression of this feeling of being unwelcome came when Krisztina said the school itself was not friendly "not for me. Not for my kids" and that other Polish parents had spoken in a similar manner about that school.

Interview 5. Magdolna, a Lithuanian mother

I have noted that she was smiling when she told me that they have bought a house, with a thirty-year mortgage. I wrote the word "Pride" in the margin.

Magdolna reports little contact with other parents in the morning. She talks to some but reports that “some don’t like foreign. They look like...oh my god, what are you doing here”. I wrote “Suspicion” next to these words.

There is a reported perception that the class teacher is too busy to speak to her in the mornings. Communication is by note, with no explanation. Magdolna spoke about a letter regarding a sports day. She did not understand what her daughter was to wear. Referring to cultural capital she said “Maybe Irish people know more, or have children, cousins, uncles, and they know what means from the note”

I have noted as “an interesting comment” where Magdolna reported that it helps her English when she gets a note from school. As she works with people of other nationalities she does not get the opportunity to speak correct English.

I have noted: “no knowledge of” homework or of how the little girl is getting on in school. Magdolna is dependent on the creche supervisor to let her know about the child’s progress.

Asked if she feels that she belongs in Ireland Magdolna again reports being unsure of people’s reaction to her. Although she speaks to people, she is unsure what they say to others about her. I noted the perceptions of not being welcomed.

Interview 6. Maria, an African mother

Maria is an African mother, from Cameroon, married with 3 children, aged 13, 10 and 7.

As I conducted the interview with Maria I became immediately aware that her experiences were different to those of those of the Eastern European mothers. My field notes illustrate the differences

Speaking about Limerick, Maria told me about the help they received from DORAS LUIMNI when they moved to Limerick. I have marked this in the transcription. Help was received in finding accommodation, and Maria was told about shops in the area. Food was different and she found it “very, very hard to adapt”. This comment I marked with a highlighter.

This was also the first occasion where I noted a decided reticence to give information about family background. Maria reported that she and her husband met in Germany where they were studying. They came to Ireland to further their studies, but as they did not have Irish as a subject they could not progress their studies. It was later in the interview that Maria mentioned that she came to Limerick as an asylum seeker. Maria was English speaking when she first came to live in Ireland but reports having difficulty understanding the Irish accent.

Again, early in the interview, when she spoke of her work as a chef, Maria showed an awareness of suspicion / discrimination and racism being displayed towards newcomers. A teacher in Cameroon Maria works as a chef because “it’s what you put on the table that matters, it’s not what you look like”. She discovered that in Ireland “my skin colour is a barrier to jobs.” This is significant when we consider the issue of welcome in the community. Maria spoke of having trouble with a neighbour when she moved into her present home. She does not know if this was because she was African.

Acceptance or Contradiction.

Maria says that her children are welcomed in school. But she later tells speaks of “things” that happen or are said to her children. She considers that the children have to accept these things: “when child comes and say “this child say I am THIS”, you tell child about being different”

Interview 7. Erzsebet, an African mother

The notes on this interview highlight another mother who did not volunteer that she came to Limerick as an asylum seeker but spoke of the hostel she lived in when she was in Dublin and being told about shops and places to go. Erszebet did not report any experience of discrimination or prejudice shown to her. I have noted a “very enthusiastic” remark that “I don’t know if it’s my personality but it’s easy for me to just meet people”

Interview 8. Edina, an African mother

My field note here show my awakened awareness of the different assistance given to African families. Doras Luimni is again mentioned as providing English language classes. Such assistance was not available to the Eastern European mothers. In my field notes I ask “why not?”

I have highlighted the section of the interview where Edina spoke about the help given by the school to parents, with the provision of cookery courses and computer classes. The school also provides an after-school service, where the children do activities such art, and sport. Edina’s children attend a homework club, at no cost to the family. If Edina has a problem concerning the children the school has a liaison person who appears to act as an intermediary.

Limited circle of friends

Although Edina reports that her children are happy and have friends, it is notable that that the friends are not Irish. She tells me that her third daughter has one Irish friend.

Reticence and reluctance to answer are obvious and highlighted in my transcript...Edina reports not knowing what work her husband did in Africa. She says that she met him in Ireland.

Interview 9. Eva, an African mother

The first comment I have written is “happy”, the impression given by Eva, who is married and living in Ireland for almost 12 years. She was the first African mother to volunteer the information that she left the Ivory coast because war broke out, to acknowledge her original status as an asylum seeker.

Coming to Limerick with no English, again help was available from DORAS LUIMNI. Eva uses the word “integration” to describe the assistance she received, with advice received as to where to shop, etc.

Limited circle of friends

She mentions the nationalities of the parents she meets daily. I noted “No Irish”.

I used the word “Inclusion” to note where she says that in the school “there all are equal. It does not matter where they come from”. Also wrote “Smiling”.

Stages of Data Analysis

1. Transcription of interviews. This was done manually. Stopping, rewinding and listening to the tape recorder / Dictaphone, I wrote each word as it was uttered by the participants. Gaps in the conversation were marked with dots Sentences and phrases were written as spoken, including grammatical mistakes and phrases used.
2. Following transcription of each interview I read over my field notes and wrote them in pencil onto the typed copy of the interviews. I also included any thoughts I had during the interview. This was done either the evening of the interview, or the following day. This was to ensure the notes and comments were written when I had clear recollection of the interview.
3. The field notes and comments written after the initial transcription of the interviews were re-written and shaped into my research diary.
4. Following much re-reading of the interviews and associated notes I organised the themes and identified the issues which were of more significance and relevance to the literature.
5. I further prioritised the following
 - Possession of the various types of capital (Bourdieu,2004)
 - Perceptions of welcome in schools and in the wider community / evidence provided of suspicion and prejudice experienced by participants

- Differences in assistance given to the African / Eastern European parents. Is this a result of a rural / urban divide or as a result of the African parents having political status as asylum seekers?
- The apparent lack of political will by government and elected officials to help newcomers as they navigate the Irish primary school system.

Reflexivity as I continued my Analysis of the Semi-structured Interviews

When I began my EdD studies the literature on immigrant parental involvement I sourced focused on barriers to this involvement. I embraced this literature, probably because it served to confirm what I had observed during my time as an EAL teacher, immigrant parents who were not mixing with other parents, not able to communicate with school and teachers because of their lack of fluency in English language. I felt secure in my assumption that immigrant parents were not involved in their children's education in the same way Irish parents in the school were, talking to teachers, helping with homework and discussing school related matters with other parents.

This then was the subjectivity I brought into my research. Initially I could only see processes of exclusion in Irish primary schools, probably because of my limited experience (teaching in a small rural school). I expected to find evidence of exclusion.

The first set of interviews I conducted were with Eastern European parents, whose experiences confirmed my earlier observations. This group of mothers were not enabled to become involved in their children's schooling. The second set of interviews was with African mothers whose experiences of parental involvement were vastly different.

Concentrating on Maria's (A) perceptions of prejudice I acknowledged but failed to engage with the very different experiences of parental involvement of the African mothers compared to the Eastern European mothers. Very definitely this subjectivity had the danger of shaping the study and its outcomes (Peshkin,1988). This realisation helped me to seek out my subjectivity when re-assessing the responses in my semi-structured interviews. Having identified my assumptions and presuppositions about the phenomenon of immigrant parental involvement (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003) my personal values and ideas, my positionality, had to be put aside.

Chapter 1 of this research outlines six critical incidents which impressed greatly on my thinking and which influenced my EdD research. These incidents mostly had personal significance, such as my efforts to communicate with parents daily and also at the annual parent teacher meetings (Shapira-Lischinsky,2001). I was particularly influenced by the words of a teacher who when asked if there were EAL pupils in the classroom replied "No, thank God. And I don't want any either". I credit this critical incident with directing my critical thinking skills towards my Ed D study and research (Griffin, 2003, in Shapira-Lischinsky,2001),

A daunting aspect of this research journey has been understanding and overcoming the methodological challenges inherent in a study such as this. Insight into these challenges was provided by a number of theorists, particularly Nind et al (2004). The first challenge was to define what I meant by inclusion. My readings of the literature and deliberations brought me to the understanding that to *enable* immigrant parental involvement schools need to *facilitate* this involvement by recognising the barriers to parental involvement experienced by this group of parents and to make efforts to ameliorate the effects of a lack of the linguistic, social and cultural capitals that are valued by the dominant cultural group in the school.

Having chosen the sample through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling I selected the semi-structured interview as the instrument, allowing for the voices of the immigrant mothers to be foregrounded. The data gathered included audio recordings of the interviews and also field notes. The interviews having an exploratory and reflexive agenda allowed my thoughts and opinions on immigrant parental involvement to develop.

It became clear to me that both inclusionary and exclusionary practices were to be found, albeit in different settings, urban and rural. It was necessary to set aside my subjectivity – all immigrant mothers in my study were not on the margins of school life. For some, parental involvement was being facilitated. My readings on reflection and reflexivity were very significant as I came to this understanding (Zembylas, (2014), Mauthner & Douet (2003), Watt (2007).

Appendix 2: Introductory letter for English parents

Dear Parent,

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me.

I am a primary school teacher, and for a year and a half I worked as an English as an Additional Language teacher. I became very interested in the changes that had come about in the lives of these children and of their parents, who were now living far from home.

I am studying in St. Patrick's College in Dublin, and my research concerns parents who have come to live in Ireland, and their experiences of being a parent with a child in primary school in Ireland. I want to talk to you about this.

The information gathered will be confidential, and you or your children will not be named in my writing. The school your children attend will not be named, and the school will not know you are talking to me.

It is necessary that I will audio-tape the interview, but again this will be confidential.

Thank you again for talking to me, and for telling me your story.

Appendix 3: Introduction to interviews for English parents

Introduction to interview

The purpose of this research is to give you an opportunity to tell your story, your experiences of being a parent with a child in primary school in Ireland. I am a primary school teacher, and for a year and a half I worked as an English as an Additional Language Teacher. This time was spent working with children who had come to live in a different country. With their parents these children were learning a new language and becoming part of a new school and a new educational system. This gave me an interest in the changes in their lives.

Thank you very much for telling me your story.

Appendix 4: Introductory letter for Polish parents

Drogi Rodzicu,

Dziękuję za wyrażenie zgody na rozmowę ze mną.

Jestem nauczycielką w szkole podstawowej i przez ostatnie półtora roku pracowałam na stanowisku Nauczyciela Języka Angielskiego jako Języka Dodatkowego. Bardzo zainteresowały mnie zmiany jakie zaszły w życiu dzieci i ich rodziców, którzy zdecydowali się na życie z dala od domu rodzinnego.

Studiuję w St. Patrick's College w Dublinie. Moje badania obejmują rodziców, którzy zdecydowali się na przyjazd do Irlandii oraz ich doświadczenie bycia rodzicem dziecka w szkole podstawowej w Irlandii. Chciałabym z Państwem o tym porozmawiać.

Zebrane informacje będą poufne i żadne nazwiska nie będą wymienione w mojej pracy. Nazwa szkoły, do której uczęszcza Państwa dziecko, nie będzie wymieniona oraz szkoła nie zostanie poinformowana o naszej rozmowie.

Ważnym elementem naszej rozmowy będzie nagranie jej na taśmie. Nagranie także będzie poufne i zostanie wykorzystane tylko przeze mnie do przygotowania pracy.

Dziękuję uprzejmie za rozmowę ze mną i za opowiedzenie swojej historii.

Appendix 5: Introduction to interviews for Polish parents

Wstęp do rozmowy

Celem tego badania jest okazja do przedstawienia Twojej historii, Twojego doświadczenia z bycia rodzicem dziecka w szkole podstawowej w Irlandii. Jestem nauczycielką w szkole podstawowej i przez ostatnie półtora roku pracowałam na stanowisku Nauczyciela Języka Angielskiego jako Języka Dodatkowego. Spędziłam ten czas pracując z dziećmi, które przyjechały żyć do innego kraju. Rodzice, razem ze swoimi dziećmi, uczyli się nowego języka i stawali się częścią nowej szkoły i nowego systemu edukacji. To spowodowało moje zainteresowanie zmianami, jakie zaszły w ich życiu.

Dziękuję bardzo za opowiedzenie mi swojej historii.

Appendix 6: Interview schedule

Introduction:

The purpose of this research is to give you an opportunity to tell your story, your experiences of being a parent with a child in primary school in Ireland. I am a primary school teacher, and for a year and a half I worked as an English as an Additional Language Teacher. This time was spent working with children who had come to live in a different country. With their parents these children were learning a new language and becoming part of a new school and a new educational system. This gave me an interest in the changes in their lives.

Thank you very much for telling me your story.

Discussion of your family and school

Will you begin by telling me a little about you and your family here in Ireland...Who lives with you?

Where did you live before you came to? Why did you decide to leaveand come to live here?... Are you currently working?....Can you tell me a little about that?Are any other of the family working?.....What work did you do before you came here?.....What work did your partner do?

I want to ask about when you came to Ireland first.

Did you know anybody living in the area when you came to Ireland?.....who did you know?.....was it easy / difficult to find a house?who helped you?.....

How did you hear about the shops, and about places to go?

How about work?How did you find work?..

.Did you find people friendly?

And what about now?have you made friends since you came to Ireland?

Do you go out in the evenings?.....during the day?..... Where do you go?.....who do you meet?

You have ...children. Where do they go to school?....Tell me about the school....is it a big school? Number of children / classes / teachers /

How do the children go to school?...Do you go with them?...Where do you say goodbye?....do you meet other parents in the morning?....Do ye talk?....what parents do you meet, if any?....What happens at coming home time?.....Do you ever meet other parents during the day?...What parents do you meet?

What about your children's teachers?.....Do you know the teacher?.....When do you meet him / her?... What is that like for you?.. do you meet the teachers often enough?Were you comfortable talking to the teacher when you came first?....Had you much English then?....How do you feel talking to the teacher now?.....Has anything changed in the time you have been here?...

How do you feel about the school your child is in?.....Is there anything you think about / worry about / that causes you anxiety every day?

Did your child go to playschool?...How was that for you? ...And when it was time to go to big school / primary school ?...How did you feel then?....Was it difficult to find a school?

Does your child's school have a uniform?....How did you hear about that?

Is there much homework?.....Are you able to help with the homework?.....Did anybody talk to you about homework?.....What did they say?...Where does X do the homework?...How do you feel about the homework?.....Does X like reading?....Where do you get books?

We have spoken about going to school every day. Now I want to talk about times you go into the school.

How do you hear about how X is doing at school?.... When do you hear?.....Do you ever ask to see the teacher for a chat?.....Is the teacher friendly?.....Do you ever meet the other teachers in the school?

Are you free to / able to visit the school if you need to?.... ..Do you want to / need to call there often?..... Is the school open to parents?.....Do they like parents calling in?.....Are you comfortable going to the school ?.....

Have you been to a parent / teacher meeting?.....Is it ok for you to go to meetings.....How do you go?.....who looks after X for you?....What are parent / teacher meetings like for you?...How do you feel?....

Do you go to school for concerts / school plays? To see art work?.....How do you feel going to school for these things?..

How do you hear about these things and about parent / teacher meetings?.... Do you get a note / letter from the school?....Is it good for you to get a note / letter?

Does the school have a Parents Council / Association?....Have you heard about that?.....Have you been to a meeting?.....Why / Why not?....How did you hear about these meetings?.....Is that good for you?...What happens at the meetings?.....do you feel comfortable there?

Does the school have a Board of Management?....Did you ever go to a meeting about the Board of Management?....Do you know what happens at these meetings?

I am almost finished, but I am wondering

Is this school different from when you went to school yourself, or from another school you know? (or from when your partner went to school?....)

What would you like / hope for your child when s/he is older and finished school?Are you happy that the school will help with this?

We spoke about notes from school, about talking to the teacher,are you happy with the contact you have with the school?.....Is there any way communication or contact with the school could be better for you and for your family?.....

Is there anything else that you are thinking about in relation to your child's school that you would like to talk about now?.....

Thank you for talking to me about your child and your child's school.