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Key Words: transactional communication; school-home communication; migrant parents and children; EAL pupils

1. Introduction

Communication between school and home is an important research area in a range of Anglophone countries such as the UK, US, and Australia, especially in the context of educating pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL students) (Coady, Cruz-Davis, & Flores 2008; Hamilton, 2013; Naidoo, 2015).[1] However, education researchers have tended to focus either on the views of EAL students *or* their parents/carers[2] *or* teachers, rather than comparing these views within the same school. Consequently, such research is in danger of missing important mismatches between the different stakeholders' perceptions of what is needed and what works for them. We argue that these mismatches hinder parental engagement, defined by a mutual understanding between teachers and parents (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Pushor, 2012), and restrict the potential of the school to meet the needs of EAL pupils. This article, therefore, explores school communication processes and the extent to which migrant parents' and teachers' views correspond, with special focus on parental knowledge, parents' engagement and barriers to parents' engagement.

Applying organisational communication theory to our empirical data, we explore the extent to which *transactional communication processes* are employed when schools engage with migrant parents. Transactional communication, as delineated by Harris and Nelson (2007), refers to a communication process which is fluid, multi-directional and progressive, focusing on a 'mutual assignment of meaning' (ibid., p. 17). In a school context transactional communication privileges a circularity of dialogue between schools, their teaching staff and pupils, and the families and communities they serve (Author, 2017). With regard to communication between school and home we are, therefore, advocating a *transactional school-home-school* (TSHS*)* communication model which places the onus on the school to facilitate effective communication systems, emphasises circularity of dialogue between school and home, enhances the mutual understanding of teachers and parents, and creates an operational environment for parental engagement.

A range of authors have highlighted the importance of linguistic and cultural inclusion of migrant parents for parental engagement (Hamilton, 2013; Jeynes, 2011; Naidoo, 2015; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Walker, 2014). However, on the whole, the different communication modes, which hinder or support an effective parental engagement strategy, have not been analysed in detail. Consequently, in 2013 we set out with

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[1] EAL is a concept developed in the English context and refers to 'all pupils whose first language is not English, but who are living and attending schools in England' (Authors et al., 2014, p. 12).

[2] Unless stated otherwise, in the rest of the article the term 'parents' refers to parents and carers of EAL students.

colleagues[3] to explore how EAL pupils were supported (linguistically, pedagogically and socially) and the modes of communication linked to such support. The results of this small scale study in the East of England implied that schools did not communicate effectively with parents of EAL students, even if schools were keen to find ways of doing so (Authors et al., 2014; Authors, 2017). This article is based on the follow-up research (2015-2016), which was conducted in two case study secondary schools in the east of England and explored (amongst other dimensions) communication between school and home (Authors et al. 2016). We focused particularly on the question as to whether there was any congruence or mismatch between the views of the teachers and the parents of EAL students in relation to:

(a) parents' knowledge about the English secondary school system and their children's learning;
(b) parents' engagement at home and at school; and,
(c) barriers to parents' engagement in secondary education.

We start by discussing how school-home communication has been conceptualised, highlighting a conceptual distinction between parental involvement and engagement, before describing in detail Harris and Nelson's (2007) notion of transactional communication. After outlining our methodology, we present our case study findings followed by discussion and recommendations. Given the difficulty of tapping into migrant parents' views, we offer our study findings as indicative rather than definitive, recognising that there is much more involved in school communication systems that needs investigating.

2. Approaches to school-home communication with migrant families and the role of transactional communication

In 2010, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco and Sattin-Bajaj reported that immigrant pupils arrive in income-rich countries (such as the US) with distinctive social and cultural resources. Such resources include optimism, high educational aspirations, positive attitudes to school, parental interest in education, an ability to adjust to new relationships and environments and polylingualism. Nevertheless, despite such resources, they face a high level of challenges:

> All too many immigrant youth […] encounter a myriad of challenges among them economic stressors, language difficulties, family separations, underresourced neighborhoods, segregated schools, undocumented status, and xenophobia. These students frequently struggle to gain their bearings in an educational system that too often puts them on a path to marginality, anomie, and frustrated ambitions (ibid., p. 538).

Communication between school and home which facilitates the relationship between parents and schools and encourages parental engagement, is recognised as an important factor in helping such students (Epstein, 2011; Hamilton, 2013; Hutchins, Greenfeld, Epstein, Sanders, & Galindo, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). However, the understanding of school-home communication has shifted over time from focusing

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[3] Authors 1, 2, 3 and 4

on parental involvement to emphasising parental engagement. Below we capture the key issues in this debate.

2.1. Critiquing the concept of parental involvement and its limited model of communication

Parental involvement is often defined in terms of how much parents can enact 'specific scripted school activities' (such as fundraising activities, involvement in parent teacher associations) and specific types of home-based support for children's learning (such as talking about homework and the school day) (Lòpez, 2001, p. 416). However, the use of lists of parental actions, associated with parental involvement, is problematic if actions are narrowly conceived on a 'one size fits all' basis, and if they are institutionalised, prescriptive and imposed (De Gaetano, 2007; Fernandez & Lòpez, 2017; Lòpez, 2001; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). The concept of *parental involvement* reflects overall a one-sided, linear communication process which places emphasis on parental adaption to the values, learning strategies and knowledge defined by the school. Furthermore, parental involvement is associated with normative assumptions about 'good parenting' which assume white middle-class strategies and resources, and thus potentially further exclude already marginalized groups (e.g. Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). Ishimaru (2014) argues that schools are in danger of pathologising parents from marginal groups as 'failed' parents. Migrant communities are especially vulnerable to being marginalised if they face language barriers and/or have recently arrived and have to deal with a new educational context.

In contrast, the concept of *parental engagement* usefully reflects a two-way interaction process between school and home, referring to a mutual exchange of values and knowledge. It places emphasis on reciprocity, empowerment, empathy, change and opportunities for both parents and the school. Pushor (2012, p. 469), for example, defines engagement as a process where:

> educators were entering a community to create with parents a shared school landscape — a landscape in which "parent knowledge" (Pushor, 2001) and teacher knowledge informed decision making, the determination of agendas, and the intended outcomes of their efforts for children, families, the community, and the school. Within such a shared landscape, there was a sense of reciprocity in their mutual engagement, a sense of benefit for families and the school.

If parental engagement is understood as a 'shared landscape', teachers and parents do not only know about their respective values and practices regarding education, but they together formulate ideas and strategies regarding parental engagement. In this latter context, school communication processes become even more salient.

2.2. The role of communication in parental engagement

Following Epstein (2001), Goodall and Vorhaus (2010) identify the quality of both school-home and home-school communication as important elements of parental engagement. In addition, they list a wide range of activities and sites such as: learning at home, including discussions about school, aspirations and careers; in-school

activities, such as parents' evenings and meetings with class teachers; involvement in decision-making (e.g. role of school governor); and, collaboration with the community (ibid.p.14) (Authors, et al. 2016).

Hamilton (2013, p. 313) points out that the 'quality of communication and exchange of information' between schools and migrant families needs to reflect 'language and cultural differences, diverse educational systems, changing family structures and community cohesion'. For this to happen, she argues, that corresponding/non-corresponding views regarding school-home communication should be analysed systematically; for example, in terms of whether there is 'open and sustained dialogue' amongst all the participants and whether the notion of a 'good successful parent' and power relations between teachers and parents are reflected upon. Any discrepancy or tension between teachers' and parents' views on school communication would greatly limit the success of any school initiative, no matter how sympathetic or imaginative. It is in this context, that schools might consider developing a model of transactional communication. Below we describe the key elements of such a model that could be used by schools to enrich the limited models of communication associated with traditional typologies of parental involvement.

2.3. A transactional communication model

Harris and Nelson's (2007) differentiation of *linear*, *interactional* and *transactional* communication models in organisational theory offers a valuable theoretical framework for analysing communication between school and home. They argue that transactional communication facilitates the most effective communication process in organisations since linear and interactional models have major shortcomings.

Linear models are defined by a 'one-way flow of messages' from sender to receiver (ibid., p. 16). The lack of feedback loops reflects a hierarchical structure between sender and recipient with no intention to foster mutual understanding. In contrast, the interactional and transactional models offer feedback loops. However, Harris and Nelson state that the interactional model is limited as it 'assumes an interactive nature somewhat similar to a Ping-Pong game where the messages are exchanged rather than simultaneously shared' (2007, p. 16). In contrast, the transactional model goes beyond a mere exchange of messages, emphasising a 'mutual assignment of meaning' and understanding communication as a complex, dynamic and ongoing process (ibid., p. 17). Transactional communication refers to a simultaneously shared communication which shows high levels of empathy and reciprocal understanding; for example, teachers being aware of migrant parents' difficulties in arranging translators for school meetings, leading to suggestions of appropriate strategies to counter these difficulties when they communicate with parents.

Using this definition, it seems that the development of a transactional communication system could be the most effective strategy for establishing communication with migrant parents and a 'shared school landscape' for parental engagement (Pushor, 2012). The focus on mutual understanding in transactional communication implies that all participants in the communication process are aware of each other's views on areas relating to schooling. In light of this, we have identified three key areas which relate to migrant parents' experiences and which teachers need to be aware of if an effective parental engagement strategy should be developed: (a) parental knowledge

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of the English school system, (b) the levels of parents' engagement at home and at school, and (c) the barriers that parents face in communicating and participating in the schooling system.[4] These three aspects, particularly whether there was any congruence or mismatch between migrant parents' and teachers' views on these areas, were researched in detail in our second phase of the [funding organisation] funded research project (2015-2016). We outline its research design in the following section.

3. Research Design

In the second phase of our research we used a comparative case-study design (Yin 2013) to examine the effectiveness of communication between school and home in two secondary schools with a reasonably large group of EAL students. Both schools were state schools (i.e. publically funded) with a higher than average proportion of economically disadvantaged pupils, situated in the East of England which is characterised by an increased number of EAL students and a 'diverse urban and rural make-up' (Office for National Statistics, 2012, p.1; Strand, Malmberg, & Hall 2015). The schools were chosen on the basis of their relative high levels of EAL students, their high levels of disadvantaged pupils, and their commitment to EAL provision. The schools differed, however, with regard to their their geographical context (urban versus semi-rural) and their experience of teaching EAL students (Authors et al. 2016).

Parkland secondary school (pseudonym) is a large, multicultural urban state school with, at the time, more than 1500 students where 11-16 year olds take their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). In 2015, the school served an ethnically diverse catchment area which is home to a well-established Pakistani heritage community, with recent arrivals from Eastern European countries. The proportion of students receiving free school meals (an indicator of low family income) was above the national and local averages. At the time of our research, over 55 per cent of students spoke a language other than English at home, with approximately 60 different languages spoken overall. As a result, the school had substantial experience in EAL provision. EAL students were supported by four full-time and three part-time teaching assistants specifically assigned to learning support, and several bilingual assistants led by an experienced Ethnic Minority Support leader.

In comparison, Kirkwood Academy (pseudonym) is a smaller secondary state school where 11-16 year olds take their GCSE. At the time of our research, there were fewer than 700 students. The school is located in a semi-rural area and its multicultural experience is far more recent when compared to Parkland school. The school attracts students from the local farming community and nearby villages and a higher than (national) average number of students receive free school meals. At the time of our study twelve per cent of the student population were categorized as EAL, relating especially to recently arrived pupils with an Eastern European background. Kirkwood school had a dedicated EAL coordinator who spoke several European languages.[5]

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[4] These are selected areas of the TSHS communication process and other areas such as parents' and teachers' views on pedagogy, homework and home language are also relevant areas to look at.

[5] EAL coordinators can be appointed by schools to have the main responsibility for EAL learners and to manage a team of bilingual and EAL specialist classroom assistants (https://www.naldic.org.uk/eal-teaching-and-learning/outline-guidance/eal/).

Mixed methods were used to gather data on parents' and teachers' views regarding parental knowledge, engagement and the barriers to engagement in the two case study schools. In this article, we focus especially on the staff interviews, the parental interviews and the parental survey conducted at each of the two schools. Interview questions and survey questions in both schools addressed the same areas of parental knowledge, engagement and barriers to effective parental engagement so that comparisons could be made within and between the qualitative and quantitative data. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted at both schools with 4 Headteachers, 4 EAL staff, and 10 teachers (who were Heads of Departments or representatives) representing subjects including English, Mathematics Science, History/Humanities and Modern Foreign Languages. Interviews were conducted with 22 newly arrived EAL students in Key Stage 3 (pupils aged between 11 and 14) and Key Stage 4 (pupils aged between 14 and 16) who had come to England in the last two years and 10 parents of recently arrived EAL pupils.[6] The qualitative data were supported with a survey of the large majority of EAL and non-EAL students in KS4 (407 pupils), a survey of 64 parents of EAL pupils and a wider regional survey of schools in the East of England.[7]

A purposive sample was used for the interviews with teachers (representing specific subjects outlined above), parents (recently arrived) and EAL pupils (recently arrived). All data collection tools were piloted and EAL staff within the schools co-ordinated the selection and the organisation of the interviews with staff, parents and pupils. All interviews with school staff (and students) were conducted during school hours and were audio recorded. Parental interviews were conducted at school and at home. Parents of EAL pupils were given information letters about the research which had been translated into their home language. Eight of the ten interviews were conducted in the parents' home language and the remaining two were conducted in English. 64 parents completed the survey, 37 from Parkland and 24 from Kirkwood (three online surveys could not be allocated to a specific school). Paper-based and online versions of the survey were created in English, Polish and Lithuanian and were distributed to parents. The largest group of respondents from both Parkland and Kirkwood were Lithuanian (10 and 12 respectively). The background of the other respondents was predominantly Eastern European in Kirkwood, while those from Parkland represented a more diverse range of backgrounds although Eastern European countries were well represented (with the largest group of parents coming from Lithuania followed by Pakistan and Poland) (Authors et al. 2016).

Formal ethical approval at university and school levels (Headteachers) was gained before starting the data collection. Ethical approval related to a range of areas including: anonymising all names; participant consent (in the case of pupil interviews both parents/carers and pupils gave their consent), participant information, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for all researchers before starting the data

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[6] The sample for the interviews with EAL pupils at Parkland consisted of 7 Lithuanian, 2 Polish and 3 Pakistani pupils; the Kirkwood sample consisted of 6 Lithuanian, 2 Polish, 1 Portuguese and 1 Latvian pupil. The parent sample for the interviews included 2 Latvian, 5 Lithuanian, 2 Polish and 1 Portuguese parent.

[7] Due to the timing of GCSE examinations it was not possible for the Year 11 students at Parkland to complete the survey. Translations of the student survey were provided in Lithuanian, Polish and Turkish for those who needed them, as identified by the EAL staff.

collection, the presence of two adults in all interviews with pupils, piloting of data collection tools and data storing.

3.1. Data analysis

The mixed methods study used quantitative and qualitative analysis. The survey data were analysed using SPSS. The parental survey relied on descriptive statistics (the sub-groups were too small to conduct inferential statistics). Key questions for the statistical analysis were: How much did parents of EAL pupils know about the English school system and their child's learning? How much were they engaged at school and at home? Which barriers did they face with regard to engagement at school and at home? The pupil survey also used descriptive statistics to highlight pupils' views in comparison to parents' and teachers' views on parental engagement. All taped and transcribed interviews were uploaded onto the qualitative coding programme NVivo. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), a qualitative coding strategy was applied by using a line-by-line analysis to identify descriptive and pattern codes. While descriptive codes are close to the text and 'entail little interpretation', pattern codes reflect a more abstract level of analysis offering more interpretation and explanation (ibid. 57). Appendix 1 lists the (general) descriptive codes identified both in parents' and teachers' interviews and Appendices 2 and 3 show the different (general) pattern codes induced separately from parents' and teachers' interviews.

3.2. Limitations of the study

Although the study engaged a range of stakeholders and different methods of data collection, it was exploratory as it was based on limited data. It was especially difficult to gain parental data even though a range of methods was used to facilitate the data collection, including translations and employing researchers who spoke several Eastern European languages and gained the trust of migrant parents. Due to the limited responses to the parental survey, the sub-groups for parents with different language abilities, arrival times, ethnic and educational backgrounds were too small to conduct inferential statistics. A longer time span is needed to collect qualitative and quantitative parental data on a larger scale and to analyse which specific TSHS communication strategies have a positive impact on parental knowledge and engagement. The following section presents the findings of the two-year study.

4. Parental knowledge of the English school system and their children's learning: the views of parents and teachers

Knowledge and information is a prerequisite for successful parental engagement and plays a crucial role in TSHS communication. Our findings in both schools show a substantial lack of parents' knowledge and understanding regarding their children's schooling. However, teachers did not seem to be aware of this lack of knowledge and understanding and/or did not seem to perceive it as being problematic.

4.1. Parents' views on parental knowledge

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The survey responses from both schools indicated that a large proportion of parents of EAL pupils felt that they had a 'limited' or 'very limited' understanding of the general school system (Table 1). Overall, a high proportion (around one in two) of parents at Kirkwood Academy had a (very) limited understanding of the English school system. Parental understanding was better at Parkland school, although around one in three parents also struggled to understand the school system.

Table 1: Proportion of parents reporting 'limited' or 'very limited' understanding of the English school system (Parental Survey, N=61)[8]

Limited and very limited understanding of …	Parkland School	Kirkwood Academy
School tests	32 %	58 %
School reports	27 %	54 %
Grouping into sets of Ability	35 %	46 %
GCSE choices	35 %	42 %
Vocational training	49 %	46 %
A-Level system[9]	32 %	42 %

Parents' responses also revealed substantial gaps in their knowledge about specific areas of their children's schooling (Table 2). Over half of Kirkwood parents reported 'little' or 'no knowledge' about topics within subjects, examination topics and homework tasks. Knowledge about topics within subjects and examination topics was also problematic for Parkland parents with over a third stating 'little' or 'no knowledge'. The majority of EAL students we interviewed at the two schools also emphasised that their parents would benefit from having more information about the exam and curriculum systems.

Table 2: Parental reporting on the lack of knowledge of specific areas (Parental Survey, N=61)

Little or no knowledge of…	Parkland School	Kirkwood Academy
School subjects	16 %	33 %
Topics within subjects	38 %	58 %
Examination topics	41 %	54 %
Tasks set for homework	24 %	54 %
When exams take place	24 %	33 %
Child's academic progress	22 %	37 %

Several factors may help explain why a high proportion of parents at Kirkwood school reported a limited or very limited knowledge of the English school system and their childrens' learning. Firstly, a higher proportion of respondents at Kirkwood

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[8] Authors et al. 2016 for all tables presented in this article.
[9] Advanced level school leaving qualifications called A-Levels are the main national examinations which are needed for university study in the UK and are usually taken by pupils who are 17 to 18 years old.

(29%) had recently arrived in England when compared to the proportion of parents at Parkland (11%). Secondly, a higher proportion of parents of EAL students in the Kirkwood sample reported having lower levels of English than those in the Parkland sample: 52% of Kirkwood parents said that their English understanding was 'not good' or 'not good at all', compared with only 17% of Parkland parents. However, our findings further showed that parents who had been in England over five years and had low levels of English also struggled with understanding the English school system. This indicates that low levels of English (rather than length of time in the UK) is the major factor in contributing to lower levels of parental knowledge and understanding in both schools (which mainly communicated with the parents in English).

Another factor which might explain the low levels of parental knowledge at the semi-rural school (Kirkwood) relates to the long shifts and travel time (often adding up to 12 hours), which parents who worked in agriculture (30%) experienced. These work patterns substantially reduced parental time for engaging in school information, especially if it was in English. It should be noted that, although parents worked in low skilled jobs, 50% of the respondents at the semi-rural school had 'fairly good' to 'very good' educational qualifications including those equivalent to A-Levels, diplomas, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. This confirms research findings that suggest that many immigrants (particularly from Eastern Europe), who work in England in low-skilled jobs, have good educational qualifications (Author et al. 2011). However, our survey also revealed that a parent's educational background is not necessarily related to a better understanding of the English school system. We found that those with lower educational backgrounds reported a better knowledge about their children's schooling than those with higher educational backgrounds. The findings from our relatively small samples, therefore, suggest that the factors behind low parental knowledge are complex, and a larger study is necessary to research this area in more depth.

The survey findings about the parents' lack of knowledge and understanding about their children's schooling resonated with the views of the ten parents who were interviewed:

> I think I don't know much as education is not my specialty. My profession is completely different and knowledge as well - very general. I know how long a primary school lasts, when children start attending the school, when they finish, how long secondary school lasts, what does college or university mean here - but nothing in a greater detail, nothing. (Lithuanian Parent/Carer Parkland School)

> Unfortunately, I must confess I don't understand the English marking system, and I am always lost when we speak about the assessment and concrete marks. I still don't understand what good or bad mark means. (Lithuanian Parent/Carer, Kirkwood Academy)

4.2. Teachers' views on parental knowledge

When we interviewed teaching staff, we discovered that they did not have concrete information regarding parental knowledge and made a variety of assumptions -

ranging from the assumption that there was no difference between parents of EAL and non-EAL students to the view that levels of parental knowledge were influenced by English proficiency, geographical origin or educational background:

> Again, you've got the three groups of parents, those with good English, those with some English, those with no English, and I think those with no English don't really understand and don't feel connected to the school. I think the other two groups do feel connected and do have a basic understanding of what is going on but I think those that don't have English struggle to understand what's going on here. (History teacher, Kirkwood Academy)

> Yeah. [They understand] pretty well. I think depending on where they're coming from, pretty well, very keen to understand […] So, the information is there. I think the information for that also goes home, but again, in English....... (English teacher, Parkland School)

> I think it varies like any parents really. Some don't understand our levels at all, and that's understandable because lots of English parents don't understand. (Maths teacher, Kirkwood Academy)

> I think it depends on where they are with their own education and what their education was in their own country. (Science teacher, Parkland School)

4.3. Discrepancies between parents' and teachers' views about parental knowledge

The communication systems between school and home in the two schools appeared to be ineffective with regard to parental knowledge as there seemed to be no feedback loops between school and home which could have improved teachers' awareness and understanding of migrant parents' levels of knowledge and understanding. It was noticeable that none of the teachers we interviewed seemed to be aware of the specific areas of knowledge that parents struggled with. Several teachers (including members of the senior management teams), thought that, generally, parental understanding of school practice was good and that there was no particular difference between parents of EAL and non-EAL students.

Linear or even interactional models of communication can easily ignore the effects which low levels of English and/or being a stranger to the education system can have on parents' knowledge and understanding of their children's schooling. Improving information strategies for parents with low levels of English and those who had recently arrived, and regular gathering of school data on parental knowledge, would have helped these two schools foster transactional communication, characterised by a genuine dialogue and shared understanding between teachers and parents.

5. Parental engagement at school and at home: the views of parents, students and teachers

In addition to the above discrepancies regarding parental knowledge, there were also contentious differences between the views of parents, pupils and teachers on the types and levels of migrant parents' engagement at school and at home.

5.1. Parental views on engagement at school and at home

Our survey and interview data very clearly show that the parents of EAL students were interested in knowing about how their child was doing at school. This was 'very important' (95% for Parkland and 78% for Kirkwood) or 'important' (5% for Parkland and 22% for Kirkwood) to parents. The high level of interest was also reflected in the interviews with parents which revealed just how much they engaged with their children's learning at home. Parents had regular discussions with their children about school, aspirations and possible post-school careers, and were involved in intense and time-consuming translation strategies. Here are two examples:

> Yes, yes, for example we discuss about English language, sometimes even about literature. We read the same books. I did this as a child but only in Lithuanian, "Romeo and Juliet" for instance. Thus we talk about a world-class literature. He tells me a lot what he has read, what interpretations he or his teacher has. (Lithuanian Parent, Parkland School)

> Yes, of course, we know everything, every change that happens in school… We have parental evenings here. We can talk with every teacher separately. We do not communicate in English but Jonas tells or translates everything. (Latvian Parent, Parkland School)

The majority of parents reported in the survey that they had helped with homework tasks, although Kirkwood school had a larger percentage of parents who never or seldom helped with homework (38%) when compared to Parkland (16%) (Table 3). This difference might reflect the higher proportion of parents in the Kirkwood sample who lacked knowledge regarding homework tasks (Table 2 above) and/or had low levels of English. Work and travel time associated with agricultural work at Kirkwood, as outlined in the precious section, might also impact on parental time for homework support. However, our survey and interview findings also highlight that a lack of helping with homework tasks did not mean that parents were less interested in their children's education (an assumption made by several teachers).

Table 3: Parental help with homework (Parental Survey, N=61)

Parental help with homework	Parkland School	Kirkwood Academy
Very often	16 %	8 %
Often	24 %	13 %
Sometimes	43 %	42 %
Seldom	8 %	21 %
Never	8 %	17 %

Table 4 indicates that parents' engagement at school was generally lower for parents at Kirkwood when compared with Parkland. 78% of Parkland parents reported attending parent evenings at school compared with only 46% of Kirkwood parents. Instead 42% of Kirkwood parents had attended individual school meetings compared with only 35% of Parkland parents.

Table 4: Parental engagement at school

Engagement at school	Parkland School	Kirkwood Academy
Attending parents' Evenings	78%	46%
Attending individual Consultations	35%	42%

According to the Kirkwood parents and the EAL co-ordinator, the low attendance at parent evenings possibly reflects parents' working conditions in agricultural employment. Low levels of English will have also impacted on attendance rates as interpreters were not provided at parent evenings and parents had mainly to rely on their own children or other EAL pupils. However, the lower attendance at parent evenings might have led to a higher proportion of parents attending individual consultations at the semi-rural school when compared with the urban school. This finding reflects Kirkwood's strategy to offer flexible times for individual consultations with the EAL co-ordinator (see Gibson and Hidalgo, 2009, for specific support strategies for migrant parents in agriculture).

5.2. Pupils' views on parental engagement at school and home

Pupils' responses to the survey reflected overall a high engagement of their parents at school and at home (Table 5). Interestingly, EAL students perceived a much higher attendance of their parents at parent evenings (92%) when compared to our findings from the parental survey. Given that the pupil survey covered a large and representative sample of EAL pupils, the finding might suggest that parents' engagement at school is higher than reflected in our parental data. Another important finding is that the pupil survey did not reflect a difference between the levels of engagement of parents of EAL and non-EAL students (at school and at home). This finding diverges from teachers' perceptions that parents of EAL students are less engaged than parents of non-EAL students (discussed below).

Table 5: Pupils' perceptions of parents' engagement (Pupil Survey, N = 407)

Parents' engagement 'very often', 'often' and 'sometimes'	EAL pupils	Non-EAL pupils
Attending parent evenings	92%	92%
Individual appointments with staff	35 %	35%
Help with homework	53%	57%
Visit of entertainment evenings, e.g. quiz night, music concerts,	7%	13%

High parental engagement at home was especially reflected in the interviews with EAL students who referred to the considerable effort their parents made to overcome

language difficulties in order to help them with their homework. Below are some examples:

> Yes, when I have homework, like I'm translating this to Polish. They telling me what they know and then I translate this to English again. (Agnieszka, Polish Student, Parkland School)

> I saying what is writing in Lithuanian, she help me, but in Lithuanian. She can't speak English. (Bronius, Lithuanian Student, Parkland School)

> Yeah, I ask them on some questions, mostly maths. They just help me understand some of the equations that would help me understand because it's the same thing in English, just the words are different but the actual numbers and everything is the same thing. (Andrius, Lithuanian student, Parkland School)

5.3. Teachers' views on parental engagement at school and home

In both case-study schools, teachers used attendance of parents' evenings as a yardstick to define parental engagement and overlooked the other forms of engagement at school and at home, identified by Goodall and Vorhaus (2010) and outlined above. Several teachers reported that parents of EAL students were less involved in parents' evenings than parents of non-EAL pupils (although teachers had no 'hard data' to substantiate this assumption as reflected in the interview with a SLT member below). Other teachers saw attendance at parents' evenings determined by English language, parents' own educational experience or their levels of confidence:

> Non-EAL parents are more involved than EAL parents […] I don't have hard data to tell you but it is much worse. It's much worse than non-EAL. There's a much smaller involvement. EAL families are highly unlikely to come to parents' evenings here, we get very few even though we have phoned and tried to make appointments and so on. (SLT member, Kirkwood Academy)

> Again, it depends on the parents, depends on the families but not as involved as I would like them to be. And I understand because mainly all the EAL students, when their parents get here to work, they work hard. They work 12 hours, or they don't work 12 hours but they travel 12 hours and they find it very difficult. Some of them will take time off [for school visits] but very rarely [...] A problem is they won't dare to ask the employer. (EAL co-ordinator, Kirkwood Academy)

> Some are enormously committed. That tends to be people who come from, who are quite educated and aren't afraid of school. Even if they don't speak much English, they will come into parents' evenings and their child will go round with them and interpret. (EAL co-ordinator, Parkland School)

5.4. Discrepancies between parents', pupils' and teachers' views on parental engagement in their child's education

If we bring these perspectives on migrant parents' engagement together, we find that both migrant parents and EAL pupils reported high levels of parents' engagement at home and at school which resonates with the findings of Tereshchenko and Archer (2014) and Hamilton (2013). Parents' engagement did not necessarily tick a list of prescribed areas defined by the school (reflecting parental involvement) but reflected parents' own practices, knowledge bases and efforts to overcome barriers of engaging more effectively.

Most teachers (except for EAL staff) did not show awareness of the complex engagement practices which occurred in migrant families' homes and the considerable efforts parents made to attend and organise meetings at school. Instead, teachers focused especially on parent evenings, reflecting the concept of parental involvement rather than engagement. They tended to see parents of EAL pupils as having low attendance at parent evenings, which was neither backed up by school data nor by students' responses in the pupil survey. There was a danger that teachers negatively contrasted EAL parents with non-EAL parents assuming that EAL parents had generally low educational interest for their children's learning.

If parental engagement is understood as a 'shared landscape' between teachers and parents, our findings indicate that teachers (apart from EAL staff) were not aware of the parental side of engagement and many parents had little knowledge and understanding of the school's perspective. This indicates that there was unlikely to be joint discussions and decision-making between staff and parents regarding strategies for parental engagement.

These findings strongly suggest the need to establish a more transactional mode of communication, whereby effective feedback loops, an empathetic culture and readiness to respond to demographic change, could provide teachers with insights and data about the different ways migrant parents engage with their children's schooling. Vice versa, as part of a TSHS communication system, schools could develop in collaboration with migrant parents appropriate strategies to transfer successfully information from school to home so that parents' understanding and knowledge about their children's schooling can be improved. TSHS communication systems would challenge the efficiency of current home-school communications and potentially (wrong) assumptions about migrant parents' educational values and interest. Such systems would lead to an overall notion of parental engagement which is based on reciprocity, empowerment, empathy, change and opportunities for both parents and the school.

6. Barriers to parental engagement

Successful TSHS communication fundamentally relies on teachers' knowledge of the specific barriers parents of EAL students face. With such knowledge, effective counter strategies can be developed across the school.

6.1. Parental views on barriers to engagement

Parents' responses to the survey clearly indicated that they considered employment being a main barrier to their engagement at school. This applied to both schools but, particularly, to parents of pupils at Kirkwood Academy who were engaged in rural or rural related work (Table 6). 'Difficulties communicating in English' was another substantial barrier for Kirkwood parents while only one in five parents mentioned it in the Parkland sample. Childcare seemed to be a barrier at Parkland School, perhaps reflecting the specific family demographics of the school. The findings indicate a need for schools to gather information about barriers and to develop targeted strategies to enable parents' engagement.

Table 6: Barriers to engagement of parents of EAL students at school
(respondents could select more than one option) (Parental Survey, N = 61)

Barrier	Parkland School	Kirkwood Academy
Employment	43 %	88 %
Difficulties communicating in English	19 %	46 %
Childcare	22 %	4 %

Our interviews with parents of EAL children also confirmed that employment was an obstacle for engagement at school. Although parents of non-EAL students have work-related barriers, some parents of EAL students may have specific working conditions related to agency work in low skilled employment sectors (e.g. long and unpredictable shifts) (Author, 2011). As a result, Kirkwood parents highlighted the significant problem of having to arrange a meeting with teachers in advance (Authors, et al. 2016).

> Meeting a teacher is quite a difficult thing to do. For example, I have to take a day out of work and ask my employer for this. You know it's not easy. They know that one has a child and only for this reason asks for a free day. (Lithuanian Parent/ Carer, Kirkwood Academy)

With regard to engagement in their child's learning at home, parents listed subject content, a lack of understanding of the homework task and a lack of knowledge about assessment preparation as specific barriers (Table 7). Interestingly, resources and accessing homework tasks were not seen as problematic by parents in our study. The findings below show that English language was clearly a major barrier to offering help with homework for an exceptionally high proportion of the Kirkwood sample (79%). Parents at Parkland also struggled to support children's homework due to language barriers although it was substantially lower than at Kirkwood (35%). The findings in both schools show clearly that language barriers affect parents' support with homework tasks more considerably than their engagement at school.

Table 7: Barriers for parents of EAL students to help with children's homework and assessment tasks (Parental Survey; N = 61)

Barriers	Parkland School	Kirkwood Academy

Subject content	19 %	21 %
English language	35 %	79 %
Accessing the homework task	8 %	0 %
Understanding the homework system	19 %	17 %
Lack of knowledge about assessment preparation	14 %	25 %
Lack of resources (e.g. computer, books)	5 %	0 %

As a consequence of language issues, parents highlighted in the survey and in their interviews that they struggled with phone calls and preferred emails. They, or their children or friends, could take time translating emails and this did not interfere with work patterns. However, face-to-face meetings are also important for communication and digital devices such as skype meetings could overcome the logistic problems of combining difficult work schedules with travelling into school (Authors 2017).

It is important to note here, that 75 per cent of parents who completed the parental survey did not view the school website as a preferred communication tool. This finding is crucial as school staff in both schools assumed that information regarding homework, assessment, GCSEs etc. was accessible via their school's website. However, at the time of our research, these websites were in English and did not offer a translation facility.

Overall, the interviews and survey findings highlighted that the lack of translations and translators was a key barrier to parents' understanding and engagement, although parents made substantial efforts to meet their and their children's translation needs. Schools praised the parents for organising translators but parents emphasised the difficulties of arranging a translator and, therefore, were less engaged at school than they would have liked to:[10]

> You have to plan everything well; also, find the right person. Sometimes friends are available to help. However, there are situations when you would like to go to school but there is no opportunity to find a translator quickly. (Parent/Carer from Lithuania, Kirkwood Academy)

Schools and parents relied heavily upon parents' children or other EAL pupils to help with translations. However, Cline and Crafter (2014) problematise the use of children as translators, suggesting that schools should not primarily rely on pupils. A TSHS communication system for parents of EAL children cannot thrive without traditional and more innovative translation strategies as outlined further in section 7.

6.2. Teachers' views on barriers to parental engagement

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[10] It should be noted that parents showed high levels of empathy regarding schools' difficulties in providing translations and translators for multiple languages.

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Most teachers acknowledged that the low level of English of some migrant parents was the main barrier to their engagement with the school. Nevertheless, teachers did not seem aware of the wider implications this barrier had on parental knowledge and engagement at school and at home. Furthermore, strategies to counter the language barrier differed widely amongst school staff. Most teachers did not seem to be aware of the specific employment situations of migrant parents in the East of England and several suggested that all parents in employment have difficulties engaging with the school.

Translations of school information are a main strategy to counter language barriers (Cline & Crafter, 2014). However, the teachers we interviewed and surveyed reflected a variety of views on translations which were at times inconsistent and contradictory: they ranged from a view that no translations were needed to engaging EAL pupils to do the translation work themselves and to providing translations prepared by the EAL co-ordinator.

> No different communication than with the English parents. Most of the communication would go through your Head of Department or Head of House, rather than necessarily through the teacher. And obviously at parents' evenings you get to see who comes in. (English teacher, Kirkwood Academy)

> Again from a department point of view we don't sort of use *Google Translate* or anything, information goes home and the students can relay information. (Maths teacher, Parkland School)

> At the moment we are translating the letters in all the languages. The translation is not accurate because we are translating by computer *Google* and it's not accurate; but at least they have got an understanding of what this letter is about. (EAL co-ordinator, Kirkwood Academy)

Translations are an important dimension of TSHS communication and schools need to establish a consistent and effective system for translations. Although EAL students and EAL staff might offer support with translations, schools cannot rely on them as being their main translation strategy (Authors 2016; Cline & Crafter 2014).

6.3. Mismatches between parents' and teachers' views on barriers to parental engagement

Teachers in our study emphasised English as a general barrier to parents' engagement, however, they did not appear to know about the more specific barriers which parents of EAL students experienced. Furthermore, teachers' interviews revealed contradictory views and strategies relating to the translation of messages to parents. Neither school had an explicit policy on translations and translators. Changes in governmental funding allocations for bilingual teachers (in England) have exacerbated schools' difficulties of accessing translators and translations. Overall, TSHS communication can only thrive if schools collect more detailed data on parental barriers, inform staff about these barriers and develop targeted, innovative and holistic school strategies to counter these barriers.

7. Discussion and recommendations

Our aim in this article has been to outline the requirements for a transactional school-home-school (TSHS) communication system which offers feedback loops and an empathetic environment between school and home, reflected in teachers' awareness of migrant parents' views and experiences and parents' understanding of school's practices and objectives.

Overall, our study revealed in both schools substantial discrepancies between parents' and teachers' perceptions of parental knowledge, parents' engagement and barriers to engagement. A large proportion of parents emphasised their limited knowledge about their children's learning, high barriers to parents' engagement, notwithstanding, the strong parental support they offered to their children's learning (also confirmed in our pupil data). In contrast, teachers were not aware of significant gaps in parental knowledge, nor did they seem to be aware of the high levels of parents' engagement in their child's learning, or had details of the specific barriers that parents of EAL pupils faced.

Discrepancies between parents' and teachers' views are most probably the result of the fact that both schools relied mainly on linear forms of communication between school and home rather than transactional communication. Had schools developed more fluid, collaborative TSHS communication systems, this would have offered them effective feedback loops, fostered mutual understanding between teachers and parents which was based on knowledge and empathy, and helped schools respond more actively and successfully to continuous demographic change. As Bertram and Pascal (2007) and Hamilton (2013) point out, effective school communication systems are vital for migrant parents and their children, especially for those who have low levels of English and/or who have arrived recently in the UK.

Our research, even if small scale, showed that migrant parents are pro-active, innovative and resourceful, and (one could argue) resilient (Carreón, Drake & Barton, 2005). These values reflect important opportunities on the parental (home) side for an effective TSHS system, and the values themselves send important messages to the wider school community. However, there is a danger that, if teachers think migrant parents are coping, they may not reflect on the communication processes between school and home.

A TSHS communication system which is implemented across the school would involve all members of staff and address a number of key elements which are discussed below (Authors, et al. 2016):

(i)   Information and data collection

Schools could collect information and school data on parental knowledge and barriers to engagement at regular intervals and disseminate these to staff and parents. Targeted strategies which improve parental knowledge and counter barriers to engagement, should be developed on the basis of these data.

(ii)   Teachers' assumptions

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Schools could address teachers' assumptions, regarding parental knowledge, engagement and the barriers to engagement, which often reflect vast generalisations and are potentially wrong. Dissemination of research information and school data on these areas, as outlined above, would help to shift assumptions.

(iii)   Consistency of communication strategies, in particular translations

Strategies relating to TSHS communication need to be consistent across teachers, departments and the wider school. A school-wide policy of TSHS communication for parents of EAL pupils would help to provide a framework for such consistency. This relates especially to translations which are the key for tackling language barriers to engagement.

Governments need provide schools with sufficient resources to offer translations and translators. Additionally, regional, local and school-based resources could be brought together through Multi Academy Trusts, local authorities, community networks or informal parental networks to assist in the bilingual support of TSHS communication. This could, for example, include sharing translations of routine school information and sharing innovative strategies to overcome language barriers (Authors, et al., 2016). Reliance on pupils (parents' own children and/or other EAL pupils) as translators is problematic and should not be the main strategy for schools' communication with parents (Cline & Crafter, 2014).

Technological advances and increasing use of computers/tablets for student learning at school and at home can overcome language-related barriers and support transactional communication (if internet is accessible in the local area). Parents should be informed about IT training and access to computers at the school/ in the community, so that tools such as Skype meetings, podcasts and online translation sites can be used for TSHS communication.

Some schools are already using a service whereby parents can identify different languages directly on the school's website, so that all the information on the website (including attached letters) is immediately translated via Google Translate. Although Google Translate does not provide optimal translations of all languages, it offers an inexpensive way to improve communication with parents who have low levels of English. Other strategies such as simplifying the language for parental letters and developing glossaries of relevant words for parents in different languages can further support the communication process (Authors, et al. 2016).

(iv)   Parental empowerment

Transactional communication, in effect, is about empowerment. In order to empower migrant parents, schools need to be proactive in working with migrant parents, especially with those who have low levels of English and/or have recently arrived. To establish TSHS communication, schools could use innovative and non-traditional approaches of communication to access migrant parents and the wide range of academic and cultural opportunities that migrant families bring to schools (Devine 2009). Strategies could include: intergenerational meetings and 'in-person communication' (so-called *personalemente* in the context of Hispanic immigrants;

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Coady et al., 2008) and establishing parents as educational leaders (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; Ishimaru, 2014).

Schools need to offer continuous opportunities for migrant parents to become involved in school decision-making. The formation of parent networks is cost-effective and helps migrant parents understand the school system, to integrate, to disseminate knowledge about their experiences to staff and to participate in decision-making. It also offers opportunities to represent their own languages, knowledge, values and recommendations in the school and the wider community (Authors, et al. 2016; Ramalingam & Griffith, 2015).

(v)   Effective feedback loops

Effective feedback loops for TSHS communication are crucial and need to be implemented across the wider school including all teachers and departments, not just at the individual level between EAL staff and parents.

(vi)   School-wide TSHS communication policy

It is vital that schools develop a written (translated) TSHS policy for parents of EAL pupils which addresses the above mentioned areas: information and data collection, appropriate communication strategies, translation policies, parental empowerment and effective feedback loops.

The implementation of a TSHS communication system involves costs. However, several of the recommendations are not very costly, such as: the wider dissemination of information which EAL co-ordinators already have, a change in assumptions about migrant communities and the implementation of a communication policy for EAL. Recommendations relating to data collection and translation services are potentially more costly. Schools could reduce costs by tapping into networks in the community, developing parental ambassadors and networks, and accessing websites which offer templates of standard school information in different languages (Authors et al., 2016). Schools should also lobby the government to offer more funding for EAL provision as it will be for the short- to long-term economic and social benefit of the country.

8. Conclusion

We have argued that a TSHS communication system could help overcome the discrepancies between teachers' and migrant parents' perceptions on issues such as parental knowledge, engagement and the barriers to engagement. To implement such a communication system a range of wider issues would need to be addressed: (lack of) school data and information regarding migrant parents' views and experiences; staff's assumptions about migrant families; schools' inconsistent strategies with regard to translations; parental empowerment; effective feedback loops; and school-wide communication policies for migrant parents. Schools need to reflect on their communication practices, just as much as any organisation needs to do, making sure that they have addressed the demands and opportunities of an increasingly diverse, transnational and globally mobile world (Author, 2017). The arrival of migrant parents and their children, from whichever country and background, and however much they speak the language of the school – in this case English - is a litmus test of

the inclusive values of a country and their educational organisations (Author et al, 2010).

Appendix 1: (General) descriptive codes

Parents' knowledge and Understanding
Understanding of school system
Knowledge of child's learning
Parents' engagement
Interest in child's learning
Engagement at school
Engagement at home
Barriers to parents' engagement at school
Individual level
School level
Barriers to parents' engagement at home
Individual level
School level

Appendix 2: (General) pattern codes (teacher interviews)

Staff's lack of information
Parental knowledge
Parental engagement
Barriers to parental engagement
Lack of school data
Parental knowledge
Parents' engagement
Barriers to parental engagement
Teachers' positive attitude
Teachers' assumptions
Parental knowledge
Parental engagement
Barriers to parents' engagement
Central role of EAL co-ordinator
Understanding of parental knowledge, engagement and barriers to engagement
Transactional communication
Inconsistency across the school
School-home-school communication
Translations
Translations

Reliance on EAL pupils
Lack of effective feedback loops
Lack of wider school policy

Appendix 3 (General) pattern codes (parent interviews)

Proactive engagement
At home
At school
Investment
Translations at home
Translators for school meetings
Resilience
Overcoming barriers to engagement
Need for parental empowerment
Knowledge about school system and child's learning
Representation
Confidence
Opportunities
Parental interest in schooling
Parental resources

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Transactional school-home-school communication: addressing the mismatches between migrant parents' and teachers' views of parental knowledge, engagement and barriers to engagement

- Effective transactional school-home-school communication (TSHS) empowers migrant parents.
- Migrant parents' knowledge about the English schooling system cannot be assumed.
- Migrant parents' strong engagement in their child's education is not recognised.
- Teachers need to be aware of migrant parents' specific barriers to communication.
- The 'one-size-fits-all' school-home communication model disadvantages EAL pupils.