

Sojourner parents' perspectives on their children's adaptation processes during their first year in the UK

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Abstract

Higher education in the UK is becoming more and more international and internationalised and an increasing number of student-parents bring along their families to live in the UK during their period of post-graduate study. Whilst a great deal of research has targeted adult international students as sojourners, no research to date has focussed on the experiences of their children as accompanying sojourners placed in UK primary schools. This study aims to begin to fill a gap by reporting on the perceptions of four parents who were interviewed about their children's experiences of settling down in local schools reflecting on the first year of stay. The results indicate that despite our initial expectations that child sojourners would have largely positive experiences, there is a great deal of variability with regard to the difficulties these children experience and the ways in which they cope. The most frequent factors that parents identified as essential for successful sojourner child adaptation included: (1) interpersonal resources to establish friendships, (2) an inclusive/ welcoming environment and (3) education related coping strategies. The discussion compares and contrasts the four children's experiences according to these themes. Implications for sojourner families, host universities and host schools are raised and a plea is made for further research.

Keywords: international students, parent sojourners, child sojourners, adaptation,

1. Introduction

Due to an ever-increasing level of internalisation and globalisation in British higher education institutions, many universities have introduced explicit strategies to attract mature international students (sojourners) to complete masters and doctoral degrees in the UK. Sojourner students typically spend between 6 months and 5 years in their host country (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001: 142). They are voluntary, temporary residents who are expected to exhibit high levels of motivation to adapt to their new environment. As Fry (2007:142) points out the nature of this temporary stay will affect sojourners' interest in and commitment to the host culture and they are likely to have a more 'intense' and more positive motivation to engage with the new culture than is typically the case with immigrants.

Whilst research related to adult or adolescent sojourner adaptation is plentiful, no research to my knowledge has focussed on the experiences of 'sojourner children' (Key stage 1 & 2) of international students even though more and more international students decide to relocate some or the whole family for the period of their sojourn in the UK. International student-parents who bring along their children often see the period of their sojourn as an invaluable opportunity to increase the children's 'cultural capital' i.e. the children's future chances in the global world (Norton 2000), mainly through learning English as a second/ global language which they take as an automatic consequence of placing them in local schools. However,

these children are often left in schools without much help and support and very little is actually known about their experiences during the first year in their new environment. This study takes a first step in this direction by reporting on four international student-parents' perceptions of their children's experiences as sojourners in UK schools focussing on their first year of stay.

1.1. International student sojourner adaptation

A great deal of research has been conducted to date with adult international student sojourners (see Leong & Chou 2002 for a literature review). Research has been conducted related to friendship networks with both co-national and host-national groups and other social systems (e.g. Bochner, Buker & McLeod, 1976, Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987, Chataway & Berry 1989, Ward & Kennedy 1993, Ong 2000), inter-group perceptions and relationships (e.g. Leong & Ward 2000), intercultural experiences (Schweisfurth & Gu forthcoming) commonly encountered problems inside and outside intercultural classrooms (e.g. Cortazzi & Jin 1997, Pratt, 1991, Liberman 1994) patterns of adaptation during the sojourn period (e.g. Ward & Searle 1991, Ward & Kennedy 1993, Kennedy 1999) and adaptation after returning home (e.g. Zapf 1991). Individual variables such as personality have also been explored. For example, locus of control, i.e. individuals' tendency to attribute success or failure to internal or external factors received considerable attention (e.g. Ward, Chang & Lopez-Nerney 1999, Hung 1974, Searle & Ward 1990). In addition to adult international students, younger students/ adolescents have also been explored (e.g. Kuo & Roysircar 2005, Hwang & Watanabe 1990 and Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006) although much less is known about younger, secondary school/senior school age students.

Ward and Kennedy (1993: 222) have proposed that cross-cultural adaptation can be divided into psychological adaptation (emotional and affective) and sociocultural adaptation (behavioural). Ward (1996) argues that psychological adaptation can be best understood in terms of a stress and coping framework and Ward & Kennedy (1999) suggest that psychological adjustment is affected by personality factors, life changes, coping styles and social support.

One influential and well known framework associated with psychological adaptation was developed by Berry (1997: 15). At the level of individuals, Berry suggests that there are two set of factors to consider: moderating factors prior to acculturation and moderating factors during acculturation. The first set of factors includes aspects of the individuals such as age, gender, expectations, cultural distance and personality. These are relatively stable factors that individuals arrive with in the new environment. The second set of factors include acculturation strategies the individuals may apply, their attitudes and behaviours and their resources, for example, their ability to draw on social support around them. This 'stress and coping' framework is a comprehensive model that attempts to combine all known factors involved in acculturation. As Berry puts it (2005:702) the framework 'serves as a map of those phenomena that need to be conceptualised and measured during the acculturation process'.

One robust finding from research about sojourners is that international students who have the ability to execute effective interactions with host nationals (i.e. who exhibit high levels of sociocultural adaptation (Ward 2001) adjust well psychologically whilst isolation and perceived prejudice seem to be the main causes of adjustment difficulties (Ying 2002). Kuo & Roysircar in a recent paper (2005) which focussed on teenage Taiwanese unaccompanied

sojourners in Canada found that teenage sojourners who were able to acclimate themselves to the new academic and linguistic environment became better adjusted psychologically. In addition, the nature of their relationships with host nationals was vital to their psychological well-being and participants' interpersonal competence was found to be a key mediator of acculturative stress. Kuo & Roysircar argue that these factors are crucial in the adaptation processes of unaccompanied teenage sojourners. To what extent are these important factors for younger child sojourners? What role does age play in these processes?

1.2. The age factor: child adaptation

In the absence of specific research focussing on sojourner children, here we draw on the literature of immigrant children and children in international schools (frequent travellers) to discuss the effect of age on adaptation. Research on immigrant children's adaptation patterns seems to suggest that they have an easier time than adults because they are more malleable and better exposed to the new culture through the school system (Garcia Coll & Magnusson, 2005). However, on closer look it appears that the age of the child influences the process of acculturation in a complex way. When acculturation starts early, before primary school, the process seems a lot smoother according to Beiser, Barwick, Berry, Da Costa, Fantino, Ganesan, Lee, Milne, Naidoo, Prince, Tousignant & Vela, 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. With regard to the nature of social attachments, a young child considers a friend anyone who is available to play with rather than someone special who is a source of emotional support or trust (Maccoby 1983). Consequently younger children have fewer problems leaving their friends and making new friends. School-aged immigrant children show a more varied picture than preschool children but on the whole they still acculturate faster than their parents (Baptiste 1993, Leslie 1993). This is explained by the formal education received in contrast to most immigrant adults. Older children tend to have more problems and some older children may experience substantial problems (Aronowitz 1984, Carlin 1990, Ghuman 1991, Sam & Berry 1995) particularly during adolescence. This is usually explained by the high levels of tension between parents and adolescent children and by the developing sense of identity and belonging in teenagers who are presented with the task of developing a more complex identity in a bicultural context. Despite these trends, Maccoby (1983) points out that no linear relationship exists between age and vulnerability to acculturative stress since coping responses also change with age. In general, older children can learn to cope better. In addition to the age of the child, the sex of the child has been associated with a variation in response to acculturative stress with young boys showing more stress than girls (Rutter, 1983).

The initial period of anxiety that adults experience is equally applicable in the case of children too. Research in the context of international schools with frequent travellers showed that children experienced frequent fatigue and anxiety related physical symptoms such as stomach problems and headaches during their initial weeks in the host environment (Ezra, 2003). Naturally, one of the most important influences on the children's processes of adaptation over time are the parents themselves. Athey & Ahearn (1991:10) suggest that 'the ability of the family to provide a strong sense of safety and support to the child serves as a buffer against external threats and plays a large role in how well the child functions and develops' and equally parents' own responses to migration will have an effect on the child's stress responses. In addition to family support, the bond of friendship is a significant factor in helping children pass through the acculturation process with ease (Ezra 2003). Peer group acceptance is a major factor in the acculturation of the child into the school environment and

the level of the child's social skills is directly related to the ease with which he/she is accepted (Pollock & Van Reken 1999). In fact Bialystok & Hakuta (1994) 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 children in Canada and Australia (e.g. Toohey 2000, Miller 2003). With regard to personality issues, in international schools Ezra observed that 'a child who has a strong personality, who is independent, confident and a risk-taker, is more likely to adapt with ease to new situations.' (Ezra 2003:139 and McLachlan, 2007).

2. The study

2.1. The rationale

Within the literature on immigration, Garcia-Coll & Magnusson argue that a major focus for future research should be to understand children's positive and negative experiences during their period of adaptation.

'What we have yet to address is what determines whether the experience will be positive or negative, or what combination of positive and negative effects will be manifested for any child. The answer seems to be that every child faces dialectical forces, challenges that can be positive or negative depending on the individual's characteristics, the family's characteristics and the immediate and larger contextual forces that influence children, adolescents, and their families. (Garcia-Coll & Magnusson 2005: 130)

We argue that it is also important to understand the experiences of sojourner children who accompany their parents during their period of study overseas. Many sojourner children stay only for one year if their parents are enrolled to do a Masters course and this means that they only have a relatively short time to adjust to life in a new country. Others, whose parents are engaged in doctoral studies may have a longer period of time, up to 3-4 academic years, but in either case the experiences of the first year are of great importance. As Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder (2006) argue longer residence will inevitably lead to better integration into the host country. However, for those who stay only one year, are there actually sufficient benefits to be gained? In this paper our aim is to find out what positive and negative experiences these children have and how these experiences are reported and interpreted by their parents. We will attempt to match the emerging themes from four parents to factors described in the psychological stress and coping framework.

This paper thus seeks to answer the following research question:

*According to international student-parents, **what factors determine** whether the first year of sojourn is a largely **positive or negative** for their children in the UK?*

2.2. Participants: mothers and children

Four parents participated in this study and thus we compare the experiences of 4 children: 2 girls and 2 boys, (without focussing on their sibling relationships) after their first year in the UK. At the time of the study all four mothers (Sook, Vera, Clare and Sam) were PG students

pursuing either an MA or EdD course in Applied Linguistics at our university centre. Sook, Vera and Sam were in the UK on their own without a partner, juggling both study and childcare while Clare had her partner to support her.

All four mothers were experienced second language teachers by profession and thus our assumption was that their children were especially well supported because of their mothers' knowledge and understanding of issues around language, culture, teaching and learning. Given also the parents' high socio-economic status and their high levels of motivation and commitment to make their own and their children's sojourn as fulfilling as possible, our original expectation was that the parents of these four children would all have largely positive experiences to reflect on at the end of the year.

The four children were between the ages of 8-11 (Key stage 2). They had all had some experience of elementary schooling in their home countries and they all had learnt some English before they arrived although in some formal learning contexts this may have been as little as just one hour a week. Having arrived in England they were enrolled in different primary schools and they were placed in classrooms where no other children shared their sojourner status or their first language. In terms of country of origin, two of the mothers were from Korea (Sook and Sam), one from Greece (Vera) and one from Taiwan (Clare).

2.3. Data collection method

Following a general call for more process oriented approaches in the acculturation and adaptation literature (e.g. Fuligni 2001), this study attempted to focus on the first year as a 'process'. Since children are likely to alternate between periods of stability and rapid change in their attitudes and behaviours (Garcia Coll & Magnusson 1997) during the first year, an exploratory, qualitative approach was employed to gain insights into parents' views and perceptions about their children's experiences. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two parents (Sook and Clare) three times during the academic year 2005/06 or 2006/07 (October, March and July). The other two parents were only available once (Sam and Vera) at the end of the academic year and thus they were only interviewed once.

In the semi-structured interviews the mothers were invited to reflect on their children's positive and negative experiences during their first year as sojourner children in the UK. In particular they were asked about:

- how they felt their children were settling in at school;
- what positive and negative experiences the children had at school;
- how they would explain and interpret these experiences;
- how they would evaluate their children's first year in comparison with their initial expectations;

The rather long interviews, which lasted about 1.5 hours each, were then transcribed and coded according to emergent recurring themes in relation to both positive and negative experiences the parents reported with regard the children 'settling in' or 'not settling in' well. The emerging themes were matched to psychological stress- coping framework for adaptation.

All interviews were conducted in English all parents and children are referred to by pseudonyms to protect their identity.

In the next section the 4 accounts will be given and some discussion of the emerging issues will follow afterwards.

3. Results

3.1. Sook's reflections on May's first year as a child sojourner in the UK

May came to the UK at the age of 8 with her brother and her mum from Korea. Their father stayed in Korea while their mother was enrolled in a PG MA in ELT course. The children understood clearly that they were going to stay in the UK for a whole academic year to support their mother in getting a higher degree and then a more prestigious job back at home. May learnt some English back in Korea but on arrival she found it very difficult to understand anything at all. Despite this, when asked about how May settled down at school, Sook explained that after the initial couple of days when the teachers reported that May had headaches and stomachaches, she actually settled down remarkably happily at school. In fact Sook commented that she was amazed at the speed with which May set about the task of settling in and making friends:

SOOK(November): I don't understand, because it was the second week of, second week and my daughter was already invited to a birthday party and by that, straight after that she was invited once again. I thought my son's English was better than my daughter's but my daughter is better at making friends.

SOOK (November): Her favourite thing is friend. When, in the morning when I take her to school there is a, sometimes that I need to wait at the playground until the teacher comes out, but I gave up. She does not stay with me, she'd rather play with her friend from earlier. I feel left out so I just drop her off and go.

Not only did May acquire some friends early on but she soon became the leader of her friendship group.

SOOK (November): She is the leader of the group. She made yesterday, she made folded paper which looks like a bowl and she wrote down every, everybody, I mean her favourite friends' name and she said this is this is that's for our group. I am going to make this group as I want..... she always finds something to give her friends when she goes back. When she prepare for tomorrow lesson she always put something for her friends, like sweets, a small accessory, stickers.

Sook was genuinely surprised by her daughter's confidence and her excellent coping strategies for school. She reported that May practised phrases she heard at school all the time at home and she very rarely relied on her mother for help.

SOOK (March): On her own, when nobody is listening, she is looking at the mirror and she practises. If I try to correct her pronunciation like: I can found, I try to correct, it is find. And she would not accept it. If I give her more assistance to make variation of the phrase then she might accept.

In addition to practising phrases, Sook suggested that May was coping well because she worked out a way of dealing with her lack comprehension. Whenever she did not understand something, she simply ignored the information and quickly moved on.

SOOK (March): If she doesn't understand, she does not care about the question and she goes on to the next topic and the question she does not seem to care about that problem. She can still carry on without being embarrassed.

Sook explained that her daughter was from the start very eager to participate in class whenever she saw a chance. To her mother's surprise she always tried to take an active part in all lessons. This is what Sook noticed one particular day after just a few months in England:

SOOK: (March) I had to go to her class to pick her up early and by accident I look at the class from the win-, outside the window, at that moment she was raising her hand and participating in the class. I didn't know what she was talking but she said she could sometimes raise her hand and answer the teacher's question.

May was very good at maths which helped her to stand out in her class. Many children from Asian educational backgrounds find mathematics less challenging because the curriculum in these countries is somewhat ahead of the UK curriculum in terms of its content. In addition, numbers, symbols and shapes mediate communication more easily than words and thus maths will help facilitate successful communication. May was keen to exhibit her independence when it came to maths homework:

SOOK(July): For math I don't try to help but when she sometimes there is a question that involves understanding of the language I try to translate, and the reading book, I try to help but May insist-, she's better than I am so she doesn't she reject my correction.

On the whole May constructed herself as an independent, competent child who not only coped well but took charge of her year in England. She finished her school year in the UK very happy and with an excellent school report that praised her enthusiasm and success. Towards the end of the school year she had her 9th birthday party to which many children from her class were invited. It was a great success, a real testimony to her popularity at school. She went home to Korea with lots of email addresses of friends. Her ability to adapt to life in a UK school significantly surpassed her mother's expectations and Sook felt bringing her children over to the UK while she was studying was an excellent decision, a really worthwhile financial and cultural 'investment'.

3. 2. Vera's reflections on David's first year as a sojourner in the UK

David and his mother were from Greece and Vera was also pursuing an EdD degree in Applied Linguistics at our university. Vera had completed her Masters degree at the same department a few years before and she decided to rent the same off-campus flat that she had lived in during her MA studies. Vera knew there was a primary school right next to her house so she enrolled David (aged 7) in that school. When asked to reflect about the very beginning of the year, Vera said she remembered the first few days vividly because of David's frustration and the difficulties in settling in:

VERA: The first days were difficult because he would not speak a word. He was sort of silent. When I asked 'How did it go?' he just said 'I don't know, I did not

understand anything'.It was difficult because other pupils wouldn't talk to him, wouldn't play with him and he was just sitting in the corner.

Being on his own was what defined David's experience at school and his mother remembers a particularly painful episode that happened just a few weeks after starting school:

VERA: 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 David. 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 Greece 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.

After the initial silence, Vera noticed that David began to speak to some of the children but there was still a problem in that he wouldn't speak to the teachers at all. Vera, being a language teacher, decided to take matters into her own hand:

VERA: As a teacher I came up with ways to help him because if I had left him on his own, because he would come up with the language but like two years afterwards. .. I borrowed lots of books and we sort of studied at home. And we read Greek as well every night. So it was a nightmare!!

Both mother and child lived and worked according to a very strict regime throughout the first year, learning English and reading both Greek and English after school.

VERA: I remember I was coming from school. I did not have a car and I had to walk two hours to get to the university and I still had his Greek and English lessons in the evening. And then I was waiting for him to go to sleep at night and then I'd start working until 1am.

It was hard for both of them but Vera felt that it was not the work or the lack of English that continued to bother David most, instead he was unhappy because he was not making friends and was not fitting in.

VERA: The most important thing for him was not language itself, it was how to cope with pupils who come from different cultural background. The most, the most difficulties he had were mostly how to deal with pupils who undermine him, want to put him down, and he had a serious conflict with one of the pupils.

By the end of the first year David improved a lot and went up several grades in his reading scheme, improved his English and his participation at school. Vera noticed that as soon as David was promoted to work with a group of children who were of high ability, people around him became more accepting and welcoming.

VERA: He has been showing signs of developing the language but at the moment he started being in the top table in both literacy and numeracy, I have seen parents I don't want to say the wrong word but they were let's say 'friendlier' to us.

David also noticed in class that once he was progressing with his work and sat with the high achievers, it was easier to make friends:

VERA: I heard him say once: Did I have to be a top student for them to start playing with me? He felt like he had to be a good student for them to approach him otherwise he would just be in the margin.

On the whole Vera evaluated their first year as a complete ‘nightmare’ for both of them. As a language specialist she kept convincing herself that her son’s difficulties had to be temporary and indeed David’s second year turned out to be much happier. Nonetheless the first year was evaluated in surprisingly negative terms.

3.3. Clare’s reflections on Tina’s first year as a sojourner in the UK

Tina (aged 10) arrived in the UK from Taiwan with her mother, father and a younger brother. Both parents gave up their academic jobs in Taiwan to further their careers in the UK. Tina’s mother was also enrolled in an EdD programme at the university. The first few weeks were especially dramatic for the family because initially the two children were not accepted in the same primary school as a result of lack of space. The parents had to appeal and eventually after winning the appeal the children started to settle down in the same primary school.

When asked to reflect about the first few days of Tina, Clare reported a great deal of anxiety. Although Tina learnt some basic English in Taiwan, Clare did not think she had enough English to be left alone at school.

CLARE (November): On the first day the teacher, the class teacher came and, then the class time, and the teacher came and just bring her into the classroom and she has no idea: Did I have, can I go with her? And it is no, no, no it is just stay there. Only she can go in, and she is bit shocked and I say: ‘Be brave!’ She said: ‘Mummy, mummy good bye’. Actually I was worried cause she although she had real English abilities, but not enough for her to be alone there.

Despite these early anxieties, Tina seemed to settle down quite well according to Clare. She commented on her classmate’s welcoming and inclusive approach to her daughter:

CLARE (November) : She is quite good with the school, I mean the class. All the other students are quite helpful and they are trying to talk to her and also in the school work, they are helping quite a lot. Both girls and boys. I am not expecting that she’s settled in quite well and she is enjoying a lot.

Clare also commented that Tina was gaining confidence to speak to teachers:

CLARE (November): My daughter I think has the confidence to speak English among friends is better, a lot better but still she is afraid to speak to teacher. Only that Mrs C – that language teacher. But Mrs S, her teacher is year 5, she is a bit afraid to speak to her. What I remember was she says something to her and Mrs R said ‘well done’ to her and she was so happy!

In addition, Tina developed a close relationship with the language support helper, Mrs C. She gave her confidence and Tina cherished the time she could chat with her:

CLARE (March): My daughter says she is just like a grandma grandmother. And she is so close to her and she can talk a lot. ... She is the most important teacher for her. She kind of looking forward to meeting her each week...For Tina I think mainly she chat with her and Tina love her so much. And this term, they kind of have extra golden time. The golden time means they can have more time to play outside ... and then Mrs C. came in said her golden time is me. And she would rather spend time with Mrs C. than go out and play.

In January a turning point came for Tina. There was a significant event in her life that helped her to become more confident and more reassured as a sojourner child in this school. She was asked to make a presentation in front of the whole school as the eldest Chinese student.

CLARE (March): 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.

Clare said that after the presentation Tina became a 'different person'. She began to talk a lot in English, even at home. Tina often accompanied her mother to parties and to see neighbours and she enjoyed chatting to people more and more.

Towards the end of the first year though when Tina moved to a different table in her class to work with a different group of children, she suddenly felt rejected by her new group and could not make new friends.

CLARE (July): There are some girls sometimes like to they don't they always have some problems. Today friend, tomorrow not you are my best friend and that's mainly her relationship with her classmates. When she gets into the new group she is not very happy at the new group. Has complained about certain group members discredit her views.

Perhaps it was partly because of these new frustrations that Tina began to talk about wanting to go back home and she was looking forward to seeing her friends back in Taiwan over the holidays. However, due to unforeseen circumstances the family had to return to Taiwan permanently after one year and Clare could not continue with her doctoral studies. In her final evaluation session when she reflected on the year from the point of view of her children she said that 'Tina's English improvement was 'over her expectation, quite ahead' and she said it was definitely worth spending a year away from home to give the children this unique cross-cultural experience.

3.4. Sam's reflections on James's first year as a sojourner in the UK

James (11 years old) arrived from Korea with his sister and mother, who was also enrolled in a doctoral programme at the university. Their father stayed in Korea and visited the family only occasionally.

Sam, similarly to the other mothers, also described the initial stage in terms of anxiety and uncertainty. She remembers that James did not have company either at school or after school. In contrast to life in Korea where James often got together with friends after school, in England he was very much on his own:

SAM: But here he did not see his peer group, anybody, not his friends walking down the street. So he felt quite lonely, if he came back home, back from the school, he felt very lonely.

While some children seem to settle down quite quickly after the initial few weeks, Sam reported that James was still lonely and frustrated after 3-4 months. In particular Sam commented on James's concern about friendships. He had a negative experience when someone who thought was his friend disappointed him:

SAM: I think 3 months after arriving I still felt my children had difficulty in adjusting to British culture because in Korea emotionally friendship means if you make one friend they never betray.

Quite early on in the first term James had a very upsetting experience at school. He could not understand the PE teacher and what he did wrong. Her mother recounts the incident like this:

SAM: The PE teacher gave him an instruction for sit up and push up for many times so he was really ashamed and he could not tell and could not explain what he was trying to do. This happened about 4 months after we came to England that night he could not fall asleep and he refused to go to school. I wrote a letter to the headmaster. .. 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 Korea.

Sam saw a link between not having any friends and James's very slow progress with English and lack of understanding of school work.

SAM: He has hardly ever tried to invite his friends. I think not any, or few of his friends came over and helped with his homework. Also, when his friends came over to my home, they just played a game a computer game or just football and they never talked together. That's why Jason does not have any, much you know, chances to improve his English.

Sam felt that James's problems were all rooted in a lack of ability to communicate in English and thus asked the headmaster if there was any language support available for her children but the response was negative. Sam, like Vera, also decided at this point to take responsibility and organise some sort of support for her children:

SAM: 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.

It is interesting that Sam felt that her children might be better served by an English course back in Korea than in the UK where they are immersed in the L2 environment.

Another episode below indicates that even by the end of the year James was not really integrating into the community of his class.

SAM: One day in the summer when there was a rugby match I saw James sitting next to the driver so I asked him why and he said it was quite boring if I sat next to my friends because I can't understand what they are saying.

Sam also noticed that James was not adapting to new ways of interacting in classrooms. In the following extract she explained that James was behaving in a Korean way:

SAM: So when I have parents' meetings teachers are quite worried because James does not ask a question. If he notices that he does not know what he has to do but he never asks a question, they are quite worried about it, but James does not understand why the teachers are worried about it. In Korea if you ask a lot of questions in the classroom, peer groups and also teachers are really annoyed at you.

At the end of the first year in the UK, Sam felt that James was still struggling with adjusting to life here.

SAM: My son did not improve quite well. Worse than my expectation.

In fact Sam felt that worrying about her children, in particular James, made it very difficult for her to focus on her own studies and eventually she had withdrawn from her doctoral programme.

4. Discussion

In broad terms it can be argued based on the above accounts that the two girls (May and Tina) had mainly positive and the two boys (David and James) mainly negative experiences during their first year in the UK but in fact it is also true to say that all four children had different experiences. As Berry suggests, 'one key feature of the acculturation phenomenon is the variability with which it takes place among individuals' (Berry 2005: 700) and this is indeed supported by our data. One common theme that emerges from the four stories is experiencing high levels of anxiety during the initial weeks after arriving in the country. However, how long this initial phase lasts and how well children cope seem to vary a great deal. Some seem to settle down remarkably well and quickly while others seem to take much longer and thus they hardly benefit from the first year at all. Overall, parents discussed their children's coping strategies, or the lack of them and all mentioned friendships, social support and the related concepts of inclusive versus excluding school cultures and communities. The only more stable variable that came up from Berry's first set of factors was that of personality.

All parents were in agreement that it was their children's ability or lack of it to establish friendships at school that determined more than anything whether their experiences were largely positive or negative during the first year. Friendships mean securing social support but they also mean being accepted into the new environment. Friendships help foster sociocultural adaptation whilst the lack of friendships will lead to isolation and loneliness. May was clearly the most successful of the four children as she proactively initiated friendships in her class. In fact her mother explicitly listed several of her strategies that helped

her make friends and maintain these friendships. Tina was also successful at making friends although she had some less positive experiences towards the end of the year. In addition to peers, Tina also secured the close friendship of an adult ESL helper and this relationship certainly served her as a source of additional support. Both May's and Tina's mothers noticed that their daughters were proactive in nurturing friendships. Sook clearly related this to May's personality. During the interviews she often mentioned that May was a confident outgoing person and this helped her to take the necessary risks in making friends and quickly becoming a dominant member of her group. Tina also attracted friends relatively easily with her bubbly personality.

With regard to education related coping strategies, May's mother noticed that May used a range of effective strategies to cope with life at school such as simply ignoring talk that she did not understand, trying to participate in class as much as she could and actively practising English phrases at home so that she could try them out the following day. However, in addition to the strategies and the personality traits of the girls, another factor seemed important. The two schools that these two girls attended were clearly welcoming to them (Bialystok & Hakuta 1994). Both mothers mentioned how the schools or the wider community of other parents supported their children. In May's case it was other parents that reached out to her from the start by inviting her to parties in her classmates' houses and in Tina's case it is clear that giving her the job of presenting in front of the school was an example of many attempts not only to include her and but give her a special status within the class and the whole school. In her capacity as the oldest Chinese student in the school she clearly felt recognised and appreciated and after the presentation she gained more confidence. Researchers with immigrant children have already demonstrated the importance of opportunities created by the host environment for these children to be 'heard' (Toohey 2000, and Miller 2003) and this is indeed echoed by our data.

The other two children, both boys, stood back and did not initiate friendships. On the face of it this fits with the finding that boys generally have a harder time (Rutter 1983) than girls and it also fits with the findings about personality, i.e. those children who are more introverted will find it more difficult to adjust (e.g Ezra 2003). However looking at the school as the micro environment it is immediately obvious that the two schools these boys went to were less welcoming and less inclusive. Both boys felt isolated and lonely and their mothers could not recall positive experiences where they were approached by their classmates or teachers or other parents or given specific tasks or opportunities to gain status and confidence within the school or their class. In fact both parents recall significant negative experiences of disappointment and upset, namely being excluded from the children's parties in David's case and being punished and humiliated by the PE teacher in the case of James. Both boys spent their first year at school lonely and frustrated. Interestingly, Sam links James's lack of initiative to communicate at school and make friends to his 'Korean attitude' to school, thereby making reference to another factor i.e. cultural distance and also his lack of ability to use appropriate coping strategies. Sam claims that in Korean schools you are supposed to be quiet, passive and by asking questions you risk upsetting both the teacher and your peers. It is interesting to note that May was also Korean but the issue of cultural distance did not seem to come up in the interviews with her mother. In fact she behaved in a very non-Korean way at school. In the case of David, Vera felt that the lack of acceptance of David by others was so serious that she had to interfere as a mother. She saw the solution for David to work hard and become a top student so that he could finally be noticed and heard. This however did not happen during the first year. The first year was the price David paid for recognition to come his way quite some time later.

In addition to the children's strategies, their personalities and their host environments, parents also made reference their own strategies. Both Vera and Sam mentioned that they felt they had to take control of their boys' lives. They both organised extra tuition for their children. Vera devoted all her evenings to tutoring David herself until he became a top student and Sam decided to pay for a private tutor to help James with his school work. Both parents believed that academic success at whatever price is the ultimate solution and good school grades will eventually enhance their children's prospect of successful adaptation and earn them some 'friends'.

5. Conclusion

It is of course impossible to disentangle exactly the reasons behind these children's varying experiences during their first year in the UK but overall an outgoing personality, effective strategies to cope and establish friendships, and being in an inclusive host environment seem to be important factors in positive experiences.

International students who bring their children with them do so because they passionately believe that this is a 'once in a lifetime' experience for the children to stay in a different culture and to broaden their horizons. However, it seems that sojourners children's adaptation in local schools is far from problematic. The schools are well aware of the temporary presence of these children but they often choose not to invest as much effort into easing their process of adaptation as they would for permanent settlers. Teachers tend to think that children of international students are lucky since the parents are literate, educated and can compensate at home while the children themselves are well behaved and bright enough to cope without much attention. Sojourners may be seen in a more advantageous position compared to some EAL (English as an Additional Language) children with greater needs. However, as our data testifies, processes of adaptation for these children are often negative during the first year and this initial negative experience may translate into additional emotional and psychological burden for parents who are themselves going through a testing time. Like Vera put in: 'At least David had my support, I had nobody's support. It was very tough.' This indicates a particular concern for host universities that aim to offer excellent services to international students.

On the whole it is perhaps possible to claim that the most crucial factor in the process of adaptation in the case of sojourner children is the ability to secure friendships of classmates. Since friendship means different things at different ages (Berk, 2000) it is important that sojourner children are helped to gain some level of control in initiating and maintaining friendships in their new environments. Some children will be more successful at proactively initiating friendships due to their personality but it seems equally crucial that the surrounding micro-environment should be accepting and welcoming, willing to reach out to these children and offering them opportunities to secure their status and build their confidence in their new environment. It is also important to emphasise the benefits of local children. The relationships that sojourners experience in their schools are reciprocal and schools need to be helped to develop effective policies for accommodating sojourner children so that this reciprocity could lead to valuable outcomes for all involved.

The limitations of this piece of research are many. First of all only four parents have been interviewed all studying at the same university and at the same centre and thus their views cannot be generalised to wider populations. Secondly, no matter how informative and

insightful these parents' views are, it would be important to explore the views of the children themselves and follow them more closely through systematic observation at school. This would allow us to balance parents' views with evidence gained directly from the children about what is actually happening to them in and outside their classrooms. Thirdly, whilst the intention was to explore parents' own views and perceptions as broadly as possible it is important to note that what the parents revealed to us might not be the whole story and there may well be alternative interpretations of the gathered data. Thus, for all these reasons a great deal more research is needed to explore the experiences of young sojourners accompanying their parents overseas. The findings from such research will have important implications for host schools, for universities attracting international families and for international families planning a period for sojourn overseas.

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