Parental Capital and Strategies for School Choice Making: Polish Parents in England and Scotland

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Based on a study of Polish migrants living in England and Scotland, this paper explores how Polish families who have decided to bring up their children in the UK make initial school choices. The Polish parents taking part in our study generally had low levels of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) upon arrival in the UK: they had limited networks (predominantly bonding capital) (Putnam 2000) and a poor command of English, and lacked basic knowledge of the British education system. Meanwhile, this is a highly complex system, very much different from the Polish one; moreover, school choice plays a much more important role within the UK system, especially at the level of secondary education. We found that while some parents acted as 'disconnected choosers' (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995) following the strategy they would use in Poland and simply enrolling their children in the nearest available school, others attempted to make an informed choice. In looking for schools, parents first and foremost turned to co-ethnic networks for advice and support; nevertheless, parents who attempted to make an informed choice typically lacked 'insider knowledge' and often held misconceptions about the British education system. The one feature of the system Polish parents were very much aware of, however, was the existence of Catholic schools; therefore, religious beliefs played a key role in school choice among Polish parents (with some seeking and others avoiding Catholic schools). The 'active choosers' also made choices based on first impressions and personal beliefs about what was best for their child (e.g. in terms of ethnic composition of the school) or allowed their children to make the choice. Parents of disabled children were most restricted in exercising school choice, as only certain schools cater for complex needs. All in all, the Polish parents in our sample faced similar barriers to BME (Black Minority Ethnic) parents in exercising school choice in the UK and, regardless of their own levels of education, their school selection strategies resembled those of the British working class rather than of the middle class. However, the risk of 'bad' initial school choice may be largely offset by a generally strong preference for Catholic schools and parents’ high educational ambitions for their children.

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Introduction: post-accession Polish migration to the UK and issues of schooling

The EU enlargement of 2004 was a highly consequential one for the United Kingdom. The opening of its labour market to nationals of Accession Eight (A8) countries resulted in one of the largest and most intensive migration flows in contemporary European history. Although the new migrants forming this flow came from various Eastern European countries, the overwhelming majority arrived from Poland. The Polish community appears to be the fastest-growing migrant community in present-day Britain: by the end of 2007, Poles became the single largest foreign national group resident in the UK, up from 13th position in early 2004 (Pollard, Lattore and Sriskandarajah 2008: 5). Currently, it is estimated that there are 726 000 Polish nationals living in the UK (ONS 2014), compared to the 75 000 living in the country just a few months before EU accession, in December 2003 (ONS 2011) – an almost tenfold increase within the decade following EU accession. Therefore, migration from Poland (and the other new member states) has been described as 'one of the most important social and economic phenomena shaping the UK today, since this movement of people has dramatically changed the scale, composition and characteristics of immigration to the UK' (Pollard *et al.* 2008: 7).

While initially it seemed that the majority of Poles coming to the UK were single men (Home Office 2009), trends towards family settlement/formation soon became evident (cf. White, Ryan 2008; Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara 2009; Tromans, Natamba and Jefferies 2009; Ryan 2011; Ryan and Sales 2013; White 2011; McGhee, Heath and Trevena 2012, 2013). The rapid and substantial increase in the number of Poles living in the UK naturally also impacted on the schooling system, with growing numbers of Polish children entering schools across Britain. Already in 2008, the Department of Children, Schools and Families reported Polish as the most commonly spoken first language among non-English-speaking newly arrived migrant school children across England (DCSF 2008, after Pollard *et al.* 2008: 27). Since this time, their numbers have grown substantially: from 26 840 in 2008 to 53 915 in 2013 (in England alone). The majority of Poles who have been arriving in the UK are young (Home Office 2009), and a year-on-year increase in the numbers of Polish-born children in the UK over the last decade has been noted (ONS 2013). Furthermore, after a clear slowdown in flows of migration from Poland to the UK in the years 2008–2010 (following the economic crisis), since 2011 numbers of incomers have again started to increase (cf. Kaczmarczyk 2014) and we have witnessed continued family migration.[1] Considering this, we can expect continually high numbers of children of Polish origin entering the British education system.

Moreover, one of the major characteristics in which the 'new' Polish (and A8) migration to the UK differs from previous migration waves is its widespread geographical distribution: Polish nationals have been registered in every single local authority across the UK (Rabindrakumar 2008). This means that Polish migrants are living both in large urban areas and in remote/rural locations with no previous history of international migration (Trevena 2009).

Naturally, the sudden rise in numbers of Polish children entering the British education system has for many reasons posed a number of challenges to the schools as well as the migrant children and their parents. We shall just note the most important of these reasons. Moskal (2010) points to the fact that there has been increased pressure on schools for places and for English language support services, particularly in areas which have relatively little experience of receiving pupils of other nationalities. Furthermore, there is limited information available to teachers in the UK on the educational background and prior achievement of the Polish pupils. This, along with these new pupils' poor English language skills, sometimes results in inappropriate assessment of their abilities and misjudgement of the correct stage and pace of learning for them (Sales, Ryan, Lopez Rodriguez and D'Angelo 2008). Polish children coming to the UK generally have little preparation for education in English, and hence face significant emotional and practical difficulties upon starting school. Their parents, in turn, tend to have equally poor language skills and little knowledge or understanding of the British

schooling system. Moreover, the housing situation of new arrivals tends to be unstable and prone to change, as do their overall migration plans, which naturally has a bearing on schooling issues (Sales *et al.* 2008). At the same time, however, it has been observed that Polish parents, even those of working-class background, typically have high aspirations for their children's education (Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Trevena 2014).

Secondly, as parents migrate with or bring children over to the UK at various points in time, many Polish children start education in the UK during the school year. This poses a challenge to schools both in terms of being able to offer school places locally and in planning for additional support (Sales *et al.* 2008). Moreover, these children bring specific issues related to the migration strategies of their parents, whose migration plans, employment and housing situation are initially frequently in a state of flux and therefore prone to change (Robinson, Reeve and Casey 2007). As a result, migrant children are more likely to change schools after arrival. As noted by Jivraj, Simpson and Marquis (2012: 499), who analysed School Census data for England for the years 2003–2007, A8 migrant families (the majority of which are Polish) initially show very high levels of internal/residential mobility, with 34 per cent of A8 pupil migrants moving home address in an average year, compared with 11 per cent of pupils as a whole.

Finally, as noted earlier, Polish migrants are widely dispersed across the UK; hence Polish children are entering both multicultural, diverse schools in large urban areas and also rural schools, where they sometimes become the first/only foreign child in the school (Trevena 2012). Therefore, schools of a longer-standing tradition of dealing with non-native speaker pupils are better prepared and equipped to support such children than those with no previous experience of working with non-English speakers. Especially within rural areas, resources may be limited (Moskal 2010).

Considering the above, a question that arises is how Polish parents who have limited social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) 'manoeuvre' the British education system in the initial stages of their engagement with it. Specifically, we shall look at the issue of school choice. Our discussion is based on a qualitative study carried out by the Centre for Population Change, University of Southampton, in the years 2009–2012.[2]

Differences between the Polish and British education systems and parents' school choice practices

The Polish and British[3] education systems differ considerably in terms of school structure and organisation of learning, but also regarding the philosophy of teaching and expectations towards pupils. Meanwhile, the expectations and attitudes of Polish parents towards school have been largely shaped by their experience with the – very different – Polish education system (Ryan and Sales 2011; Trevena 2014). Therefore, Polish parents are frequently very surprised (or even shocked) by the disparities between the two systems. In this section we shall explain some of these differences and consider what impact they might have on Polish parents' school choice/enrolment practices.[4]

The structure of the schooling system in Poland and in the UK is different (Sales *et al.* 2008: 10–11; Trevena 2014). Significantly, children in Britain start primary school at an earlier age than in Poland. In the UK, primary schooling is obligatory from the age of 5, with many parents sending their children to school between the age of 4 and 5; at the time of EU accession, children in Poland would start school at 7.[5] This was a difference many parents arriving in the years following accession were not aware of; in some cases this resulted in interventions on the part of the social services, as Polish parents were not sending their 5- or 6-year-olds to school (cf. Sales, Lopez Rodriguez, D'Angelo and Ryan 2010). Moreover, as our interview data shows, in the case of older children who were admitted to school, some parents tended to believe that their children had been *put up by two years* because they were clever, not understanding that they had simply been placed accordingly to their age.[6]

The ages covered by primary and secondary education also differ in the UK and Poland. In Britain, primary education covers ages 5 to 11;[7] in Poland, it currently covers ages 6/7 to 12/13. Secondary education in Britain

covers ages 11–16; in Poland currently spans ages 13/14–15/16. Nevertheless, in both countries, compulsory (full time) education finishes at the age of 16.[8] Furthermore, in both the UK and Poland young people take examinations towards the end of (lower) secondary school, the results of which are important for their future education. Significantly, Polish children entering British schools at the age of 14–16 are in the most vulnerable position in terms of educational achievement and future opportunities, especially if their level of English is low. At this stage, their peers are already preparing for their final examinations, and it may be difficult (if not impossible) for the newcomer children to catch up with them; at the same time, schools are not obliged to educate young people beyond the age of 16. Therefore, migration may prove most damaging for the educational and work trajectories of these young people.

The school term and breaks are also organised differently in the two countries: in the UK there are three terms, and in Poland two; in Britain breaks are more frequent than in Poland, but the summer holidays are considerably (2–3 weeks) shorter. Furthermore, the organisation of the school year in England and in Scotland differ in terms of start dates and the schedule of mid-term and other school breaks. The biggest difference is that in England the school year runs from early September to late July, while in Scotland it runs from mid-August to late June. In Poland, in turn, the school year begins on 1 September and ends at the end of June. Therefore, parents arriving in Scotland might not realise that children begin the school year prior to September.

One of the crucial differences between the Polish and British education systems is the range of schools available. The Polish education system is much more centralised in comparison to the UK one. What is more, in this respect there are also stark differences between the English and Scottish education systems, as they are ruled by a separate set of policies (introduced by the British government for England and by the Scottish government for Scotland), with the Scottish system being more comprehensive and much simpler in comparison. In our discussion of these differences that follows below, we shall focus on the state system (i.e. free education) exclusively, as this was the system accessed by all of our study participants both in Poland and in the UK. Moreover, it is the dominant system in both countries.

Within the Polish system at primary and lower secondary level (*gimnazjum*), we can differentiate state and non-state schools (among the latter: fee-paying community schools, faith schools and private schools) (FRSE 2014). Since the introduction of the revised Education System Act in 1991, school choice within the Polish system has continually been growing. Nevertheless, since schooling in Poland is (in comparison) still rather centralised, the differences between individual schools are not as marked as in the British system; this relates particularly to primary and to a lesser degree to lower secondary education. In consequence, in the Polish system there is far less emphasis on school choice, in particular at primary level, with parents commonly enrolling their children in their local (catchment area) school. There is more focus on choice at the stage of *gimnazjum*: some of these can be linked to higher secondary schools or universities, or have more specialist profiles, and admission to them can be highly competitive (based on test results).

In terms of organisation, the UK compulsory schooling system is far less centralised than the Polish system and hence much more complex, the English system in particular. In England, organisational and administrative differences between schools come into play already at local authority (henceforth LA) level. For example, in some LAs across England, there are only 7-year primary schools, while in others there are two-stage primary schools, where younger children attend a 3-year infant school (5–7 year-olds) and older children attend a 4-year junior school (8–11 year-olds). In Scotland, in comparison, there are only one-stage 7-year primary schools.

Moreover, in England there is a much broader range of types of primary schools (than in both Poland and Scotland), depending on how they are funded and run (e.g. by LAs, charities, churches). Within the state-funded system at primary level we can currently differentiate seven types of schools accordingly: community schools, academies, foundation schools, voluntary aided schools, voluntary controlled schools, and free schools;[9] the most important

difference between these is that some follow the national curriculum and others do not. Next, among these schools we can further differentiate between faith schools (e.g. Church of England or Catholic) and non-denominational schools, and admission policies for these may differ. The (lower) secondary system is also a highly complex one, within which, again, a number of different types of schools can be singled out. Similarly to with primary level, there are faith schools and non-denominational schools. Significantly, although the majority of non-denominational secondary schools are comprehensive by name, most of them specialise in a particular area of the curriculum (there are at least ten types of specialist schools, including languages, science, maths, arts, sports, humanities and even rural studies). Within the secondary system there are also, for example, secondary modern schools, academies, and a small number of highly selective grammar schools, admission to which is based on an 'eleven plus' exam.

Compared to England, the Scottish system is much more straightforward. In Scotland there is little choice between types of school, apart from state and fee-paying private schools. State schools are simply divided into non-denominational and (predominantly) Catholic faith schools,[10] and all of these are fully comprehensive and non-selective in intake.

In terms of religious education in schools, one crucial difference between the Polish and British state school systems is that within the Polish system, religious instruction (according to the faith chosen by the parents/children) commonly takes place in (non-denominational) schools. Although it is not an obligatory part of the curriculum and religious instruction in state schools is run *at the will of the parents*, in practice, since just over 90 per cent of the nation are Roman Catholics,[11] the overwhelming majority of schoolchildren in Poland attend religious instruction in the Roman Catholic faith (and the minority attend ethics classes or religious instruction according to a different faith or none of these).[12] What is more, if the child does attend either religious instruction or ethics classes, the grade received for these count towards the general 'grade points average' score.[13] Also, certain religious practices are frequently an integral part of school life (e.g. attending mass in the local church to celebrate the beginning and/or end of the school year, or e.g. blessing of a new extension to the school). Therefore, we may say that in practice religious instruction (in the Roman Catholic faith in particular) is part and parcel of the Polish state system. Consequently, the religious beliefs of Polish parents (and the fact that the Roman Catholic faith is strongly supported within the Polish education system) may play a significant role in their school choices in the UK. It is thus notable that in the UK, Catholic schools (and faith schools overall) have a stronger academic standing than non-denominational schools.[14]

Significantly, school admissions to most state schools in the UK are based on catchment area, with these being stricter in Scotland than in England; in both Scotland and England, parents can make a request for admission to a school which is outside their catchment area (which may or may not be granted). Similarly, in Poland there are also catchment areas, but parents can put in applications to schools outside their catchment, and these may or may not be granted depending on availability of places in the preferred school. Nevertheless, a major difference between Poland and Britain in this respect is that the catchment area policy in the UK has entailed particular 'school targeting' practices, particularly among middle-class parents, with some families moving into particular areas specifically because of the (high) quality of local schools (Reay 2001). Notably, this is a strategy which is basically not practised in Poland, and hence Polish parents are generally not familiar with it.

As mentioned earlier, school choice is not as significant in the Polish education system as in the British (and particularly English) system, especially at primary school level. Therefore, literatures on school choice in Poland are scarce. However, research on secondary school choice demonstrates that the importance of choice increases with parental education and size of place of residence (Majkut 2010). Therefore, 'skilled choosers' (as understood by Gewirtz *et al.* 1995) in Poland are primarily parents with high levels of education who live

in large urban agglomerations. While parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds choose schools according to proximity to home, perceived safety in the school and the free afterschool care opportunities offered by the school, the 'skilled choosers' focus on the school's academic performance (e.g. exam results), the education it offers (e.g. particular profile, specialist subjects) and the opinions of friends/acquaintances about it. Although class divisions within Polish society are not as strong as in British society, school choice preferences and strategies demonstrated by well-educated Polish parents as compared to those with less education resonate closely with UK literatures on the relationship between exercising school choice and class. Research has shown that while both the British middle class and working class think choosing a good school for their children is of high importance, their understanding of what constitutes a 'good school' is disparate. Whereas middle-class parents see a good school above all as one which maximises their child's future academic achievement, their working-class counterparts tend to focus on less academic aspects of schooling, such as friendliness of staff, inclusion and support for the less academically able (Allen, Burgess and McKenna 2014: 19). Moreover, proximity to the school is more important to lower-income households than to higher-income ones (NFER 2015). Such preferences may thus lead lower socio-economic groups to select themselves out of high-performing schools (Allen *et al.* 2014: 28), due both to the 'similar social environment' preference as well as to choosing schools nearer home, regardless of their academic ranking. Another major difference between the two classes is the degree of access to high-quality information on schools. It has been underlined that middle-class parents are more adept in the use of school league tables and other formal sources of information on school performance (West, Pennell and Noden 1999; Coldron, Tanner, Finch, Shipton, Wolstenholme, Willis, Demack and Stiell 2008), but also have stronger social networks of 'high-quality' information (Schneider, Teske and Marschall 2000) than working-class parents. Finally, class differences are also reflected in the role ascribed to children in the school choice process: in the case of the middle class, the child's input into the process is limited, as opposed to families of lower social class, within which the child's wishes are often decisive (Coldron and Boulton 1991; Ball 1993). Furthermore, regarding ethnic minorities in the UK, research on school choice in England shows that many BME (Black Minority Ethnic) parents find it difficult to exercise actual choice. BME parents are limited in the choices they make by such factors as structural barriers to accessing necessary information, institutional constraints on the kinds and quality of schools available to families living in deprived areas, the demand for ethnic, gender or religion-specific provision, and less tangible considerations around location, safety and reputation (Weekes-Bernard 2007: II). Thus, literatures on school choice in the UK generally conclude that the system is very much geared towards the (White British) middle class, as 'the system itself is one which valorises middle- rather than working-class cultural capital' (Reay 2001: 334).

Considering the complexity of the British education system, choosing a school can be a huge challenge for Polish (as well as other migrant and even British!) parents, especially in England, where the system is much more complex than in Scotland. As Stephen Ball (2003: 173) has underlined, the school choice mechanism in England requires time, effort, expense and skill. Significantly, school choice, particularly at secondary level, may be highly consequential for future educational opportunities (e.g. choice of a given type of school may limit possibilities for future study). Nevertheless, Polish parents might not be aware of the extent to which it may impact on their children's educational opportunities in the future.

All in all, as demonstrated in the short comparison outlined above, the Polish and British schooling systems differ considerably. Meanwhile, Polish parents coming to the UK are generally unaware of these differences and have little understanding of them (cf. Sales *et al.* 2008; White 2011: 116; Trevena 2014). In consequence, they often bring expectations of schooling based on their experience of the Polish system (D'Angelo and Ryan 2011). In this article we shall explore the role of these expectations, as well as of social and cultural capital in school choice and enrolment practices of Polish parents with no previous experience of the British education system.

Polish parents' capital and schooling

While there is by now a vast (and rapidly growing) body of literature devoted to the post-accession wave of Polish migrants in the UK, literature relating specifically to issues of schooling is still scarce. It has so far focused primarily on the experiences of Polish children in British schools, touching on issues of adaptation, integration, and school achievement (Sales *et al.* 2008; Fox, Sime and Pietka 2009; Moskal 2010, 2013; Egley 2011; White 2011: 160–163). More recently, attention has also been drawn to the role of schooling in migration decision making of Polish families (Ryan and Sales 2011; Trevena 2014). Furthermore, there is a small body of literature concerned with Polish migrants' social and cultural capital and how it might impact on their children's educational pathways in the UK (Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Moskal 2013).

In discussing capital in the context of migration and education, two concepts are of particular analytical use: Bourdieu's notion of social, cultural and economic capital (1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), and Putnam's notion of bridging and bonding capital (2000).

Bourdieu defines social capital as 'the sum of resources, actual and virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119). Moreover, he distinguishes cultural capital (knowledge, skills, competencies) and economic capital (money, assets).[15] According to Bourdieu, the key characteristic of social capital is its convertibility into other forms of capital; people gain access to social capital through membership in networks and social institutions and then convert it into other forms of capital to improve or maintain their position in society (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988). Significantly, in the process of international migration much of an individual's social capital is 'lost', as typically they leave (most) of their personal networks behind. Naturally, new social capital can be acquired in the country of migration; however, this process takes time. Moreover, for post-accession Polish migrants, many of whom do not have a good command of English and commonly work in low-skilled jobs in the UK (regardless of their level of education) (Drinkwater, Eade and Garapich 2006: 18; Pollard *et al.* 2008), building social networks they could truly 'capitalise on' and/or comparable to those they had in their home country can be difficult (Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara 2008). Furthermore, in the context of migration, their cultural capital may not be (fully) transferable: the most obvious barrier is language (one's command of English), while others can be lack of recognition of formal qualifications or non-transferability of particular skills (cf. Trevena 2013). Notably, cultural capital also encompasses what Fischer, Martin and Straubhaar (1997) refer to as 'insider knowledge': an understanding of how the social system and its institutions operate (be it the labour market, the healthcare system or the education system).

Putnam (2000), in turn, draws attention to how social capital can be formed, and distinguishes between 'bonding' and 'bridging' capital. Bonding capital exists between people who share (a number of) common characteristics, such as class, ethnicity or economic position. Bridging capital, in turn, is formed between people who connect despite a lack of such common characteristics. Therefore, in our analysis, we will be referring to bonding capital as that existing between Polish migrants by virtue of shared nationality, language and other characteristics, such as their position in the UK labour market; bridging capital would encompass social networks established for instance with British people (Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara 2008). Significantly, it has been recognised that having bonding capital exclusively can have detrimental effects on the migrants' position in the receiving society, as it may limit their access to certain employment opportunities (cf. Trevena 2013; McGhee, Trevena and Heath 2015) and, for instance, 'insider knowledge' of the education system (Lopez Rodriguez 2010).

Generally, as our own and others' research has shown, for Polish parents living in the UK, their children's schooling is a matter of great importance and expectations of academic achievement are generally high (Lopez

Rodriguez 2010; Moskal 2013; Trevena 2014) – as are the educational aspirations of Polish parents in general (Kozłowski and Matczak 2014). At the same time, however, they have limited social and cultural capital upon moving to the UK, especially as certain forms of capital cannot be easily transferred (Moskal 2013: 283). Meanwhile, as explained in the previous section, the education systems of Poland and the UK and the way they operate differ considerably, and this also impacts on how Polish parents understand and exercise school choice.

So far, the literatures dealing with Polish migrants' social and cultural capital in the context of schooling have focused on how this capital may be applied by parents and young people to support their educational success in the UK (Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Moskal 2013). These literatures have stressed the role of acquisition of new capital over time (Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Moskal 2013). For example, Lopez Rodriguez (2010) argues on the basis of her research on Polish mothers living in or around London that in the case of Polish migrants, even working-class parents display an almost 'middle-class involvement' (when evaluated in relation to UK findings relating to parental involvement) in their children's education, which may enable them to surpass their (at least initial) lack of social and cultural capital. In this paper, however, we focus on how these capitals play out at the initial point of engagement with the British system, namely school choice/enrolment.

The research participants

The analysis presented in this paper is based on the ESRC-funded 'Polish migrants' project carried out by the Centre for Population Change, University of Southampton (2009–2012). The project covered a wide range of topics, one of which was children's schooling. The research involved 83 in-depth interviews with Polish migrants living in four different locations in England and Scotland, both urban and rural: Southampton and Dorset in Southern England, and Glasgow and Perth and Kinross/Angus in Scotland.

The material presented in this paper is based exclusively on interviews with parents whose children attended schools in the UK: 25 people altogether – 12 men and 13 women. They had arrived in the UK between 2004 and 2008. Two-thirds lived in a city or large town in the UK (N = 16), one-third in a small town or village/farm (N = 9); 16 in England and 9 in Scotland. At the time of the interview, the majority of the parents were in full- or part-time employment (N = 19) and the overwhelming majority were or previously had been carrying out unskilled work in the UK (21 out of 25) regardless of their level of education. In terms of the parents' educational background, 8 had basic vocational education, 13 (higher) secondary education (either general or vocational), 1 post-secondary education, and 3 master's degrees. The overwhelming majority (19 out of 25 persons) declared their level of earnings as low, i.e. at the level of the minimum wage. Significantly, at the point of arriving in the UK the overwhelming majority of the parents had no or little English, and at the time of the interview they generally declared a low rather than high command of English: 8 parents had elementary speaking ability, 15 communicative (but not good), and only 2 considered themselves to be fluent in English. With regard to migration channels, the majority of these parents had arrived in the UK either to join their partners (N = 7) or through networks of family and/or friends (N = 10); therefore, they already knew some other Poles living locally upon arrival (though the size of these networks varied; in some cases it was only their partner). Others had arrived through an agency (N = 7) or independently (e.g. found work on the internet; N = 1); these persons had no ties at all in the locations they had migrated to.

All in all, with regard to 'cultural capital', considering the parents' speaking ability in English, level of education, and nature of work carried out in the UK, this was overall lower rather than higher in our 'sample'. Levels of economic capital were also low. In terms of social capital, the majority (N = 17) had some 'bonding capital' as they had at least one contact, if not a network of family and/or friends on arrival, while some parents

(N = 8) had no ties with anyone in the UK at all, and therefore would need to build their social capital from scratch.

Exercising school choice in the UK

Generally speaking, the Polish parents we spoke to had little knowledge of the British education system when arriving in the UK, and would only acquire some understanding of how it operates with time and experience (Trevena 2014). Therefore, parents enrolling children in schools shortly after arrival faced the biggest challenge in making their choice of school, especially if their level of English was poor and they had no networks or contacts locally, i.e. very limited cultural and social capital. As mentioned earlier, the Polish education system is far less varied in terms of the range of schools available; especially at primary school level there is far less emphasis on 'choice' within the Polish system, with children typically attending their local (catchment) school. Therefore, following this practice (cf. D'Angelo and Ryan 2011), many Polish parents arriving in the UK simply tried to enrol their child in the school nearest home, without seeking information about the British education system, possible differences between (different types of) schools or the school itself; hence, essentially, they did not exercise informed school choice. Others, however, attempted to make an informed decision based on what they thought was best for their children, with different features of schools appealing to different people. We shall focus here on how parents who had no prior experience of the British education system chose schools for their children.

The Polish parents we spoke to looked for information on schools through personal networks; by approaching schools directly for information and advice; through consulting various institutions, organisations and designated advice services; and on the Internet.

Parents who had some 'bonding capital' upon arrival, i.e. ties with other Poles already living in the area (either people known to them before migrating or met after moving to the UK), and at the same time who did not speak much English, first and foremost asked these local contacts for advice and/or support. They sought information on where schools are through these social networks, and in many cases also practical support with enrolling their children in school, especially if they had little or no command of English. Thus, typically, other family members or friends/acquaintances accompanied our study participants to the schools, spoke on their behalf and helped with filling in paperwork:

> [A] friend who has been here for a few years [helped me enrol my son in school]. Her son is a year younger than mine, but she already knew all about the schools, and helped me with getting the forms and completing them (Dorota, Southampton).

In other cases, however, parents with limited English who could not count on personal networks for practical support tried to manage by themselves or with the help of their children:

> [M]y two daughters came together, and then I asked a friend to help me arrange for school for them. But she said she didn't have time today and she didn't have time tomorrow and the day after tomorrow perhaps she would have some time. So I said to my oldest [14-year-old] daughter 'Listen, you have some English, I have some, we'll put our knowledge together and manage somehow'. And that's what we did. She didn't know that much English, but we went to a few schools together and managed to arrange for a place for both her and her younger, seven-year-old at the time, sister. (…) So that's how things were with the schools, and we managed to arrange everything without my friend's help (Krystyna, Southampton).

Those parents who could speak English, in turn, would typically approach the nearest school directly and deal with enrolment independently.

Going to the nearest school in person and asking for information/advice directly (independently or with the help of other Poles who had more English) was hence the most popular strategy of school enrolment among the Polish parents we spoke to. Depending on the availability of places and/or the impression made by a given school, they would choose a school and enrol their children on the spot or continue their search. For example, Krystyna received a list of local schools from her nearest school (which did not have any free places) and she and her daughters carried out the search for a school place accordingly:

We found the school nearest our house and we went there to ask where we could go. We got addresses of other schools from them and a map with the locations. The first school we approached from this list (...) was a Catholic school (Krystyna, Southampton).

Other parents, especially those who had both very limited (spoken) English and limited personal networks, would turn to other sources for information and advice. For example, Bartek had turned to a professional advice centre:

There's an education centre in the city centre, I don't remember the name of the organisation. And there they found the school nearest to us (Bartek, Southampton).

Notably, however, Bartek was the only parent out of the 25 in our sample who used such a strategy; other parents seemed totally unaware of the existence of generally available (free) advice services at the point of choosing and enrolling their children in school:

So you didn't seek help with this [school enrolment] from some organisation or institution?

No, I didn't even know you could. Now I know that there are various organisations where you can seek help, and practically speaking you can go to a governmental organisation with every problem you encounter. But at the time I didn't know that and wasn't even interested, because she [a friend] had offered help straight away and she took me round all the schools (Dorota, Southampton).

In contrast, some of the parents who did not have such networks tried to seek information through other sources, such as commonly known Polish institutions or the Internet:

Well, first we were looking for contacts through the Polish church (Ernest, Dorset).

And with schools, someone had told me or I had heard somewhere that I should search for them by postcode. And everyone knows what school is in English. So that's how I managed. Quite well, actually.

So you found the school through the internet?

Yes (Jowita, Glasgow).

Jowita – cited above – had come to the UK with her young son to join her husband. At the point of arrival she had little English and no one she could ask for help with enrolling her son in school. Hence, though she had

found information on the schools in the area independently, she had to look for support in order to contact them. She eventually turned to a private agency providing various services for Polish migrants:

> *When I was looking for schools I'd also approached one of these Polish agencies which help in dealing with different issues…*

> **For money?**

> *Yes, of course. But as one of those companies was looking for a school for three weeks and they weren't helping me at all I got annoyed with them and thanked them and found another company. This one dealt with the issue totally differently. (…) So in this second company the lady made this phone call straight away* (Jowita, Glasgow).

As can be seen from the above quotation, even using a private paid service for help might not have been the best strategy in terms of practising informed school choice or efficient school enrolment. In general, parents who had bonding capital locally could tap into that resource and were best placed to enrol their child in school. Nevertheless, they might not have been equally well placed to exercise informed school choice.

We mentioned earlier that some Polish parents enrolled their children in the nearest (in these cases typically non-denominational) school. Significantly, Polish families in the UK are often based in the more deprived neighbourhoods (due to the availability of affordable rental accommodation or social housing there) (McGhee *et al.* 2013; Trevena, McGhee and Heath 2013), where schools often struggle with maintaining academic standards because of the greater proportions of disadvantaged pupils resulting in extra teaching and behavioural challenges (Lupton 2004). Meanwhile, pupil peer effects in particular are known to impact on pupil performance (Robertson and Symons 2003; Dills 2005; Ammermueller and Pischke 2009). Hence, simply enrolling one's child with the local school may have considerable impact on their educational (and later occupational) pathways in the long run. Polish parents are typically unaware of these implications; very rarely did those parents who enrolled their children in the nearest school make an informed choice. This was the case with a number of families we spoke to.

Notably, in terms of making educational choices in the UK, the Polish families tended to depend predominantly on the mother's initiative (cf. Lopez Rodriguez 2010). In the overwhelming majority of cases (and there were similar numbers of men and women in our sample), it was the mother who dealt with finding a school for the child and enrolment (except for one case of a father who was a single parent). Considering this, we could argue that the mother's social and cultural capital is of greater importance for children's educational trajectory than that of the father. Some of the fathers participating in our study were completely unaware even of the process involved in enrolling their child in school:

> **And how did you manage with enrolling her [daughter] in school?**

> *My wife took care of that, normally, as people do, she went to school and enrolled her, I think* (Dariusz, Southampton).

Generally, practising school choice was a difficult task for the Polish parents, most of whom, as mentioned earlier, had very limited knowledge of the British education system at the point when they enrolled their children in school. In these terms their position was similar to that of BME parents (Weekes-Bernard 2007). Nevertheless, some of the parents would endeavour to make an informed choice. In doing so, they looked at the

(religious and/or academic) profile of the school, available support networks, the ethnic composition of the school, the look of the school and how it was equipped, the geographical proximity of the school, and their children's preferences.

Significantly, the one feature of the British education system most Polish parents were very much aware of was the existence of Catholic schools. Notably, our interviewees were not quite certain about what other types of schools were available. Interestingly, in this respect the differences between Scotland and England in terms of the range of schools were apparent from the narratives of our interviewees. However, parents would make a number of false assumptions, mainly based on information they had heard from compatriots. For example, some of the parents living in Scotland would mistakenly assume that all of the non-Catholic schools were other denominational schools, either 'Protestant' or 'Evangelic', rather than non-denominational (as they in fact are):[16]

[H]ere, in Scotland, it's not like in England. Here you have only two types of schools: Catholic and Protestant. (…) The schooling system here generally differs a lot from the English system (Czesław, Glasgow).

Other parents would make false assumptions about the ratio of Catholic to non-Catholic schools in the UK:

[T]he majority of schools here are Catholic schools.

You mean here, in [the 'Polish' district of Southampton]?

No, I mean here in England, at least from what I've gathered (Krystyna, Southampton).

In reality, however, only 10 per cent of the national total of state-funded schools in England are Catholic.[17] Notwithstanding this fact, the awareness of the existence of Catholic schools was a crucial factor impacting on school choice, with some Polish parents specifically seeking out such schools for their children and others actively avoiding them. Parents who chose to place their children in a Catholic school would do so because they were Catholics (even if not practising) and/or because they had heard that these schools fared better in academic terms. For some parents both of these reasons were equally important:

[W]e'd only consider Catholic schools, no way would we send them to a Protestant school. (…) Because the level of teaching here [in the UK] is shit, excuse the word, but in the Catholic ones it's always higher than in the Protestant ones, so if you want your child to learn anything, it's better to get them into a Catholic school.

So when you were choosing schools this is what you paid attention to?

Yes. Especially as we're Catholics, how religious we are is another matter, but we are after all Catholics (Czesław, Glasgow).

Other Polish parents did not like the idea of their children attending a Catholic school, as they associated such schools with over-emphasis on religious instruction. This was typically (though by no means exclusively) a stance taken by people who would identify themselves as non-religious:

The first school [we approached] was a Catholic school. And this school was so Catholic that it was truly terrifying: the moment you entered there were plenty of crucifixes on the wall, and rosaries and holy pictures and what have you. And when this lady told us they're very sorry but they have no places I thought, 'Oh, thank God' [laughs] (Krystyna, Southampton).

[When we went to ask for information in the local Catholic school] we were told that children of Catholic faith have precedence over all others. (…) So I immediately… Even though opinions about this school are very good, and I wanted my child to go there, but we crossed it off the list instantly, because if there's such selection and emphasis on denomination, masses and so on… My child has never been brought up in faith, he knows all about it, knows all the symbols, but I didn't want him to have a problem at his age whether he should believe in God or not, so we let it go. Even though I've heard very good opinions about it (Dorota, Southampton).

In terms of academic standing, Catholic schools were generally believed to be of a higher level than non-Catholic schools. However, as mentioned above, some parents would not wish to send their children to a Catholic school because of expectations regarding what they denoted or because the specialist profile of a given school was more important for them than denomination/academic standing:

I was still considering the Catholic school at the time. But the lady [who was making an enquiry on my behalf] said that she'd had a bit of a strange conversation with the headmaster. She asked if there were any Polish children there and he said 'What difference does that make?' So I was under the impression that this headmaster wasn't exactly favourably disposed (…). And in the second school they seemed much more open and friendly, so… (Jowita, Glasgow).

[T]hey found the school nearest to us. It was a mathematics/computer school. And he's always liked computers, so he went to this school (Bartek, Southampton).

For some of the Polish parents who had (helpful) contacts locally, and especially if they had limited language knowledge, it was the presence of another parent whose child was in the school and who could provide support and 'insider knowledge' (Fischer, Martin and Straubhaar 1997) that determined the choice of a particular school. Usually, such support and knowledge would be provided by compatriots. Lidia provides a rare example within our sample of a parent who had some 'bridging capital' and was able to capitalise on it:

We chose this school because there was this [English] manager here [at work] at the time and he had a younger daughter (…) and she also went to that school. (…) It's not a big school and they were happy with the school and the teachers… And a taxi would come to pick up this girl every day, the parents had to contribute a little towards that. So I knew there wouldn't be a problem with taking the child to school and picking him up because the taxi would come right to their doorstep. So I thought it would be better for him to go with her and we enrolled him there. Because also if there was a need to go there and ask about something, this Martin [the manager] would go with us (Lidia, Dorset).

Other parents were thinking of the support their children would be able to count on in school from compatriots, and with a view to this, would – similarly to Jowita cited earlier – look for schools where there were other Polish children. In some cases, these would be children they already knew, including other family members:

[Kasia, my middle daughter, went to the same school as Ilona, her younger sister, who arrived in England earlier] and that was really good because by that time Ilona could speak English very well, and could help Kasia. Kasia in general isn't as quick a learner. This resulted from a number of factors (...). So she required more care (...). So the younger sister was taking care of the older one, Ilona is two years younger. Ilona was attending the fourth form and Kasia the sixth form. So they attended the same school for a whole year, and then Kasia went to secondary school and that was the same school that Renata [oldest daughter] was attending. So she was supported by her sisters for two years (Krystyna, Southampton).

I've found [a school] also not far from here. We've been to see the school and there are also some Poles there, including his friend from the other side of the road, also a little boy so they know each other, so I think things will be fine (Sylwia, Southampton).

Interestingly, while a number of Polish parents mentioned the importance of peer support from compatriots for the children and the role of ethnic composition in school choice, none of them mentioned other forms of in-school support for foreign-language children that might have been available, such as bilingual teaching assistants. However, this might have been due to the fact that at the time of making the choice of school our participants had little knowledge of the system, so might not have been aware that such support could also be offered.

Apart from those factors mentioned above, some parents would also pay attention to school facilities: whether the building was new or old, how well the school was equipped:

It's new, very well equipped and the teachers are brilliant. The atmosphere is very warm, unlike in other schools we looked at. They were mostly old and badly equipped. This one is in a new building, with a brand new heating system. That was an important factor for us because one school in [a small town in Dorset] we went to see had no central heating! There were only radiators (Żaneta, Dorset).

Moreover, Polish parents would (understandably) have a preference for schools that were near home. The strategy of enrolling a child in the local school is a common one in Poland, especially at the primary school stage, and in this respect the way Polish parents make their choices resembles that of the British working class. The strategy of moving into a particular area 'for the schools' was completely unknown to the parents in our sample. Only in exceptional cases would they consider sending their children to a non-local school, e.g. in the instance of their being bullied in the local school. Nevertheless, finding a school in the vicinity of the place of residence was not always possible. In general, parents living in urban areas of the UK and with children attending primary schools were usually able to place them in schools in the vicinity, while children living in rural areas and/or attending secondary schools (also in urban areas) would typically have to travel further to school. Still, in some cases choice of school was limited by lack of school places in the locality, or other reasons, such as a child's disability.

Notably, Polish parents whose children had some sort of disability were much more restricted in exercising school choice. Rather, they had to enrol their children in a school that could cater for their particular needs. For Dominika, who lives in a rural area in Southern England and whose young son had been diagnosed with autism, it was necessary to send him to the nearest town, as only there could he receive the needed specialist care:

Adam [has] a type of autism. It's not a very severe autism but it is there and he needs a little more time and a little more care. That's why Adam doesn't go to school here but goes to school in [a bigger town].

(…) And Adam was referred there because of speech difficulties. The only thing that worries me in all this is that he's tired because he has to get up just after 6 and he comes back around 5 p.m., so this is a very long day for him and he's only 5 years old. But he's made such progress in that school, he speaks totally differently now and he is developing so much that for now, for as long as we can, we'll try to keep him there because it's better for him (Dominika, Dorset).

Jerzy, whose teenage son is severely autistic, was even more restricted in terms of exercising school choice as there were very few schools in the region catering for children with such specific needs. Jerzy had made an informed choice to live in Glasgow, a large city, as he was aware of the fact that considering his severely disabled son it would be impossible to live in a small town with restricted access to specialist services. However, even in Glasgow Jerzy struggled to find a (suitable) school for his son and to gain access to education:

Did you have any problems with enrolling Piotrek in school?

Yes, I did, to be honest with you… because of all sorts of procedures involved. It took us half a year to find out about this school, to start with. He should have been able to start attending the school as soon as he got enrolled. But although I enrolled him two weeks after we came over, he only started attending in June the following year (Jerzy, Glasgow).

Piotrek started attending school eventually, but Jerzy soon realised that his son was not happy at school, and in effect was suffering from increased levels of stress. Therefore, at the time of the interview Jerzy was searching for an alternative, yet this was proving to be very hard:

We're trying to find him a place. We don't have much time because most schools won't admit him when he's over 18 and he's 16 already. But we'll keep trying. If not here… I can't think of anywhere else in Scotland… it's only Glasgow or Edinburgh, really… (Jerzy, Glasgow).

For Jerzy, therefore, whose son will never be able to achieve academically or even be able to live an independent life, the most important factor in exercising school choice was that his son felt comfortable at school. Still, such an attitude was by no means particular to his family situation.

Similarly, for many other parents the most important thing was for their children to feel happy at school. Hence, in the case of older children, parents would ultimately leave the choice of school to them. Interestingly, while, as mentioned earlier, many Polish parents saw having other Polish children at school as an advantage, this opinion was not necessarily shared by their children:

[W]hen [my son] arrived he could choose between going to school with other Poles or only with English children. We went to [a small town in Dorset], had a look around a few schools but didn't want to attend any of them. And then a friend of ours told us we might like to check out the local village school. We went there and straight away Szymon said 'I want to go to this school, I don't want to go to school with other Poles'. So he himself chose this school here, in [a village in Dorset], and he went there (Angelika, Dorset).

Other 'older' children would also express clear preferences for some schools over others. For instance, Krystyna's daughter, Renata (aged 14 at the time) did not like the first school she went to see:

The first school [we went to see] for Renata was an all-girls school, and she didn't want to go there because she said she didn't want to go to school with a bunch of 'little lesbians' and she wanted to go to an ordinary school (Krystyna, Southampton).

Therefore, in the case of older children, choice of school was typically left to them. Naturally, these young people would not think in terms of the academic level of the school, but rather whether they liked what they had seen or heard about the school. In consequence, they would not be in the position to make a fully informed decision either, and, like their parents, would essentially be 'disconnected choosers' (Gewirtz *et al.* 1995).

Ultimately, initial school choice was guided by a set of individual beliefs as to what was most important for the child's education: whether it was convenience and the school being near home, the religious and/or subject profile of the school, the academic level of the school or its 'friendliness'. How these beliefs played out in reality is a different matter, and often parents remain unaware of whether they have made a 'good' or 'bad' choice for their child. As one mother reflected when asked about her opinion of her daughter's first school in the UK (which was a primary school; her daughter had moved to secondary school by the time of the interview):

I think it wasn't bad, I can't really compare it to anything because I don't know how other schools here operate. Don't really have that many acquaintances who have their children in other schools. But I think it's OK, it's a small school, 200 pupils, there's only one class in each year, the headmistress knows all the children by name and the atmosphere in this school is quite good. I think Zuza was taken good care of, that she had a good start (Elżbieta, Southampton).

Summary and conclusions

This article focuses on the initial stages of Polish parents' engagement with the British education system, and how parents who have low degrees of cultural and social capital and do not have 'insider knowledge' of the system make initial educational choices for their children. The British education system is a highly complex and nuanced one, very much different from the Polish education system. Moreover, the system is not uniform across the UK, with education (as well as other local delivery mechanisms such as health and local government) devolved in Scotland and Wales. Meanwhile, Polish parents arriving in the UK with school-age children typically have very low awareness of the ins and outs of the British schooling system. At the same time, their cultural capital might not be easily transferable (e.g. due to poor knowledge of English) and their social capital after arrival may be highly limited and mainly in the form of 'bonding capital' (social networks consisting of other Poles), which rarely allows them to access 'insider knowledge' of the system. Moreover, the English system is substantially more complex to navigate than the Scottish system, possibly putting Polish parents living in England at an even greater disadvantage in terms of making an informed school choice. In consequence, when faced with the task of finding a school for their children, some parents do not make informed decisions but follow the same strategy as they typically would in Poland, i.e. enrol their children in the local school.

Those parents attempting to make an informed decision about schools would typically seek information through their ethnic networks, hence following other Poles' largely unverified opinions rather than 'facts'. Nevertheless, the one feature of the British system that Polish parents in our sample were very much aware of was the existence of Catholic schools in the UK; issues of faith would largely impact on Polish parents' choice of school in the UK, with some parents (both believers and non-believers) expressing a clear preference for Catholic schools and others deliberately avoiding them. Importantly, Catholic schools were commonly known

to be academically superior to non-denominational schools, yet many misconceptions about them also appeared in the parents' narratives, e.g. much exaggerated numbers of Catholic schools in the UK and the belief that non-denominational schools are essentially 'Protestant'. Other features taken into consideration in choosing a school were atmosphere (perceived friendliness of the school; first impressions) and/or more tangible characteristics such as school profile (specialisation), available facilities, or ethnic mix. With regard to ethnicity, Polish parents who had low levels of English themselves (as did their children on entering schools) often chose schools where there were other Polish children – with a view to the in-school support their child could receive from their Polish peers. Nevertheless, such a strategy might ultimately lead to slower language acquisition, ethnic segregation, and limiting the child's networks – hence reproducing one's own, largely bonding (co-ethnic) capital in the longer run (cf. Wierzbicki 2004; Griffiths, Sigona, Zetter and Sigona 2005). Parents of (more severely) disabled children were most restricted in exercising school choice: this was often 'made for them', as the parents would have to place their children in schools likely to best cater for their specific needs. Finally, parents of older children arriving in the UK would typically leave choosing schools to their discretion, as they believed that the most important thing was for their children to simply like their school. Significantly, at the stage of initial engagement with the British schooling system the Polish parents were generally unaware that school choice, especially at secondary level, may have serious implications for their children's' future educational opportunities as 'bad' choices could lead, for example, to limiting later opportunities for taking a given academic route.

As follows from our analysis, with regards to school choice Polish parents with little previous engagement with the UK system are, similarly to BME parents, largely limited in exercising actual choice predominantly due to lack of knowledge of the system and/or living in the more deprived neighbourhoods. Moreover, their strategies for selecting schools resemble those of the British working class (e.g. choosing school by proximity to home or perceived friendliness rather than academic standing; letting children make their own choices) rather than those of the middle class; therefore, Polish parents are not well positioned to secure educational success for their children through targeting 'better' schools. Nevertheless, one factor that may work to their advantage in relation to BME and (White) British working-class parents is their rather common preference for Catholic schools, as these are indeed generally superior to non-denominational schools in terms of academic standards and pupil achievement.

Polish parents coming to the UK typically do so *for the sake of the children* and believe a *better life* for them can be achieved through education. At the same time, however, the initial (bad) school choices made by parents might have a negative impact on their children's future educational opportunities. On the other hand, research has shown that home background – rather than what school a child attends – is by far the most important factor in predicting how well a child will do at school (Allen *et al.* 2014). Meanwhile, Lopez Rodriguez (2010) notes that even working-class Poles display an 'almost middle-class involvement' (when judged in relation to UK findings relating to parental involvement) in their children's education, and expectations of academic achievement are generally high. She argues that these characteristics might ultimately put them at an advantage over British working-class families in terms of their children's educational trajectories. Indeed, many – though not all – of the (working-class) parents in our sample also declared high educational ambitions for their children. Arguably, however, although further knowledge and a better understanding of the system may be acquired over time, its 'quality' will largely depend on the degree of parental engagement with the system, and the development of their social and cultural capital (e.g. improving English language skills, widening social networks, forming bridging capital). Polish parents coming to the UK typically do so *for the sake of the children* and often see their children's education as key to achieving the *better life* they migrated for. However, it remains to be seen to what extent this is an achievable ambition for the children and their parents, as this young generation of Poles in Britain progresses through the schooling system and enters the labour market.

Notes

[1] This observation follows directly from data collection for a research project on Eastern European migration to Scotland on which the first author is currently working (noted: April 2015).

[2] *International Labour Mobility and Its Impact on Family and Household Formation Among Polish Migrants Living in England and Scotland*. This project was funded by the European and Social Research Council, award number RES-625-28-0001.

[3] For the sake of simplicity, we shall use the term 'British education system' in this paper. In fact, however, there are also internal differences between the education systems of the countries comprising the United Kingdom, i.e. England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Despite these differences, the philosophy of education and organisation of education are fairly similar across the UK, although the Scottish system is most different from the other three systems, in that it has traditionally emphasised breadth across a range of subjects, while the English, Welsh and Northern Irish systems have emphasised greater depth of education over a smaller range of subjects at secondary school level (http://www.gtcs.org.uk/education-in-scotland/scotlands-education-system.aspx; accessed: 20 April 2015). Moreover, the Scottish system aims to provide a more comprehensive and equal education. In this article we will be focusing on Polish migrants living in England and Scotland, which follow different curriculums. Discussing the differences between the English and Scottish education systems in depth is beyond the scope of this paper; nevertheless, wherever they are important for our analysis, they will be explained.

[4] For a more detailed description of the differences between the education systems of Poland and the UK (England), see Lopez Rodriguez *et al.* 2010; Trevena 2014.

[5] Currently, following the educational reform of 2004, the age of starting school in Poland is being lowered to 6. In the transition stage parents were able to send their children to school either at the age of 6 or 7, but from 2015/2016 primary schooling in Poland is obligatory from the age of 6 (IBE 2011).

[6] Interestingly, our interviewees who lived in Scotland would sometimes mention that their child was put down a year in relation to their age group in order to facilitate acquisition of English. This was mentioned specifically for primary-school children. In general, at the time of the research Scotland had different language support than England, while in England some in-school support (language training or translation by a specialist teaching assistant or teacher) was provided for both primary- and secondary-school children (the amount of support received would depend on resources, but it was usually a couple of hours per week).

[7] In both England and Scotland primary school starts at the age of 4–5 and lasts for 7 years, yet there are some differences in terms of organisation. In England primary school starts with so-called Year R ('reception') and then Years 1–6; some primary schools are divided into two levels: infant (4/5–6/7) and junior (7/8–10/11). In Scotland all primary schools are 7-year schools, with classes named Primary 1 to 7.

[8] In England and Poland young people above the age of 16 who complete the compulsory stage of education are obliged to participate in some form of further education: up till the age of 18 in Poland, and up till the age of 17 in the UK (since 2013; and from 2015 up to the age of 18). The main difference at this stage of education is that in Poland it is the parents' responsibility to ensure their children are in education up till the age of 18, while in Britain it is the responsibility of the young person. However, in Scotland young people can leave school at the age of 16 and are not obliged to further participate in any form of education (https://www.gov.uk/know-when-you-can-leave-school; accessed: 20 April 2015).

[9] https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school (accessed: 23 April 2015); http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/experts-uk-has-too-many-types-of-school-2352191.html (accessed: 23 April 2015).

[10] http://www.scotsman.com/news/education/english-schools-best-not-scottish-1-760750 (accessed: 21 April 2015).

[11] http://wystap.pl/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Rocznik-Statystyczny-2012-o-wyznaniach.pdf (accessed: 8 September 2015).

[12]   http://www.rownoscwyznania.org/wyznania-w-polsce/articles/nauczanie-religii-w-szkolach-a-rozno-rodnosc-wyznaniowa-w-polsce.html (accessed: 8 September 2015).

[13] https://men.gov.pl/ministerstwo/informacje/informacja-w-sprawie-zasad-organizowania-nauki-religii-i-etyki-w-roku-szkolnym-2014-2015.html (accessed: 8 September 2015).

[14] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/secondaryeducation/3852653/Faith-school-pupils-outperforming-others-at-every-age.html (accessed: 14 September 2015).

[15] Bourdieu (1986) also distinguished one more type of capital, which he named 'symbolic'. This may be seen as the resources available to an individual on the basis of honour, prestige or recognition. However, symbolic capital cannot be converted to other forms of capital (economic, cultural, social). Rather, these three can also have symbolic value.

[16] There are also a few (altogether four) other denominational schools in Scotland, namely Jewish and Episcopalian ones. Nevertheless, most non-denominational schools in Scotland are indeed linked to the Church of Scotland (e.g. have a church minister), which is a Protestant church. Nevertheless, though certain celebrations might take place in church (e.g. Christmas mass), these schools do not focus on teaching Protestant religion in school.

[17] http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/about-us/faqs (accessed: 24 April 2015).

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