'When I get upset about my children's problem, I can't concentrate'- International students reflect on their roles as parents while studying in the UK.

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This article explores international student–parents'reflections about their children's difficulties as temporary sojourners in UK schools, and the ways in which they attempt to support them in the process of settling down at school. The data is drawn from qualitative research interviews (Richards 2003 and Hiller & DiLuzio 2004) with 25 student parents. The emerging themes focus on parents' attempts to assist their children with academic and linguistic problems and with making and maintaining friendships. A major theme emerges about the role of host schools, and also about the parents' emotional burden regarding their own compromised situation. The data reflects overall that the first year of sojourn is often more problematic than expected, and thus more research in this area is needed to address how universities interested in internationalisation can best support these student parents. Further, more research is needed into ways in which local schools, including both teachers and learners can best accommodate international children focussing on their unique competencies.

Keywords: parent roles, family, sojourners, international students, intercultural adaptation.

Introduction

A great deal of discussion has recently been devoted to proposed links between parents' involvement in their children's education and their children's attainment and progress at school (e.g. Greene & Tichenor 2003, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1997). While cultural variations exist, modern parenthood is constructed as embracing democratic values which include parents' responsibilities to understand their children's needs and development as well as the demands that society places on them (Vuorinen, 2010: 66). How do parents cope with these responsibilities when the whole family moves abroad and the parents take on a new role?

The parent participants in this paper constitute a group of mature, international students studying for their post-graduate degrees at a large UK university. The student- parents in this study are full time students to complete Masters or PhD programmes, and they are all in the first year of their temporary sojourn. The reason for their sojourn is to further their professional development and increase their competitiveness in the home labour market. The nature of the study they undertake varies across discipline areas, but, overall, they all face significant challenges in attending regular lectures and participating in seminar discussions, writing academic papers, and understanding and coping with a new culture of education.

Not only do most of these students take a career break and pursue academic studies in the UK, but they also relocate their whole family to the UK for the period of their study. Some relocate their children only, while others bring along their spouses as well. It is widely believed that bringing along their children is an invaluable opportunity to increase their 'cultural capital' in the global world (Norton 2000), mainly through access to English as a second language, but also through the experience of being immersed in a new culture. Despite high expectations and the perceived ultimate benefits, however, many of these families describe the first year of their sojourn as a time of difficulty that seriously affects their roles and

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responsibilities as parents as well as PG students in negative ways.

Our study indicates that international student/parents at UK universities need considerable support and guidance during their sojourn, not just in terms of their own academic studies but also as parents, otherwise they are unable to take full advantage of their period of study and life abroad. These insights carry important implications for UK universities that are currently keen on developing their internationalisation agenda as well as for local host schools where international children are accommodated. Since global travel, lifelong learning and internationalisation are priorities here to stay, more research is needed to understand how increasing numbers of student parents can be appropriately supported in their dual roles.

Background

Research has already explored international students' adjustment patterns and we also know a great deal about permanent immigrants, including immigrant families. In contrast, much less is known about temporary sojourner families and their experiences during their first year in the host country. For many, one year is the maximum time they will spend in the new culture and this short, intensive time brings special challenges. Typically, children from international families join local schools in the catchment area of the university and receive very little or no structured support from the school to help them adjust to the new cultural, linguistic and social context. Schools that receive short term sojourner children often do not make efforts to integrate them because due to their temporary status these children do not count towards their official assessment records. International children often speak no English at all and they do not necessarily share their parents' enthusiasm and motivation to adjust to a new culture. Even though the parents are fluent speakers of English, they possess hardly any knowledge or understanding about the UK school system.

Research on young, single adult sojourners, i.e. short term international students, has uncovered a great deal about how they cope with education overseas (Leong & Chou 2002). Fry (2007: 142) argues that the nature of their temporary stay tends to affect sojourners' interest in and commitment to the new culture in a positive way, and they exhibit high levels of motivation to adjust as quickly as possible. Studies have reported on how this adjustment happens, e.g. through sojourners' friendship networks with both co-national and host-national groups and other social systems (e.g. Bochner, et al 1976, Spencer-Oatey and Xiong 2006, Ward & Kennedy 1993). Other studies have targeted international students' inter-group perceptions and relationships (e.g. Leong &Ward 2000), their intercultural experiences (Schweisfurth & Gu 2009), and their commonly encountered problems inside and outside intercultural classrooms (e.g. Cortazzi & Jin 1997). Personal qualities, such as the most effective ways of dealing with stress and culture shock, have also been researched and identified (Matsumoto, Yoo & LeRoux 2007). While a great deal of research has targeted adult international students, families and children have been investigated to a lesser extent. Some studies have explored children's adjustment processes in international schools (e.g. Grimshaw & Sears 2008, Ezra 2003) and in complementary schools (e.g. Creese & Martin 2003) as well as bilingual immersion schools (e.g. Warriner 2007, Hawkins 2005). However, no research, to our knowledge, has targeted child - parent relationships and patterns of support that parents are able to offer to their children in their new role as student parents in the first year of sojourn. This focus is particularly important and timely. First of all, when the specific challenges these families encounter are described, such insights will help universities to support these mature students in their dual roles. The data can shed light on the changing nature of the support student-parents in transition are able to offer. With global travel, and intercultural work and study as the norm rather than the exception, many more parents in the future will face similar challenges, and will need to balance their roles as parents and students in an unfamiliar culture.

The literature on permanent immigrant families, although only indirectly relevant, suggests that children have an easier time than adults when it comes to adjusting to the new environment because they are more malleable and better exposed to the new culture through the school system (Garcia-Coll & Magnusson, 2005). When acculturation starts early, before primary school, the process seems a lot smoother (Beiser, et al, 1988). This may be because young children have not fully enculturated into their parents' own culture yet and because flexibility and adaptability are maximal during these early years. Older

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children tend to have more problems and some older children may experience substantial problems (Aronowitz 1984, Sam & Berry 1995, Yeh, 2003) particularly during adolescence. Despite these trends, however, Maccoby (1983) points out that no fixed linear relationship between age and vulnerability to acculturative stress has been established, and both Birman (2006) and Hernandez (2010) point out that individual family members do not have the same rate of acculturation but instead both adults or children can be faster or slower.

Despite being fluent in English, student-parents are under pressure and are often somewhat overwhelmed by the new academic environment and find that it is extremely challenging to juggle studying and looking after their families. Having no or little understanding about school life and culture, which is often very different from their own, they often feel helpless when it comes to advising their children and this is where the lack of school related support impacts on parents.

This paper reports on how student-parents make sense of their children's adjustment processes during this first, intense year of sojourn, and to what extent they feel they are able to offer support to their children in the role of parents.

Methodology

The original impetus for this study grew out of our everyday experiences with our own international students, many of whom were parents. We noticed that their experiences were very variable, and while some families enjoyed their sojourn and were able to take advantage of their opportunities, others were struggling and they often described their year of sojourn in negative terms.

Our ongoing study into the experiences of international families at a UK university is characterised as qualitative inquiry (Richards 2003) based on a constructivist approach, i.e. an attempt to understand the 'lived experiences' of participants using a variety of data collection tools. The underlying assumption is that that experiences are subjective and multiple (Creswell 2007). Our larger data set therefore brings together a variety of insights from interviews with parents, interviews, diaries and photo projects with children, group interviews with local (UK) children and interviews with teachers in local schools.

For the purposes of this paper, the data have been drawn from a pool of 25 parent interviews. In these interviews parents were invited to report on their reflections about their children's ability to settle down and cope at school and on their own role as parents in supporting them. The international parents are from different cultural backgrounds. It is interesting to note that it was mainly mothers who volunteered to participate in the study even though many of them were accompanied by their spouses. Some families had more children and were thus able to reflect on the differences between the children within the same family.

Table 1 summarises the background details of the participants.

The research focus centred on the following question: 'How do these parents make sense of their children's adjustment processes and how in turn do they attempt to assist their children in settling down at school'?

The interviews were in-depth narrative interviews with a broad focus, allowing participants to share their stories. In-depth interviews give a chance to the interviewees to construct their stories and dominate the conversation while the interviewer is engaged in 'the art of listening' (Richards, 2009:189). Narrative interviews were considered suitable because they bring the interviewees' actual voices in focus. In fact, Clandinin and Connelly (2000:18) argue that the 'narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience'. Murray (2009) notes that a specific limitation of narratives is that stories are not necessarily reflective of the historical truth, and people might not be revealing the whole truth, but, as Kouritzin (2000) points out, the accuracy of the stories is less important.

What is more important is the participants' understanding of the events and the impact these events have on their lives. In some cases our participants used these interviews as an opportunity to release their emotions and frustrations (a mixture of counselling/ narrative interview). According to Hiller and DiLuzio (2004) qualitative interviews that encourage participants to talk about experiences that had great personal impact often bring up highly charged, emotional responses and the whole process may have a cathartic role in helping participants make sense of and deal with their own difficulties.

Table 1. A summary of the background of participants.

Parent Participant code	Country	Age and status	Type of course	Children
P02	Columbia	Mother/ early 40s / spouse also studying at the university	attending an Intensive English Course in preparation for a PhD in Engineering	Boy (7)
P03	Cyprus	Mother/ late 40s/ spouse also studying at the university	Masters in Education	Boy (13)
P05	Mexico	Father/ mid-40s/ spouse not working or studying	Doctorate in TESOL	Boy (17) Boy(15) Boy(13), Girl (8) Boy (6)
P06	China	Mother/late 30s/ spouse back in China;	Masters in Education	Girl (8)
P08	China	Mother/ late 30s/ spouse back in China;	Masters in TESOL	Girl (9)
P12	Korea	Mother/ early 40s/ Spouse back in Korea	Maters Law	Boy (11)
P13	Korea	Mother/ late 40s/ spouse back in Korea;	Doctorate in Education	Boy (12) Girl (10)
P15	Korea	Mother/ early 40s/ spouse back in Korea	Masters in TESOL	Girl (8)
P17	Denmark	Mother/ early 40s/ spouse also studying at the university	Masters in Law	Boy (13); Girl (11)
P19	Greece	Mother/ late 30s/ single	Doctorate in Education	Boy(8)
P20	Korea	Mother/ mid 30s/ spouse back in Korea	Masters in Politics	Boy (11) Girl (8)
P21	Taiwan	Mother/ mid-30s/ spouse also studying at a different university	Doctorate in Education	Girl (10) and Boy (6)
P24	Greece	Mother/ mid-30s/ spouse back in Greece	Masters in TESOL	Boy (8)
P25	Columbia	Mother/ early 40s/ single	Masters in Chemistry	Boy (9)

For analysis the thematic approach was used (Braun & Clarke 2006) which consists of the following steps: familiarising oneself with the data set, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes (checking if the themes work in relation to the codes (level 1) and in relation to the entire data set (level 2) and, finally defining and naming final themes. First, codes were grouped and regrouped and then classified into categories once connections between some codes were established. Cross check and re-reading previously coded data helped to finalise key themes. The two researchers consulted one another about the codes and the emerging themes and discussed any discrepancies. All coding was done manually.

Analysis of the main findings

Academic/ linguistic support

Parents noticed that their younger children coped in UK schools better because the tasks were often broken up with flexible play activities or group activities where children could join in as and when they felt ready to. This more relaxed atmosphere in junior classes in UK schools was often contrasted by the rigidity and the monotony of similar classes particularly in Asian countries (Alexander 2000). However, older children were reported to be struggling more because of the complexities of the curricular subjects in higher grades. Here, for example, a Taiwanese mother is comparing her two children in year 5 and year 1 (aged 10 and 6), saying that the academic pressures and the language knowledge associated with the content in year 5 places her older daughter in a very difficult position, while her younger son can effortlessly join in with simple activities in year 1, such as copying and tracing letters.

P21: In year 5 actually my daughter she faces a lot of problems with science, with literacy, she could not write as the other students are writing some stories so she would do something else. But with R (younger brother) I think it is better, because everybody doing the letter and so he's doing the letter as well (..) for my daughter there's a lot of different words and she is doing architecture and history information. That's for her, every word is a new word to her and that she is very difficult in that part.

Parents report that their older children, who were typically high achievers and successful back at home, suddenly find themselves placed in groups with weak learners in streamed classrooms, or even in classrooms below their age group because of the their weak English skills. Sitting at the 'bottom table' and not being able to participate is a shocking experience for these children who are often academically talented but just lack the necessary linguistic resources to access the curriculum content in English. This Danish mother describes her son's difficulties with science and geography:

P17: I think when he tells me about things that are not so easy for him, it is science and geography, which are lessons where there are lots of words you don't understand, and it is difficult for him because he wants to understand, he wants to be part of it, he wants to know everything and normally he knows everything at home, it is strange for him not to be able to answer.

Despite not knowing exactly how to help, all parents in our sample attempted to offer both linguistic and academic support. This mother reports on a frequent strategy in the data set, i.e. borrowing books from the local library to read together. Even though it was unclear which books, which topics and which language structures and functions the children needed, regular reading of easy picture books was seen as beneficial.

P02: I borrow books from the library (..) I try to take notes from the book in English. And try to help him understand what he is saying.

Most parents were acutely aware of the difficulties their children were having at school but they felt lost when it came to understanding school curricula and school routines and did not know how to best help their children. They commented on the fact that it was impossible to know what the children were doing every day. The absence of set textbooks in school means that parents cannot work out what each day's exact topic or exercise might be so they feel they are not in control or unable to support their children directly. This parent comments as follows:

P20: If I could change one thing it would be textbooks. The teacher sometimes gives me paper about what is the school subject, they let parents know they are doing Romans, the Romans, just a single title, I thought she would give us…. In our country we have textbooks so you know what is happening.

Many parents also mention the lack of systematic English language support as a source of early problems for their children. One of the parents was so frustrated with the lack of support

that she decided to contract private services to help her children. Bizarre as it is, she sees the solution in sending her children back to Korea for a short time to study English with a private tutor so that their language skills are enhanced and they could better cope with the demands at school in the UK:

> *P13: Right now my children have a private tutor. I have also arranged for them to learn English as a second language in Korea as they have lots of institutes to learn as a second or a foreign language.*

Some parents told stories about how they decided to systematically tutor their children at home. In some cases this assistance was intense and all-consuming. This extract gives a flavour of how far some parents were prepared to go to support their children with language input as well as the curricular content.

> *P19: Because I wanted him to fit in with the group within Christmas, since we came in September, I borrowed all the help books, all the auxiliary books from the university bookshop, all this literacy. And we sort of studied at home (..) The objective would be for him to be among the top students in the class, the best in the class eventually (..) I borrowed lots of books and we sort of studied at home. And we read mother tongue books as well every night. So it was a nightmare!!*

As mentioned above, many parents were also concerned with tutoring their children in L1, covering curriculum areas from books in the mother tongue. This is seen as essential since the family will go back after the parent has gained their degree. All parents were deeply worried about how the children would re-adjust and pick up school work upon return to their country.

Social support: making friends and managing friendships

Consistent with the adult findings about psychological adjustments (e.g. Ying 2002), it seems that making friends in the very early stages of the sojourn is of crucial importance to have a chance to progress with gradual adjustment. The

literature about child development also emphasises the importance of friendships. Those who are accepted by their peers tend to do better at school compared to those who are on the periphery (e.g. Wentzel & Caldwell 1997). Having close friends in childhood can be linked to positive effects on the formation of social relationships in adulthood (Pahl 2000). Conversely, social isolation and friendlessness have been associated with adverse outcomes from early childhood to adulthood, and social isolation is a consequence as well as the cause of childhood adjustment problems (Laursen & Bukowski (2007: 1396). Friendship therefore is both a component and a consequence of social capital (Pahl 2000:143) and it can be an entry point 'into wider social networks'. In the case of international children, being in a new, unfamiliar culture, making friends is seen as of outmost importance. Here a Columbian mother is concerned that her son has only one friend, another L2 speaker who arrived at the school on the same day as her son. Arriving together and being in the same difficult situation is in fact the basis of their friendship:

> *P25: I am trying to make friends for him…(…) I try to teach him to play with other children because R (current friend) will stay here for a short time and then he leaves.*

This parent takes the responsibility of making friends for her son upon herself, because she feels that her son is unable to do that on his own yet. This following extract also indicates how another mother took responsibility for making friends for her children by negotiating with several people:

> *P12: B wants to make friends, friendship is very important in his life. Without friends he won't go to school... so I told the teacher that there is one boy he liked, that's F and the teacher talked about it to F's mother, and F's mum and I talked on the phone and in the morning I met her and she is a nice lady and she want B to come over to her house. And he's going to come to my house to our house yeah.*

The same parent further explains how she invited classmates to her house and scaffolded her son during joint play activities. First she translated a complicated game from Korean into English so

that her son could persuade the other children to play with him. Observing that complicated games did not work, she decided to organise simple, more physical games that did not require sophisticated language use, so that the children could enjoy playing together and hopefully 'bond as friends'.

> *P12: The first time when a friend came I just let them play together but I realise it is not going fluently so, because my son wants to explain something they want to play something very complicated game, he want me to translate. B, always, whenever B is with Korean friend he sets out the rule, very complicated rule, and so, he needed me, and it was very difficult. So I suggested some simple games so I arrange a chair, and tied a ribbon around the chair and with the balloon they could play volleyball.*

Parents also described how they were monitoring their children's developing friendships and when the children experienced any upsets they provided plenty of emotional support. Here is an example of a child who felt that her friend, by correcting her English all the time, was ruining their relationship. The parent was not only offering emotional support, but also attempted to extend the child's understanding of friendships.

> *P06: M told me that she got to feel hurt because her friend sometimes tried to correct her English for example, M said my mom buyed this for me, and her friend corrects her English and she said I think it's very mean and I told her it's not mean if they don't correct you will never improve.*

Another example below reflects the parent's attempt to console her child by explaining cultural differences relevant to friendships. This mother tells a story about how her son felt excluded when one of the children was distributing birthday invitations in the school line and her son was left out.

> *P24: One morning there was a little girl dancing and hopping in the school yard distributing birthday invitations to all the children and gave everyone an*

invitation, except D. He came with tears in his eyes and said: 'she did not give me one'. 'Don't worry' I said, at the time, she does not know you and in this culture if we don't know people we don't invite them to our places and he sort of calmed down or he would have cried I think.

The school's supportive role

Parents also realised that they were not really able to support their children fully without the school's support. The willingness of the host environment to notice and accommodate these children is essential. Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) in the context of the presence or absence of supportive host environments go as far as stating that the ease with which children are accepted into a new language community is dependent mainly on the willingness of the new culture to accept new members. This is echoed by a large body of ethnographic research with ESL (English as a second language) children in Canada and Australia (e.g. Toohey 2000, Miller 2003). Many parents in our data set, especially those whose children were in schools with very few other (or no other) international children, have reported a total lack of support, down to complete isolation in the beginning weeks where these children became 'invisible'. In this extract, a mother is reporting on her son's painful experiences in a science lesson where the teacher failed to acknowledge his presence.

> *P03: My son was just sitting on his own, all by himself, the others were sitting in groups, with 3 or 4, so he was on his own, and the others had some projects that they were working on, and he was sitting there, hmm, what am I supposed to do and the teacher was not really doing anything even when he saw that he did not know (..) and that was hard for him. He cried at school that day.*

Similarly, this Greek mother shares an emotional story about her son being left alone in the corner, isolated from everyone else in the class.

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P24: Other pupils wouldn't talk to him, wouldn't play with him he was just sitting in a corner. It has been difficult.

Our data is rich in such negative examples, and only one or two positive stories emerged. These positive examples come from schools where international students are greater in numbers and where both children and teachers specifically look out for newcomers in the classroom as well as on the playground. This Korean mother felt that her daughter at school was given special attention by the teaching assistant, especially in terms of encouraging her to read. This attention by the teacher led to heightened levels of motivation and when the student was rewarded with a prize, a positive cycle of encouragement, motivation leading to improvement was set in motion:

P15: My daughter told me that she got promoted, her reading book is promoted. She has been reading catch up 6. Now she is promoted to 7. She gets a prize for that from the teacher and the teacher really encourages her because she tries really hard and every weekend she tries to read. 'Mommy listen to me I am reading this 5 times, you need to write down I've read 5 times'.

In the next extract a Taiwanese parent is describing her daughter's chance to give a short presentation to the whole school. This is by far the most positive example in the whole data set.

P21: Because my daughter is the eldest Chinese student in the school Mrs R asked her to do a presentation about how we celebrate our Chinese New Year at home. She presented almost 5 minutes in front of the whole school (..) And after that her confidence boost up. When she finished, everybody clapped and she felt great and everybody is saying she is doing very good. (…) She is very confident after the first term, after the Chinese presentation. She kind of speaks out in English.

In the case of this child, an opportunity to demonstrate a unique mixture of competencies, i.e. to be able to give a bilingual presentation even if very brief, and to share content knowledge with both teachers and learners in front of the whole school, proves to be an excellent confidence booster. The emphasis is put on the child's specific strengths rather than her weaknesses. Giving a presentation in front of the school means showcasing what this child is already knowledgeable about. According to the mother, her daughter's attitude and outlook on school changed completely as a result of this single significant event. This incident also indicates that some schools are able to take at least some advantage of international children's cultural knowledge and their unique abilities even if their L2 knowledge is limited.

Emotional reactions

Hiller and DiLuzio (2004) suggest that qualitative research interview participants often have their own agenda as to why they wish to or agree to participate in a study. Similarly to their own study, where submerged feelings of participants surfaced under interview conditions, we also found that our participants used the interview to move gradually from 'front stage' to 'back stage' discourse, in that they revealed deep and complex feelings of frustration and helplessness about their own situations. Even though the intended focus of these interviews was about how these parents supported their children, another theme emerged around the frustrations of being a parent and trying to study at the same time. Here is an example of an emotional statement from a mother, who in the end decided to abandon her studies at the university because of her children's difficulties:

P13: I never have friends, you know, who I can discuss or get some advice. I got emotionally hurt and my son had a great emotional shock as well. My son always cried a lot and he wanted to go back to our country.

For children, friendship is an essential part of the socialisation process and because of their age and context it can happen very quickly. However, the situation is different for parents - where friendship can be a source of essential support – and it can be hard in a short time to forge close friendships that would bear this sort of pressure.

Many other statements like this illustrate that the hybrid role of functioning as a student and a parent in a new culture puts unique pressures on these parents. This next statement is from a parent who identifies herself as a 'victim':

P19: The only victim is myself (...).I had no option, no social life, I was feeling pressurised. I did not have many help with him, someone to babysit for me to go out, you know. So, the whole thing was difficult for me, you know, not for him. He sort of coped with it because he had my support, I had nobody's support.

Similarly, a father is talking about 'suffering' and he admits that he feels for his children as it is very challenging for them to fit in.

P05: At times there is suffering. We have thought, well, have not used this word with my wife, not in front of the children, but this is suffering (..) I try to understand it. I try to be in my children's shoes. It is very challenging.

Even those parents who have evaluated their experience as positive and rewarding, overall, admit that it was not easy to manage in the dual roles:

P12: It was not easy. When I get upset about my children's problem, I can't concentrate. I try not to work while they are at home, I try to work before, until the last minute they finish… and after they get to bed I start to work from 10 and until late at night. That's how I manage. (…) The most thing I regret is the life I had. They've had fine, I mean my children they've enjoyed it more than I expected actually, whereas I did not have the opportunity.

Discussion

International students who relocate their families do so because they passionately believe that this is a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity for the children to broaden their cultural and educational horizons (Norton, 2000). However, overall, it seems that sojourner children's adaptation in local

schools is far from unproblematic. As our data testifies, processes of adaptation for these children are often negative during the first year, and these experiences translate directly into additional emotional and psychological burden for parents who are themselves going through a testing time. Like one mother put it *'At least my son had my support, I had nobody's support. It was very tough.'* These parents, all of a sudden, find themselves to have to support their children by helping them make friends and tutor them in English so that they can access the curriculum at school. These additional tasks put extra strain on the parents causing anxiety and worry that they did not have in the home context.

Even in the case of highly educated parents, who wish to support their children and indeed do their best to do this, a new, dual role in a new cultural environment means that they are facing considerable challenges. Presumably, parents who undertake employment in a new country and who have no academic background would find it an even bigger challenge to support their children adequately in their new schools. More research needs to focus on how cultural transition and taking on new roles can affect parents.

Student-parents who struggle with their dual role in a new cultural environment should represent a concern for host universities that aim to attract such international families. UK universities need to explore and understand international families' lives and needs, otherwise there is a danger that they lose excellent quality PG students or these students cannot fulfil their true potential. Local support networks need to extend beyond academic support and offer family support directly relevant to parents with children in local schools. In addition, introductory briefings at universities or pre-departure briefings should be organised to highlight to families in advance some of the specific challenges parents and children may expect to face while living abroad. More research should address families in internationalisation and higher education.

There is also a range of positive strategies local schools as host environments can introduce to help international children to fit in better from day one (Bialystok & Hakuta 1994). It seems that particularly in schools where the number of international students is low such proactive approach is crucial because otherwise children can easily become 'invisible'. Raising teachers' awareness about international children's difficulties and their specific status in schools may

be an important first step. Such awareness-raising may include introducing strategies to acknowledge and monitor these children's competences, such as their developing bilingual competence, which was so well exploited in one of the schools by asking a student to give a short bilingual presentation. These strategies should focus on noticing competencies rather than emphasising weaknesses. Specific English as a second language help - wherever it is available – should be targeted at concrete learning goals, rather than organised in an 'ad hoc' manner. One of the participating parents, for example, explained that linguistic help (English as a second language) was offered to her daughter at school but it was far from appropriate:

> *P08: Sometimes she (the language assistant) comes to pick my daughter up when the other students are having fun in the sports class, but she does not want to miss the sports class that's why she does not enjoy that. She sometimes brings home materials she has done with the support teacher but it's kindergarten stuff (..) you know, cutting and putting the nose and eyes.*

Teachers in local schools may also find information about school systems in other parts of the world useful so that differences between the UK schools system and other countries are better understood and international children's immediate difficulties are better appreciated. Such a comparison may also focus on what may be surprising to parents in the UK system as compared to what they are used to elsewhere (such as for example, a heavy reliance on textbooks and rote learning in many cultures). It would also be beneficial to raise teachers' awareness about the emotional strain these families are under, or the fact that international children are quite heavily burdened at home with additional mother tongue homework. In addition to raising teachers' awareness about international families, local children's awareness must also be raised so that they can appreciate their international classmates' situation. There is a clear gap identified for research focussing on the host environment as well.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this study indicate that parents find it hard to juggle their new role with parenting in a new cultural environment. One limitation of the current study is that it only explored the stories of a small group of parents at one university, so the results and outcomes cannot be generalised. A great deal more research is needed internationally with large numbers of student/parents to explore these experiences. The findings from such research will have important implications for host schools that welcome these children, for universities that attract international families, for international families that consider a period for sojourn overseas, and for parents taking on new roles overseas. In our modern, fast moving world, where more and more families are uprooted for short term sojourn overseas and it is our duty as researchers to understand their experiences and respond with more appropriate support.

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