

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF EASTERN EUROPEAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS
OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ONTARIO**

by

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Abstract

This study focuses on the parental involvement among Eastern European immigrant parents of elementary school students in Ontario. Immigrant parents are shaped by their own educational experiences in home countries and face particular challenges to be involved in the education of their children who attend schools in the immigrant-receiving nations due to language barriers and low familiarity with the new school system. I collected my data through interviews with parents and the analysis of parental involvement documents in Ontario. The analysis was informed by the concepts of social and cultural capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu. I found that Eastern European immigrant parents see their role supporting children mainly in the home by emphasizing academic achievement and extracurricular activities. Interviewed parents grew up in countries with strict boundaries between school and family, as a result they often do not see volunteering and taking part in decision making in Ontario schools as meaningful for them. Although most parents possess high levels of cultural capital there was a variation in the amount of social capital available to immigrant parents. Those who managed to recreate rich social networks in the new country communicated with teachers more successfully and were satisfied with school. The critical analysis of policy documents showed that despite the shift towards acknowledging different types of involvement more value is still given to school-based activities, which makes the immigrant parental involvement less visible. The results of the study will enable educators and policy makers to pay more nuanced attention to the involvement

among immigrant parents for better achievement and well-being of all children in Ontario classrooms.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

My interest in the educational research was inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's thinking tools and Annette Lareau's seminal work *Unequal Childhoods* with its attention to the interplay between social class of parents and educational outcomes of children. Soon after moving to Canada, I took a course on Pierre Bourdieu for my MA program. As a parent of two young children, who were born and grew up in between Canada and Europe, I was immediately attracted to the idea of researching immigrant parents and the ways they get involved in their children's education through the Bourdieusian lens. When parents go to school in one context and then send their own children to school in a new country there is always a potential for confusion and dissatisfaction. All parents want the best for their children, but some experiences are valued more than others and the involvement of parents is not equally acknowledged. It does not have to be this way, because the diverse schooling beliefs and expectations among parents and students have the potential for enrichment rather than misunderstanding. I hope that my study will help both immigrant parents and teachers of their children to better understand each other's roles, motivations, and actions.

Although an established relationship exists between parental involvement, academic achievement, and the behavioural outcomes of students (Epstein, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2007; McNeal, 1999; Wilder, 2014), both parents and teachers view parental involvement from different perspectives (Myers, 2015). While educators value school-based activities (volunteering, attending parent-teacher conferences, serving on parent councils), parents often confine their role to the home environment (setting expectations, monitoring child's progress, helping with homework, discussing schools). The way parents get involved in their children's education is shaped by parental social class, race, gender, and immigrant status. Structural inequality and governmental

policies affect family practices legitimizing some and pathologizing others with significant consequences for children's education (Lareau, 2000). Recent research in the field of parental involvement shows that to achieve higher level of equity in parental involvement policymakers need to acknowledge parental resources in a meaningful way (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt & Moll, 2011) and empower currently marginalized parents via transformative parental involvement (Olivos, 2006).

The focus of this study is on parental involvement of Eastern European immigrant parents in Ontario. Some scholars differentiate between the term parental engagement (with students' learning, e.g. extra tuition, organized arts and sports activities outside of school, learning in the home) and parental involvement (in schools, e.g. attending parent-teacher conferences, curriculum nights, volunteering in the classroom, taking part in fundraising and school governance) (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Pushor, 2007). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggest looking at the continuum between parental involvement in schools and parental engagement in children's learning. Such shift allows moving away from a school-centred approach to the more equitable one where the interests of parents and families are paid increasingly more attention. Jaynes (2018) acknowledges that the debate on the preferred term "parental involvement" or "parental engagement" is unlikely to be resolved in the near future, but it is crucial for social scientists to distinguish between school-based and home-based activities, which all affect children's education in different ways. Being aware of this debate, I use parental involvement as a broader term that includes both home-based and school-based activities.

Immigrant parents represent one of the largest group of parents, who experiences significant misunderstanding regarding their role in students' learning (Turney & Kao, 2009). Coming from various cultural and educational backgrounds they bring in distinctive sets of expectations, often not corresponding to those of teachers. Some groups view their involvement in school as interfering with the work of teachers (Pena, 2000), whereas others emphasize academic activities at home (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009), which goes against the normative expectations of parental involvement in school shared

by teachers in the host countries (Theodorou, 2008). Moreover, immigrant parents face additional challenges due to their lack of linguistic capital¹ and low familiarity with the host country's education system (Zhou, 1997). They arrive with the potential to help their children succeed in schools, but their parental expertise is often unacknowledged and undervalued, especially when parents experience downward social mobility (Guo, 2009).

The current drive for accountability in education spills over to family life with parents required to be more responsible for their children's academic success (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2013; Reay, 2008; Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014; Vincent & Maxwell, 2016). Parental involvement programs are increasingly used by policy-makers to deal with achievement gaps (Jeynes, 2012), while the narrative of the "good parent" (Thomas, Keogh, & Hay, 2015) was refashioned to create more independent and entrepreneurial parents (Nawrotzki, 2012). Parenting is becoming more intensive (Faircloth, 2014), while governments increasingly interfere in parenting practices of citizens (Macvarish, 2014). These recent trends put added pressure on parents, which especially disadvantages minority and immigrant parents², because parental involvement is a socially-constructed and historically-specific practice with its set of winners and losers (Stitt & Brooks, 2014).

Most research on parental involvement and academic outcomes among diverse students in North America focuses on "visible minorities" understood as "persons who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour and who do not report being Aboriginal" (Statistics Canada, 2012). The reason behind this choice is that they suffer from well-documented racial discrimination, stereotyping, or exhibit higher than average drop-out rates (Harris, Jamison, & Trujillo, 2008; Lee & Kao, 2009; Peng

¹ Linguistic capital is represented by the linguistic competence in the dominant language (Bourdieu, 1977). In the field of education good competence of the language of instruction brings significant benefits to students, because communication, learning, and assessment are mediated by the official language of the school (Luke, 2009).

² Although the terms minority, or visible minority in Canada, and immigrant are often used interchangeably in the literature they are not the same. In the Canadian context not all visible minorities are immigrants, because 31% of them were born in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Similarly, 22% of immigrants who moved to Canada between 2006 and 2011 were not visible minorities, but are identified as White (Statistics Canada, 2016).

& Wright, 1994; Portes & MacLeod, 1996). On the contrary, immigrants, who are not visible minorities, but comprise around 1.5 million Canadians, are rarely researched based on the often erroneous assumption that they face insignificant integration problems (Cilliers, 2005). One of the largest non-visible minority groups in Canada is represented by Eastern Europeans³ (Statistics Canada, 2016). In this study I focus on the province of Ontario, which has the largest population among all Canadian provinces and territories and attracts the majority of immigrants to the country (Statistics Canada, 2016). There is a scarcity of research on Eastern European immigrants in North America (Robila, 2007) who differ in substantial ways from the largest immigrant groups (Asian, Latino/a, and Black). One of the most salient differences with possible implications for parental involvement lies in their low assertiveness in social and institutional interactions (Robila & Krishnakumar, 2004). Eastern European immigrant parents in Canada are not only under-researched, but form a group of parents, whose particular experiences, attitudes and practices of parental involvement shaped in post-socialist countries (Silova, 2014) differ significantly from those of White middle-class parents in North America (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009). They consider school curricula to be not rigorous enough, especially in Math and Science, and believe that expectations towards students should be higher (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009). School-based parental involvement (volunteering, decision-making, collaborating with community) is not widely-spread in Eastern Europe, and parents see their role in children's education mostly at home (parenting, learning). Additionally, Eastern European immigrants are more reserved in social interactions, especially at the institutional level (e.g. schools), which makes it difficult for them to advocate on behalf of their children in educational contexts (Robila & Krishnakumar, 2004). It has been argued that such experiences of Eastern European immigrant parents may prevent them from fully realizing their parental potential for the benefit of their

³ Here I focus mostly on Eastern European countries of Albania, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Former Soviet Union republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia are not included in the present analysis as their (post)colonial and (post)socialist trajectories are slightly different.

children (Asanova, 2005) predominantly due to the dissatisfaction with school curriculum and struggles with new patterns of parental involvement policies in North American schools (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009). Moreover, prior research shows that the degree of parental satisfaction with their children's school directly influences the positive effect of parental involvement on their children's achievement (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016). In other words, the combination of strong school–family relationships and high levels of school satisfaction provide a boost for young people's academic success.

Research questions and description of empirical study

With this goal in mind, my study will answer the following research questions: 1) How do Eastern European immigrant parents of elementary school children in Ontario define parental involvement? 2) How do types of parental involvement used by Eastern European immigrant parents match the narratives expressed in Ontario policy documents?

In order to analyze the parental involvement among Eastern European immigrant parents, the concept of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) will be applied. Social capital consists of valuable resources acquired through membership in a particular social group, while cultural capital denotes a set of socially desirable skills and dispositions (Wacquant, 2008). According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), dominant classes enjoy more social and cultural capital, because their social networks and cultural predispositions have more value in a given society due to their financial and political power. Furthermore, their capital matches what is expected by school. For example, the linguistic competence in the language of instruction, academic literacy skills and familiarity with the school system gives benefits to children, whose families can provide the above-mentioned resources. Prior research showed that difference in cultural capital affects how parental involvement influences

academic and cognitive outcomes of students (Lareau, 2011; Reay, 1998).

My study focuses on Eastern European immigrant parents in elementary schools in Ontario, and the way their social and cultural capital impact upon their parental involvement. Elementary school students were the group selected, because parents are more active with this age group and their involvement produces a higher effect as compared to high school students (Singh et al., 1995). All participants come from Eastern European countries and attended school and/or university in their home country before immigrating to Canada. A qualitative research methodology is used in order to understand the complex relationship between parental involvement and policy. This methodology allows me to examine both the parental understanding and beliefs regarding their involvement, and the discourses in policy documents. Ontario policy documents (e.g. Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools, Parent involvement committees: Supporting links between Ontario's school boards and Ontario's parents, School councils; a guide for members) will be studied to understand the narratives on parental involvement in Ontario schools and how different types of parental involvement are valued in the official discourse (Flessa & Grégoire, 2012).

This research project builds upon my Master's thesis on social and cultural capital of Ukrainian university students in Canada and their educational experience, where I found that cultural capital in Eastern Europe is acquired differently, as compared to Western nations, due to the more equitable approach to the availability of print, access to organized activities⁴, and popularity of enriched curriculum. Having already looked into the social and cultural capital of Ukrainian university students with the aim to explore their educational experience in Canada, I have used this theoretical framework for the study of parental involvement among Eastern European immigrant parents.

⁴ I define organized activities as adult-led activities, which take place in school and/or in the community and can include sports, arts, social and religious activities (Weininger, Lareau & Conley, 2015).

Eastern European immigrant parents in context

Eastern European immigrant parents, whose experiences of involvement in Ontario schools are in the centre of attention in my proposed study, come from a diverse group of 21 countries, which are nonetheless united by their post-socialist condition (Silova, 2014). Similar to other aspects of life under communism (1948-1990), education in Eastern European countries was highly centralized with prescribed textbooks, standardized curricula, and uniform funding (Perry, 2013). Traditional teaching styles were teacher-centred and depended on high subject expertise among educators. Curriculum was rarely individualized, but its objectives were clearly communicated to parents and students. All schools followed the same curriculum guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education. Students across the country had the same textbooks, which allowed parents to know exactly where their children were in particular subjects. Ability grouping and early tracking of students at the elementary level were rare, so as to reduce educational inequality (Perry, 2013). Secondary schooling offered significant specialization in separate schools with academic, technical, and vocational emphases for the last two years of school.

After the end of communism, education in post-socialist countries came to be understood through the narratives of crisis, “return to Europe”, and education reform “package” (Silova, 2014). The idea of “crisis” is tightly associated with notions of conflict and failure represented by decreased funding for education, dwindling student numbers, deteriorating reputation of the teaching profession, outdated textbooks, and stagnated curricula. “Return to Europe” rhetoric continues the old Soviet idea of “catching up and overtaking” the West during the rapid modernization in the USSR. Here Western education is uncritically understood as the epitome of progress and is located in the binary, where everything socialist is “old” and “bad”, while Western approach is “new” and “good”. No alternative is provided in this script: Western education is democratic, but Eastern European is totalitarian, even

though the latest scholarship on socialist education shows that such description is not entirely accurate (Perry, 2013). Educational reforms are often described as a “package” developed by “experts” from the World Bank, Soros Foundation, British Council, and multiple NGOs based in Western countries (Silova, 2014) to ensure that former socialist countries join the globalized education context. The content of the “package” is usually represented by the shift to student-centred learning, introduction of new curriculum standards and standardized assessment, decentralized educational administration and privatization of educational services. It is the West that decides how Eastern European education should change, and it is ready to provide ample “expert” knowledge. Narratives of crisis and catching-up are misplaced in the case of Poland, Estonia, and Slovenia, which significantly surpass the average OECD level in PISA scores leaving the USA, UK, and France firmly behind (OECD, 2014). Russia, Latvia, and Czech Republic have average scores among OECD nations, while Albania, Montenegro, and Bulgaria have below average results (OECD, 2014).

Nevertheless, the introduction of Western curricula and pedagogical practices had only piecemeal implementation and was met with resistance, both from teachers and parents (Elliot & Tudge, 2007). Teachers consider the new curricula to be weak compared to already existing ones, while parents view the humanistic approach as lacking and prefer high standards and strictness (Elliot & Tudge, 2007). Despite seemingly ongoing educational reforms, institutional culture and practices remain unchanged since the days of communism (Kutsyuruba, 2011). This also often applies to structural organization of schools, colleges and universities, curricula, administrator and teacher education programs. Regarding the levels of educational attainment, Eastern European countries form a heterogeneous group.

Due to this complex history, Eastern European immigrant parents yearn to be part of the “West”, which makes certain features of North American education attractive, while different educational experience in Eastern Europe and immigrant status make them relative outsiders in the

classroom and, at times, leads to frustration with the system. Post-socialist education systems, where Eastern European immigrant parents and students were schooled, exhibit features of a complex hybridity. They combine the elements of socialist education (comprehensive schooling, egalitarianism) (Perry, 2013) with globalized neoliberal narratives (accountability, competencies, school choice) (Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). These contradictory experiences affect how Eastern European immigrant parents and students function in North American schools (Asanova, 2005).

Overview of the thesis

Chapter 2 is the literature review, which introduces the concept of parental involvement, and the demographic group in the study, Eastern European immigrant parents of elementary school students in Ontario. Furthermore, I describe my theoretical framework of social and cultural capital put forward by Pierre Bourdieu.

Chapter 3 is the Methodology chapter that provides the rationale for the use of qualitative methodology for this research and the details of the empirical study. Chapter 4 describes the research participants in the project. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the question of how parental involvement practiced by Eastern European immigrant parents matches the narratives expressed in Ontario policy documents. Chapter 6 analyzes the parental involvement among Eastern European immigrant parents, whose children attend elementary schools in the province of Ontario. Finally, Chapter 7 provides the conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Parental involvement: Three scholarly approaches

Parental involvement, one of key topics of academic literature on student success for several decades (Epstein, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Taylor, 2004; McNeal, 1999; Wilder, 2014), has been shown to affect cognitive and behavioural outcomes of school-aged children across socio-economic segments and ethnic groups. It could be roughly classified into school-based activities (volunteering, attending parent-teacher conferences, and serving on parent councils) and family-based activities (setting expectations, monitoring child's progress, helping with homework, discussing schools). Despite the almost unanimous acknowledgement of numerous benefits of parental involvement for children (for critique and discussion see Robinson & Harris, 2014), this phenomenon has been approached by scholars from three different perspectives based on variation in methodology, theoretical lens, and positionality of researchers. In this chapter, I define these approaches as *involvement for achievement*, *involvement as capital*, and *involvement for equity*.

The *Involvement for achievement* perspective is the dominant approach both in research (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007) and policymaking (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The appeal of this orientation lies in the possibilities parental involvement has to improve academic achievement (Nawrotzki, 2012). Prolific scholarship in this area is attested to by several meta-analytic studies, which aggregate numerous primary sources dedicated to the establishment of relations between parental involvement in its multiple definitions and academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Senechal & Young, 2008). On the policy level, parental involvement offers promise to decrease the achievement gap (LaRocque,

Kleiman, & Darling, 2011) and improve schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Parental involvement programs are one of the explicit requirements from the federal government for U.S. public schools with high concentration of students living in poverty, which receive additional funding under Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Authorities in England and Wales experimented with the range of initiatives including home-school agreements (Gibson, 2013). Schools and parents were encouraged to sign such agreements where both parties agree on obligations they have regarding children's education. The critics consider these agreements to be signs of differences between more powerful schools and parents, who are seen through a deficit lens (Gibson, 2013). In the Ontario context, *Education act. Ontario regulation 612/00* contains provisions for the mandatory establishment of school councils in individual schools and parental involvement committees in school boards across the province. School councils serve to "improve pupil achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents" (Ontario Government, 2000, p.1), while parental involvement committees "support, encourage and enhance parent engagement at the board level in order to improve student achievement and well-being" (Ontario Government, 2000, p. 7).

One of the main contributions of this perspective lies in the classification of types of parental involvement and psycho-social explanations of why parents get involved in their children's education. The most common classification of parental involvement by type was offered by Epstein (2010), who combined psychological, educational and sociological perspectives on the cooperation between families, schools, and local communities. She distinguished six types of parental involvement: 1) *parenting*: help by school to families regarding their parenting skills and home environment conducive to learning; 2) *communicating*: regular exchange of information between schools and parents about curriculum and students' progress; 3) *volunteering*: encourage parents to participate in school activities; 4) *learning at home*: support of parental help with homework and other curriculum-related

activities; 5) *decision-making*: involve parents in school management; and 6) *collaborating with the community*: find and incorporate community resources to aid parenting and learning at school.

Although this framework is based on schools as active members of the partnership, while parental agency is neglected (Stitt & Brooks, 2014), it is useful nonetheless, because in all six types of involvement parents can show initiative and engage with schools. In my study I use the framework of types of parental involvement developed by Epstein (2010) exclusively to capture the involvement at home, in school, and in the community. The section on the theoretical framework provides more details regarding my own stance on parental involvement and how the limitations of this model could be overcome.

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) explains why parents become involved in their children's learning. Four constructs define parental orientation towards involvement: role construction, sense of efficacy, perception of invitation to involvement, and life-context variables. Role construction is concerned with parental understanding of their role in children's education, familiarity with stages of child development, and beliefs and expectations regarding parenting. Such beliefs are socially constructed, are subject to change, and are influenced by parental culture (M. Andrews, 2013; Sohn & Wang, 2006). Sense of efficacy is predetermined by the schooling experience of parents, so that their own academic success or failure shape how capable they think they are of helping their children succeed. Perception of invitation to involvement can be formed as a response to explicit parental involvement policies, but it is also affected by the overall school climate. Finally, life-course variables of parents include an array of related factors, such as socio-economic status, knowledge, skills, time available for involvement, and family culture. The latter is a powerful factor that influences how parents see their role at home or in school (Guo, 2011; Klein, 2008).

Despite the above-mentioned contributions of the *involvement for achievement* perspective that

establish the benefits of parental involvement for children's learning, provide an initial definition of the term, and look at psycho-social reasons why parents get involved, this stance has several limitations. First, the purpose of parental involvement is narrowly defined here as a tool to improve achievement to meet the needs of governmental authorities in terms of teachers' accountability and competition between schools (Epstein, 2010). Academic performance is the only measure taken into account. Such needs of parents and teachers as emotional support, identity formation, and reproduction of family culture are ignored, because it is the school-based involvement that is emphasized here (de Carvalho, 2001; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Secondly, such salient social categories as class, race, and immigration status are not paid enough attention, when the *involvement for achievement* perspective is adopted. Subsequently, more holistic approaches to parental involvement are required to capture the complexity of the phenomenon, take into account the experiences of diverse parents, and to provide insights for policy and practice that would be meaningful both to parents and teachers.

One of such alternative approaches is *involvement as capital*. Scholars who follow this line of inquiry (Lareau, 2011; McNeal, 1999; Reay, 2004) pay special attention to the way social class affects parental involvement and use the concept of capital⁵ as developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) in their analyses. He extended the notion of capital by adding its cultural and social types to the economic capital (money and assets) (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital denotes a set of values, skills, and dispositions that help its owners achieve social mobility or successfully navigate educational systems. Social capital is expressed through valuable resources acquired through membership in a particular social group (Wacquant, 2008). Going back to the central notion of education as the main site of social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), researchers working through the perspective of *involvement as capital* show how the education system is organized to provide all children with education commensurate with their social class (Anyon, 1980, Luke, 2010). As far as the middle- and

⁵ Capital will be discussed in detail in the section on the theoretical framework of my study.

upper-middle classes dominate capitalist societies, their cultural norms (language, comportment, preferences, dispositions, etc.) are viewed as desirable by the school system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). On the contrary, the cultural and social capital of working-class children and parents is devalued, due to their lower social position, and do not correspond to the school expectations.

Differences based on social class permeate culture of parenting in profound ways affecting behaviour of parents at home, in school, and in the community. Lareau (2011) defines two main types of parenting as “concerted cultivation”, practiced by middle-class⁶ university-educated parents with professional jobs, and “the accomplishment of natural growth” typical of working-class and low-income parents. Concerted cultivation lies in organizing children’s time in a structured way, especially through organized activities (Rivera, 2011; Snellman, Silva, Frederick, & Putnam, 2015), developing critical thinking and presentation skills by talking to children as equals, and instilling the feeling of entitlement. On the other hand, accomplishment of natural growth approach allows children to play freely on their own, with siblings, or neighbours. These differences are not necessarily predetermined by choice, because middle-class parents have the capacity to “cultivate” their children due to high level of education and financial resources needed to provide organized activities, whereas working-class and low-income parents suffer from the lack of time and money (Calarco, 2014; Lareau, 2011). Crucially, their own early socialization and schooling prepared them for manual jobs, where they have to follow instructions of superiors and have little freedom to define how work should be done, which contrasts with professional occupations that require critical thinking and presentation skills.

In school settings, middle-class parents can successfully negotiate on their children’s behalf to ensure they receive appropriate services (for example, access to academic tracks or gifted programs) and disciplinary and academic problems are resolved (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). Successful

⁶ Middle-class defines people with university education involved in non-manual labor with significant degree of workplace flexibility. On the contrary, working-class members are understood as persons without postsecondary education, who perform manual labor (Lareau, 2011).

educational experience, rich social networks, financial resources for remedial and complementary activities make middle-class parents confident that their voice will be heard. Their actions are not necessarily valuable per se, but are better aligned with the expectations of school as an institution (Lareau, 2015). On the contrary, working-class parents have very few resources that allow them to advocate for their children. Quite often they not only lack the general understanding of the “rules of the game”, but also feel shy seeking institutional help (Reay, 2004). Their social networks consist mainly of relatives and neighbours similarly located in the working-class, who cannot provide support when school accommodation is required (Lareau, 2015). Due to such differences based on class, middle-class parental involvement is considered normative by schools (Reay, 1998), whereas the ways working-class or low-income parents get involved in their children’s education are disregarded or undervalued. The strongest point of looking at *parental involvement as capital* is that instead of focusing only at school-centred involvement, this approach allows us to understand the underlying social conditions that affect how different groups of parents get involved in their children’s education. Attention to social inequality explains why parental involvement of working-class and low-income parents does not provide their children with as many benefits in the school system as their middle-class peers receive.

If the *involvement as capital* perspective highlights the salience of class, *involvement for equity* also adds race, ethnicity, and immigration status to the analysis of parental involvement. Researchers working in this tradition critique the *involvement for achievement* approach for largely ignoring the ways parents from non-dominant backgrounds⁷ participate in their children's education (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Traditional typology of parental involvement in the Western contexts is based on practices of White, middle-class, native-born parents. The involvement of this

⁷ Non-dominant background is understood here as not belonging to the White, middle-class, native-born group, which has been traditionally seen in the literature as parents, who received most benefits to the children from the education system compared to racial and ethnic minorities, working-class or immigrant parents (Brantlinger, 2003; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Lareau, 2011; Reay, 1998).

group of parents counts as normative by teachers, who also belong to this dominant group (Stitt & Brooks, 2014). It not only privileges one particular type of parenting over others (Lareau, 2011), but also focuses almost exclusively on academic achievement as measured by standardized tests. Subsequently, different parental involvement strategies adopted by racialized minorities, working-class and immigrant parents are perceived through the deficit approach, which negatively affects their involvement.

The deficit approach ties into the general perception of parents as inadequate in their role of child-rearers, who need expert advice on parenting and state intervention to ensure that children are taken care of and their educational success is ensured (Berry, 2013; Gillies, 2005; Lee, 2014). Unsurprisingly, parenting education programs are disproportionately aimed at the non-dominant parents (Fernandez & Lopez, 2017; Gillies, 2007; Rawolle et al., 2016). In the neoliberal times, parents are constructed as entrepreneurial subjects, who approach their children as “projects”, can choose schools and other educational products and services for their children (Geinger, Vandebroek, & Roets, 2014; Reay, 1996). Such discourses further marginalize diverse parents, because their parenting practices are less often aligned with the vision of parents as consumers (Reay, 2004).

To counteract the deficit view of diverse parents and their childrearing practices, academics who espouse the *involvement for equity* approach see parents as agents who can intervene on behalf of their children and resist existing barriers to involvement (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). A promising way of studying *involvement for equity* is followed by researchers interested in the concept of “funds of knowledge”, which was originally developed through the anthropological study of Latino/a households in the US (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). This concept defines parental practices, ideas, and values about education predominantly typical of Latinx working-class immigrants that resist marginalization in the US school system (Olivos & Mendoza, 2009). Another possible emancipatory practice at the intersection of research and activism is parent community

organizing (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013), when grassroots organizations supported by educational researchers are used to work against the power of bureaucratic organizations (school boards, ministries of education). Although these empowerment approaches are a significant step forward compared to traditional school-centric parental involvement, there are several downsides here as well. First, the necessity to have a researcher to initiate change could be too paternalistic and deficit in essence despite noble aims. Secondly, if “funds of knowledge [are] for the poor and forms of capital for the rich” (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011, p. 163), we are still left with the question: How in the field of education can funds of knowledge be transformed into capital (e.g. better grades, higher college enrollment, etc.)? It is not enough to ask “whose culture has capital?” (Yosso, 2005) as we know the answer, but rather what can be done so that practices adopted by the marginalized communities become more valued by the school. The notion of capital brings back class and power, which are evident in contemporary schooling more than ever (Ball, 2010; Siraj & Mayo, 2014). If educators want to use the parental involvement for equity purposes, then they should try and challenge the unequal power relations that lead to the devaluation of the working-class capital in the first place. The idea of “parent knowledge” (Pushor, 2015) as the relational and embodied knowledge that parents have about their children that could be shared with teachers and enhance the schooling experience of students, has a great potential to achieve that.

To sum up, the complex phenomenon of parental involvement has been in the centre of attention of researchers, educators, and policymakers for several decades. Whether analyzed for its connection to achievement, its value as capital or potential for equity, parental involvement in education cannot be ignored. I used the three approaches to the study of parental involvement to make sense of the literature in the field as a heuristic tool. In my study I use involvement as capital as the main theoretical lens to inform the research design and to look at the data.

Parental involvement among immigrant parents: What does research say?

Prior research shows that members of diverse minority groups practice different aspects of parental involvement, which influence their unique sets of expectations towards their children, educators, and the curriculum (Huss-Keeler, 1997; Jeynes, 2003; Kim, 2009). Immigrant parents, who were shaped by prior educational experiences in their countries of origin, might experience even more misunderstanding regarding their role in students' learning. Parents who come from countries with strict boundaries between families and the school view their involvement in school as interfering in the work of teachers (Pena, 2000). Such parents see educators as valued professionals and support their judgement in issues of teaching and learning (Pena, 2000). Others emphasize academic activities at home and believe that they could and should help in the family domain rather than venturing into the school world (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). Many immigrant parents face additional challenges due to their lack of linguistic skills in the majority language, and most of them are not adequately informed about the particularities of host countries education systems (Zhou, 1997). Immigrants who come from middle-class backgrounds in their home countries experience downward social mobility (Guo, 2009). As far as school systems in host countries privilege middle-class parenting practices (Lareau, 2011), working-class immigrant parents are at a disadvantage in this case. Demands from governmental agencies for more parental involvement as expressed in the rise of parental involvement policies and parental education programs (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2013; Nawrotzki, 2012) put added pressure on parents. As far as parental involvement is a socially-constructed and historically-specific practice with its set of winners and losers (Stitt & Brooks, 2014), minority and immigrant parents who do not conform to the normative expectations regarding their involvement are especially disadvantaged.

Several meta-analytical studies explored the influence of parental involvement on academic

achievement among elementary, middle and high school students (Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009). They found that overall parental involvement has positive influence on students' academic achievement with significant variation between different types of involvement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Academic socialization at home had the most prominent positive effect with school-based involvement (e.g. attending school events and volunteering) showing smaller albeit positive effect on academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005). Only parental help with homework had negative effects, which is explained that this type of involvement is usually a reaction to the decrease in children's academic performance and there is no cause and effect relationship here (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Some researchers focus on specific types of involvement ranging from help with homework (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008) to family literacy practices (Senechal & Young, 2008). Others analyze parental involvement among general student population (Fan & Chen, 2001) or pay special attention to minority children (Jeynes, 2003). Scholarship on immigrant parents and their involvement is one area where research is lacking. It is especially timely in the current demographic situation, when immigrant students comprise now 20% of all students in the US (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008), while some school boards in Canada have an immigrant majority among their student population (TDSB, 2013). The established focus on minority students and parents privileges the broader categories of race and/or ethnicity at the expense of immigrant status. The category of immigrant students is often subsumed under the label of "visible minorities" or "culturally and linguistically diverse students", which makes it difficult to clearly distinguish immigrant students from their peers who have no record of immigration in their previous two generations (Kim & Diaz, 2013). This constitutes a serious drawback both for research and practice, because the existing literature shows significant differences in academic attainment, let alone overall educational experiences, between native-born and foreign-born students from the same ethno-racial groups (Greenman, 2013). The phenomenon of "immigrant paradox" results in the decline of overall

academic achievement among immigrant students over time despite their initial better educational attitudes and higher expectations compared to home-born students from the same ethnic communities with other categories (gender, socio-economic status) being controlled for (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). In other words, racial or ethnic identities of immigrant students, however salient they may be, do not fully explain differences in education experience between home-born and immigrant students. Clearly, this sizable and fast-growing group of students (Kim & Diaz, 2013) deserves more attention from researchers, educational practitioners, and policy makers.

Taking into account that educational experiences of immigrant parents and students often put them at a disadvantage, I will first provide an overview of equity issues in parental involvement before moving to questions related specifically to immigrant parents. Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) distinguish four key discourses which govern unequal power relations between parents and teachers and result in the proliferation of deficit or neo-deficit approaches to parents from non-dominant backgrounds.

The “Parents as first teachers” discourse requires parents to prepare children for preschool and is aimed disproportionately at children from low-income families (Reay, 1998). The parenting strategies of middle-class parents, especially emphasis on enrichment activities (academics, arts, sports) are viewed by policy-makers as normative practices all parents should aspire to (Vincent & Ball, 2007). At the same time the working-class parenting is often seen as deficient when parents do not or cannot follow the same strategies as their middle-class peers (Vincent, Ball, & Braun, 2010). The gap in school readiness for disadvantaged children in this context is interpreted in a factual and unproblematic way (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004) without acknowledging the structural inequality leading to the “education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). As a result, individual parents are required to provide their children early on with home environment that is aligned with

the school and is intellectually stimulating (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013).

The discourse changes with the start of the kindergarten and grade school, when parents have to help their children with schoolwork. “Parents as learners” discourse comes into play and focuses on parents with low literacy levels, due to lack of formal education, and those who are labelled as English Language Learners (ELL). Although many immigrant parents, especially refugees and displaced persons, do share such characteristics, this approach is assimilationist in nature, as it expects parents to adapt their home literacy practices to school requirements instead of tapping into parental “funds of knowledge” (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). It ties into a larger notion of parenting education programs aimed at improving the parenting skills of low-income parents, whose skills are deemed insufficient and require improvement (Romagnoli & Wall, 2012).

The “Parents as partners” orientation is very instrumental and school-centric, because this type of partnerships mainly serves the interests of educators rather than parents. This rhetoric is epitomized by the very titles of books like *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (Epstein, 2010) or manuals dedicated to “skills needed to work effectively with parents” (Hornby, 2011). If all parents are expected to communicate with school, check children’s homework, and provide learning space and time at home, then “good” parents should also volunteer at school to help teachers with children’s learning (Thomas, Keogh, & Hay, 2015). Once again, the involvement governed by this type of discourse caters to middle-class parenting practices leaving everyone else behind (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002).

Finally, “parents as choosers” is understood as representing subjects responsible for their children's education with two different philosophies: conservative and neoliberal. Conservative school choice is based on rights of parents to educate their children in harmony with home culture

and religion, whereas neoliberal choice is rooted in accountability of teachers, marketization of the educational field, and tools of governmentality that allow governments to diminish their involvement in public education. When parents actively choose schools they function as consumers with the pressure on schools to provide educational services to their customers (Meier & Lemmer, 2018). Some parents are better choosers than others, which is closely correlated with class (Reay, 1996) and further exacerbated by inequalities based on race and immigration status. The normative parental involvement here is also entrenched by “empowering” state initiatives to help working-class parents make better choice (Exley, 2013).

The above-mentioned four discourses guide educational research and practices in a way that keeps all knowledge with the school, whereas parents are seen as having a less active role (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Having established the dominant discourse through which parents are constructed, I will now turn to the specific experiences of immigrant parents, when they are involved in their children’s learning.

Immigrant status and parental involvement

Increased immigration from the Global South to the countries of the Global North⁸ over the last several decades (OECD, 2013) led to the renewed interest in the educational attainment and trajectories of immigrant students (Lee & Zhou, 2015; Portes & Hao, 2004). All too often immigrant students fall behind their native-born peers (OECD, 2015), which leads many commentators to explain this gap by the lack of parental involvement among immigrant parents (Lahaie, 2008). Unfortunately, parental involvement is narrowly conceptualized by policymakers only as one of the most effective means of raising academic performance and improving schools, because “good

⁸ I acknowledge the contested nature of the divide between the “Global North” (Europe, North America, Japan, Australia, New Zealand) and the “Global South” (Asia, Africa, Latin America), but use this classification instead of even more inaccurate terms, such as First, Second, and Third World, East/West, developed/developing countries (Levander & Mignolo, 2011).

schools become even better when parents are involved” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.5), while issues of genuine inclusion and equity are often sidelined. At the same time significant attention paid to the roles of parents in children’s education led to the publication of studies which look at immigrant parental involvement from the holistic, critical, or even emancipatory perspective (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2007; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Doucet, 2011). Carreon, Drake, and Barton (2007) showed how parental presence in their children’s schooling matters whether parents are active at home or in school despite their struggles as working-class immigrants. Crozier and Davies (2007) famously asked if we deal with “hard to reach parents or hard to reach schools” (p. 295). Their conclusion is that even if many parents are not familiar with the school system and do not initiate communication with teachers, they are definitely not “hard to reach” and should not be seen through a deficit lens (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Doucet (2011) adopted an anthropological perspective and found that parental involvement often works as a ritual among parents from the dominant group and that leaves immigrants excluded.

To understand the connection between the immigrant status and parental involvement, we need to have a clear picture of how immigrant parents are involved in their children’s education. One of the key features of parental involvement among immigrants, predominantly coming from Asia, Latin America, and Middle East (Statistics Canada, 2011), which sets it apart from the normative conceptualization evident in policy documents and teachers’ narratives (Theodorou, 2008), is the prevalence of home-based involvement (Poza, Brooks, & Valdes, 2014). Due to prior educational experiences in home countries, many immigrant parents see their place at home (Klein, 2008; Sohn & Wang, 2006), where they often provide additional instruction or emphasize the maintenance of first language (Guo, 2011). Others trust schools with children’s academic development and instead focus on instilling good morals, transmission of home culture, and provision of material and

emotional help (M. Andrews, 2013). Despite higher benefits of home-based involvement (Poza, Brooks, & Valdes, 2014), teachers in the Global North traditionally see school-based activities (fundraising, membership in parent-teacher associations, volunteering in the classroom and on field trips) as more legitimate forms of parental involvement (Andrews, 2013). It is further exacerbated by the mismatch between frames of reference of teachers, who are predominantly home-born and represent the dominant culture (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009), and foreign-born parents shaped by the different educational experiences. When teachers and educational administrators match the ethnic diversity of students and parents there are fewer cases of bias, misunderstanding, and devaluation of students' culture and experiences (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009).

Whereas middle-class immigrant parents are infrequent visitors to their children's classrooms in large part due to specific involvement preferences, their working-class and low-income counterparts also face obstacles related to low education levels and demanding work schedules (Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009). Immigrant parents with incomplete secondary education have high academic expectations for their children and value education, but they find it difficult to help due to low familiarity with the school culture (Bitew & Ferguson, 2010). The necessity to hold several low-paying jobs with inflexible schedules prevents working parents from attending most school events and leaves almost no time for academic assistance at home (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Theodorou, 2008).

The invisibility of immigrant parental involvement is reinforced by the ways immigrant parents communicate with schools. Dyson (2001) found that if Euro-Canadian parents communicate more with their children's instructors, prefer face-to-face interaction, and discuss topics of social nature, Chinese-Canadian immigrant parents communicated with teachers less, relied more on written messages, and expected to discuss academic performance of their children in detail. As a

result, immigrant parents in the sample were not happy with school-home communication, while parents born in Canada showed higher levels of satisfaction. Immigrant parents communicate for their children's academic purposes instead of supporting schools' agenda (e.g. volunteering, fundraising) (Dyson, 2001; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009).

Different views of children, teachers, and schools create communication barriers between immigrant parents and home-born teachers, which go beyond the language as the means of information exchange. In the English-speaking countries the impetus is on parents to initiate the involvement (Crozier & Davies, 2007), but "good parents" are expected to do it in a way that supports existing policies and practices rather than criticizes the school system (Doucet, 2011; Guo, 2011). Parental involvement is encouraged, but only in forms approved by the school and beneficial to it. If you are overtly critical of school practices, you are labelled as "too involved" (Doucet, 2011), but if you are not a frequent visitor in classrooms, then teachers may consider you "hard to reach" (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Coming from different cultures and being shaped by different educational experiences, immigrant parents are often caught between the two extremes.

Emphasis on home-based activities makes immigrant parents less visible in the classrooms and further diminishes their chances for participation in decision-making (Beauregard, Petrakos, & Dupont, 2014; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009). In the North American context, parent-teacher associations are normally controlled by White middle-class parents who make decisions on behalf of all parents but inevitably represent the interest of their own social group at the expense of minority and immigrant parents (Doucet, 2011). When the latter come up with the initiatives to benefit immigrant students, schools ignore them (Ramirez, 2003). Teachers are not familiar with the culture of immigrants, and often see their parenting practices as deficient and tend to devalue their parental involvement (Andrews, 2013).

Many immigrant parents face challenges to parental involvement similar to those of home-born ethno-cultural minorities (racial and cultural discrimination; low teacher expectations) (Doucet, 2011; Sohn & Wang, 2006) and working-class parents (lack of formal education, poverty) (Al-deen & Windle, 2015; Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Menard-Warwick, 2007). Additionally, the vast majority of immigrant parents also deal with two specific obstacles: language barriers and insufficient familiarity with the educational system of a host country.

As far as most immigrants are not native speakers of official languages in host countries, lack of proficiency in the majority language is often viewed as a barrier to involvement (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Doucet, 2011; Klein, 2008). It makes home-school communication less frequent and comprehensive (Dyson, 2001; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009). Absence of language support in schools prevents many immigrant parents from participating and helping their children to navigate the system better (Ramirez, 2003; Sohn & Wang, 2006). From the perspective of teachers, second language learners are often perceived as deficient, so parents with low proficiency in the dominant language are also seen as less competent (Theodorou, 2008).

On the contrary, bilingual English-Spanish programs in the US show, among other things, higher levels of parental involvement, especially when teachers represent the same ethno-linguistic group as parents (Coll et al., 2002). In Canada, Ladky and Stagg Peterson (2008) found examples of successful practices of language support for parents, when translation of messages sent home, emphasis on students' first languages, and modification of homework for linguistically diverse learners helped parents learn more about schools.

A second challenge typical of immigrant parents lies in the lack of familiarity with the host country's school system. With education acquired abroad in different educational contexts, immigrant

parents often know little about school rules and policies in the new country (Crozier & Davies, 2007), ranging from grades and report cards (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009) to demanding a particular homeroom teacher (Klein, 2008) or receiving guidance counseling (Doucet, 2011). Complicated and relatively heterogeneous educational systems in host countries with significant possibilities for school choice (public schools versus private schools, selective versus non-selective, and religious schools) and in-school variation (tracking, ability sets), make the role of parents in carrying out such choices and advocating for their children more important than ever (Reay, 1996).

Middle-class immigrants feel confident to use their social networks of professionals to learn the rules of the game (Klein, 2008) or search for curriculum documents online (Guo, 2011), but the majority of immigrants from working-class backgrounds report feeling hopeless that they cannot help their children or advocate on their behalf (Qin & Han, 2014). Most immigrant parents, regardless of class, see devaluation of their cultural capital in the new education field, because some practices they use (e.g. focus on discipline and homework) are not seen as the most important in the new context (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005). Additionally, social networks of immigrant parents are disrupted by the migration process leading to diminished social support, which had to be restored and reconstructed in receiving countries. This process is fraught with inequality, where White middle-class immigrant parents from North America, Western Europe, and Australasia, have a better chance for integration than parents marginalized due to their race and/or class (Lundström, 2014). Doucet (2011) found that mainstream parents in the US perform parental involvement as a ritualized practice which marginalizes diverse parents who do not share the insider knowledge taken for granted in local contexts. Parents who do not belong to the group, most often represented by White middle-class mothers with flexible work schedules, are excluded from the “core” parental community visible in schools (Doucet, 2011). Immigrant parents are normally located outside of this group and are not

privity to the knowledge and information circulated through such networks.

Despite significant challenges for immigrant parents, there are several possibilities for a transformative approach to parental involvement both in practice and research. Major recommendations suggested in the literature include the salience of language support (Dyson, 2001), which success makes a difference in immigrant involvement (Ladky & Stagg Peterson, 2008; Rivera & Lavan, 2012), and taking into account the culture of immigrant students and parents (Lopez et al, 2001; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Guo, 2011). An initiative in the US, where parents took part in family literacy program showed increased levels of confidence among participating mothers. This program included Parent & Child Together (PACT) activities in school, English as a Second Language classes for parents, and Parent Time sessions dedicated to sharing parenting experiences (Rivera & Lavan, 2012). Guo (2011) describes how immigrant parents in Canada use informal learning to help their children succeed despite stereotypes and racism. Participants in this study advocated for more inclusive school practices and instilled resilience in their children by producing counter narratives at home, which resisted dominant stereotypes of immigrant families.

Only one study mentioned that teacher readiness to work with parents improves communication (Ladky & Stagg Peterson, 2008). Researchers found that when teachers are open to learn more about their students and parents, the families are more willing to get engaged (Ladky & Stagg Peterson, 2008). This is precisely where the misrecognition of immigrant parental involvement can be dealt with. Prior research shows the lack of pre-service and in-service teacher preparation for parental involvement in most jurisdictions (De Bruine et al., 2014). The gravity of the situation is that when such programs are implemented, they increase teachers' sense of efficacy and foster positive beliefs regarding parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones & Reed, 2002).

In addition, more studies are required that highlight successful parental involvement

experiences among immigrants (Rivera & Lavan, 2012; Poza, Brooks, & Valdes, 2014). Similar to research on elite education, we need to understand how more privileged immigrant parents fare and make mechanisms of inequality visible to offer any course of corrective action (Stitch & Colyar, 2015).

To sum up, immigrant parents experience parental involvement differently compared to their native-born counterparts due to differences in prior educational experiences acquired abroad. Contemporary immigrants, who mostly come from the Global South to the Global North, see their parental role mostly in the home, whereas the teachers in the new school expect them to be visibly present on the premises. Differences in expectations create mutual miscommunication which adversely affects children's learning. Immigrant parents have rich resources to offer, but because of language barriers, lack of information on the school system available for parents, and inadequate preparation of teachers working with immigrant parents, these resources are often underutilized.

Inclusive parental involvement might become more possible, if we stop reproducing the deficient view of immigrant parents, constructed as the passive recipients of educational guidance, and include parental involvement content in pre-service and in-service teacher education in order to make parent-school partnerships truly democratic and effective for all (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011).

Eastern European immigrant parents and students in Canadian schools: post-socialist identity versus White privilege

There is a lack of research on Eastern European immigrants in North America (Robila, 2007), whose demographic characteristics are significantly different from other large immigrant groups

(Asian, Latino/a, and Black), especially due to their life in former socialist countries. Despite the increased numbers of Eastern European immigrants in North America after the fall of communism in 1989-1991, there is still a lack of research on this group (Robila, 2008). It can be explained by the fact that communist governments restricted immigration until late 1980s, and the research community requires more time to react to the new phenomenon of post-1989 immigration from Eastern Europe. This is unfortunate, as we need to know more about today's diverse immigrant populations and their adaptation in host countries. Due to their European origin, which is believed to minimize the adaptation problems, Eastern European immigrants are often overlooked by researchers and policymakers. The few studies that appeared recently contradict this overly optimistic picture. Robila and Krishnakumar (2004) found that immigrants from former socialist countries of Eastern Europe in the US have values that are not shared by the majority of American population. They are more restrained and reserved, more humble and less assertive in social interactions, especially on the institutional level (e.g. in schools and workplaces), which might create difficulties for their swift adaptation in the host country. One of the few extensive studies of Eastern European immigrants in the US carried out by Robila (2007) concentrated on such factors affecting immigration to North America as educational attainment, language use, and income. She found significant variation in levels of higher education from 4%-8% among immigrants from Bosnia, Macedonia, and Serbia to rates of 20%-30% in immigrants from Belarus, Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania, and Russia. The same disparity was found in exclusive use of English at home ranging from 2%-3% in Belarus, Bosnia, and Moldova to 20-25% in Estonia, Hungary, and Latvia. As to the economic prosperity, 20-30% of Albanians, Bosnians, and Moldovans have annual incomes below \$15,000, whereas 20% of Croats, Hungarians, and Latvians boast incomes above \$100,000. Overall, Eastern European immigrants in US have relatively high levels of education, with those coming from former Yugoslavia exhibiting significantly lower attainment levels due to the fact that most of them are refugees, displaced during the military conflicts

in the Balkans in the 1990s, whose schooling was interrupted. Levels of economic prosperity are also different, with Central Europeans/Baltic States citizens enjoying high average incomes (Hungary – \$34,624; Latvia – \$30,364), while immigrants from former Yugoslavia/Soviet Union have considerably lower incomes (Bosnia - \$12,513; Moldova - \$16,500) and are comparable in that respect to immigrants from Mexico and other Central American nations (Robila, 2007). These numbers are more than 10 years old, but they give an overview of comparative economic diversity among members of this immigrant group.

Similarly, there is a lack of research on Eastern European immigrants in the school system. Despite significant numbers of students born in Eastern Europe (e.g. it is the fifth largest group in one large school board in Toronto, the only study providing data on comparative academic achievement among Eastern European students in Canada was published more than a decade ago (Samuel, Krugly-Smolka & Warren, 2001). Eastern European immigrant students were found to have average grades slightly higher than those of multi-generational Canadian students, but they were behind Chinese immigrant students (Samuel, Krugly-Smolka, & Warren, 2001). Some emergent data from the UK could be helpful to understand the experiences of Eastern European immigrants in Western schools, but we still only have a handful of studies there as well. Tereshchenko and Archer (2014) made a significant contribution with their project *The Schooling and Identity of Eastern European Immigrant Pupils in England*. According to the results of the study, Eastern European students face instances of racism regardless of their European/Christian origin and white skin. Whiteness does not always protect immigrants from racism, because racialization can use culture as the basis of differentiation (Fox, Morosanu, & Szilassy, 2012; Thomas, 2012). In the case of Eastern European students, it often centres on stereotypes of drinking and aggressive behavior. Even the positive image of “hard workers” may lead to negative consequences, when it affects teachers’ expectations of career paths. Seen as “others” by white majority and established ethnic minority students, Eastern European immigrant pupils in

England are desperate to belong and emphasize English language proficiency and assimilation at the expense of home languages and cultures (Tereshchenko & Archer, 2014). White privilege⁹ has benefits for Eastern European immigrants in societies with well-established racial hierarchies, but they are never seen as belonging to the White majority population either, especially in schools where linguistic and cultural differences are highlighted (Randolph, 2012). Importantly, initial student attainment for Eastern European immigrants was low due to insufficient English skills but showed significant improvement, as children spent more years in the school system. Among this group was found a statistically significant variation with students from Slovakia and Czech Republic scoring much lower than others. The phenomenon could be explained by high number of Roma students among Slovakian and Czech immigrants, who face additional barriers of racism and poverty. Parents in the study also reported high levels of anxiety because of low English proficiency and lack of knowledge of the UK education system, especially school choice, which may disadvantage children in education and labour market trajectories. Nevertheless, Eastern European immigrant parents were optimistic of their children's chances for success and did not think they were discriminated. An explanation could be found in the dual frame of reference, when immigrants compare their experience in the host country with life "back home", which leads to initial optimism and belief in meritocracy in the new society. Ironically, Eastern European immigrants enjoy incomes lower than members of other immigrant minority groups in the UK, and their children suffer from low teacher expectations (Tereshchenko & Archer, 2014). Key implication of the study for educational authorities was to collect data on migrant students based on their country of origin in order to avoid treating all White immigrant students as homogenous and better meet their educational and social needs.

⁹ Unearned privilege experienced by individuals identified as White in racialized societies, which is not available to non-Whites living under similar social, political and economic conditions (McIntosh, 1988).

Where do Eastern European immigrant parents fit?

Most studies of immigrant parental involvement look at members of visible minorities with Latino (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Ramirez, 2003) and Chinese, especially well-represented (Dyson, 2001; Klein, 2008). The only exception was a somewhat larger study of parenting experiences of Eastern European Immigrant professionals in the U.S reported in Nesteruk, Marks and Garrison (2009). They interviewed 50 professional immigrant parents from seven Eastern European countries (Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Poland, Belarus and Bosnia) and asked questions about their children's education in the United States. Eastern European immigrant parents were found to value education holistically, both for personal development and career opportunities. They see more options in the US education system for their children, because “sky is the limit” (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009, p. 429), but mention reservations regarding the quality. Due to their own educational experiences in former socialist countries, they consider curricula to be weak, especially in Science and Math (insufficient homework, lack of subject specialization, possibility to choose “easy” courses), and expectations low. Higher educational inequality in the US makes parental involvement more important, that is why Eastern European immigrant parents in the study resorted to the combination of tutoring, gifted programs, extra homework, and private schooling to meet the educational needs of their children (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009). They also noted that students are more difficult to motivate in the US compared to Eastern Europe, because of materialistic emphasis of the host society (ubiquitous advertising, celebrity culture).

Parenting practices of Eastern European immigrants, similar to other groups of parents, have a class-based correlation. Highly educated professionals in the US study (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009) exhibit all signs of “concerted cultivation” (Lareau, 2011), where parents keep an eye on their children’s progress in school, interfere when necessary, provide supplementary schooling and academic

organized activities. On the contrary, less educated and, what is more important, employed in low-paid occupations parents in England (Tereshchenko & Archer, 2014), let their children decide how to navigate the school system and follow various postsecondary paths more in line with “accomplishments of natural growth” (Lareau, 2011). Crucially, despite this variation Tereshchenko & Archer (2014) found that social class of Eastern European immigrant parents was less correlated with their children’s academic performance compared to white majority parents in England. It is possible to hypothesize that, similar to ethnic capital (Shah, Dwyer, & Modood, 2010), post socialist educational background could serve as a protective factor for Eastern European immigrant students in the West. Ethnic capital here is understood as a range of supplementary resources available to members of a particular ethnic group, which facilitate educational attainment and social mobility (Borjas, 1992).

Parents from different ethnocultural groups are involved in their children's education differently. To a significant extent this variation could be explained by unequal amounts of social and cultural capital at their disposal. Social capital consists of valuable resources available to individuals due to their membership in a particular social group (Wacquant, 2008). Cultural capital combines a range of skills and dispositions that are considered desirable in a given social context (Wacquant, 2008). In my earlier study (Antony-Newman, 2014) I found that Ukrainian immigrant and international university students possess high levels of cultural capital which provides them with advantage in Canada. Specific patterns of social inequality and state-sponsored obstacles to social reproduction made Ukraine different from capitalist societies. Particular ways of acquiring cultural capital in Ukraine are represented by a more equitable approach to the availability of print, access to organized activities, and popularity of enriched curriculum. Whereas in the West book ownership (Constantino, 2005), participation in a variety of teacher-led organized activities (Lareau, 2011), and access to enriched curriculum (International Baccalaureate, immersion programs, arts education, and gifted programs) (Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai, 2013; Resnik, 2012; Smala, Paz, & Lingard,

2013) have been traditionally associated with the middle-class, in Ukraine and other post-communist countries of Eastern Europe such resources were available to everybody regardless of socioeconomic status (Antony-Newman, 2014). I believe that the above-mentioned conclusions on the specific features of cultural capital accumulation in Ukraine could be to some extent generalized to all neighbouring countries sharing the post-socialist condition based on common legacies and transformations (both social and educational) after the fall of communism in Europe (1989-1991).

Possessing high levels of cultural capital, Eastern European immigrant parents place emphasis on home-based and out-of-school activities they organize for their children, especially homework monitoring, organized activities, and tutoring (Crisan, 2013). At the same time, parents who grew up in post-socialist countries are not accustomed to the expectations of active involvement in schools, because in their home countries these are the educators who initiate dialogue, which is usually of formal and curriculum-related nature. These conflicting expectations have potential for misunderstanding between parents and teachers to the detriment of students' educational success. Additionally, as it is often the case with immigrants, Eastern European parents lack social capital valuable in the host country, because they left their networks behind and cannot meet the expectations of teachers based on normative assumptions of parental involvement.

Theoretical framework: Parental involvement as capital

To analyze parental involvement among Eastern European immigrant parents I have applied the concept of social and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1986). One of the key contributions of Pierre Bourdieu to the social sciences was a re-examination and redefinition of the term “capital” freeing it from limitations imposed by the economic theory (Moore, 2008). He complemented economic capital with social and cultural capitals. Cultural capital is expressed in a set of skills and dispositions (e.g.

competence in the prestigious forms of language, familiarity with highbrow culture, educational credentials), which are considered desirable in a given society, while social capital is expressed in valuable resources acquired through membership in a particular social group (Wacquant, 2008). An important sub-type of cultural capital is linguistic capital, which is represented by the linguistic competence in the dominant language (Bourdieu, 1977). In the educational context, good competence in the language of instruction brings significant benefits to students because communication, learning, and assessment are mediated by the official language of the school (Luke, 2009). According to Bourdieu (1977), social and cultural capitals differ from economic capital, because their instrumentalism is hidden, and they are believed to have intrinsic value. Nevertheless, the field of capital is homologous to that of economic capital with the possibility of accumulation, investment, and profit. Social and cultural capitals are scarce resources, and they are involved in the reproduction of social inequality through relations of class and power (Moore, 2008).

Grenfell (2009) underlines the complex nature of the capital in its relation to the field theory of Bourdieu, where capital, field, and habitus work together and should not be viewed separately. Field is understood here as the autonomous microcosm within the social world, which has its own rules and hierarchical position among participants struggling for capital (Wacquant, 2008). Examples of fields include juridical field, field of cultural production, field of higher education, etc. where agents compete for power based on their capital (resources) and shaped by habitus. Habitus is a subconscious set of dispositions which define our perception and actions in the world based on our exposure to social structures (Wacquant, 2008). It is a “structuring structure” which defines what social events we consider “natural” based on our upbringing, socialization, and past choices, but also affects our future decisions. Habitus orients our “thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and action” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 55). Capital is the “currency of the field” which defines what has value in the field and what has not, who is included or excluded, and what is required to boost one's status or power as the basis of distinction.

Not surprisingly, distinction creates hierarchies, which result in inequality (Grenfell, 2009). Capital is not equally distributed, and, though its values are set by the field, it is owned by individuals who compete for it. Capital fuels the communication between the field and the habitus, because different fields require different combinations of capital. For example, cultural capital is more important for the field of education, whereas the business world relies more on economic and social capitals. Different types of capital (economic, social, and cultural) are convertible into one another as an aspect of stratification across different fields (Bennett & Silva, 2011). What is important to note is that any kind of capital has value only if it is recognized as such. Its contents can be easily changed depending upon time and place (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Veenstra, 2010). Methodologically it frees Bourdieu from accusations that his insights into the French culture of 1960s-1980s are of little value in other localities and different time periods. Capital is an example of a thinking tool which is not to be applied rigidly in all contexts but have to be tested empirically (Grenfell, 2009). Habitus, capital, and field are key contributions of Bourdieu to the analysis of social class (Weininger, 2005).

The field of education is one of the key areas where capital comes into play with far-reaching societal and individual consequences. Bourdieu considers education to be the main mechanism of class reproduction. Through education, dominant groups impose arbitrary culture and value the type of achievement, which corresponds to their interests (Broadfoot, 1978). Subsequently, many non-elite students do not succeed academically as they lack the values and cultural capital, which children of privileged backgrounds share with their teachers and get credited for. The hidden curriculum (implicitly taught beliefs, norms, and values) reproduces the stratification of society without explicitly stating such objectives (Apple, 2004). Instead of increasing social mobility, education preserves the status quo, and even some success of lower-class students gives the system the appearance of meritocracy instead of challenging such system (Sullivan, 2001). Merit and cultural capital become

intertwined, which further hides the rules of the educational “game” (Alvarez, 2010).

Being fully aware of definitions of social capital put forward by Coleman (1988), who viewed social capital as a neutral resource that facilitates individual or collective action and is generated by networks of relationships, and Putnam (1995), who understands social capital as connections between individuals but emphasizes the importance of such capital for successful democratic societies and civic engagement, for the purposes of this research, I focus only on the conceptualization of the term developed by Pierre Bourdieu. In the tradition of the latter, social capital comprises current and potential resources contained in networks of lasting institutionalized relations, in other words belonging to a group (Grenfell, 2009). Social capital works together with other types of capital, and, despite the fact that it deals with social networks, its benefits are reaped by individuals. For Bourdieu, social capital, similar to other types of capital, is a finite and rare resource which has to be competed for and can be used by the dominant classes to secure their position and boost other types of capital already at their disposal. In societies where personal connections are extremely important, a chance of a successful career may predominantly rest on social networks available for candidates. The ones lacking social capital most likely will experience difficulty getting access to adequate amounts of economic capital in the form of lucrative jobs, and the cycle of reproduction will repeat itself (Vryonides, 2007).

The concept became so popular that it was readily exported from the domain of sociology to education research. Dika and Singh (2002) synthesized 39 studies published between 1986 and 2001, which analyzed the impact of social capital on educational outcomes. The majority of those used exclusively Coleman's operationalization of social capital and overlooked the importance of differential access to social networks and social resources. Later scholarship offers a more relational Bourdieusian perspective. Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003) focused on one kind of social capital, namely parental networks and their impact on children's schooling. The principal factor behind the

formation of such networks was the organized out-of-school activities, which allowed parents to form relations between one another. Middle-class children participated in significantly higher number of activities compared to working-class and low-income children. It clearly shows that middle-class parents have an advantage and could form stronger and more sprawling networks. Similarly, middle-class parents had more professionals (teachers, psychologists, doctors) in their social networks, whereas their working-class peers relied on relatives and friends who were not usually employed in professional occupations. When problematic issues arise at school, parental networks respond differently depending on the class origin of parents. In cases of inappropriate behaviour of teachers middle-class parents mobilize their entire network, which affects the handling of the situation. Working-class or low-income parents did not see themselves in settings where they seek advice on the side and go against the establishment (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). Middle- and upper-class parents trust their networks during school choice and believe that by following advice of their equally privileged friends, they are assured of access to “good” schools. By contrast, working-class parents need to invest a lot of time to find and appropriate school for their children without the guarantee of success (Lareau & Goyette, 2014). The main value for education research here lies not so much in the presence of parental networks or their quantitative characteristics, but in the amount of social capital transferred through such networks, and it is obviously unequal.

The definition of cultural capital is more contentious due to the way its original conceptualization was used by some sociologists and educational researchers. Bourdieu (1986) talks about three types of cultural capital: 1) embodied (dispositions of mind and body, e.g. linguistic competences, manners, tastes, and preferences); 2) institutionalized (educational qualifications); and 3) objectified (books, paintings, and other cultural artefacts). While Bourdieu included exposure to highbrow culture (theatre, opera, ballet, galleries, and museums based on his empirical research in France in late 1960s) into the notion of cultural capital, it was clearly not intended to be the only

explanation behind the power of the concept. Subsequently, Lareau and Weininger (2003) consider the dominant English-language interpretation of cultural capital as knowledge of and participation in highbrow cultural activities (DiMaggio, 1982) as departing from Bourdieu's intention, who emphasized the arbitrary nature of legitimate culture, scarcity of available cultural resources, and their unequal distribution. For this reason, researchers from countries other than France always questioned the salience of highbrow culture in the social groups they studied. For example, in North America the “elites” are traditionally considered to be cultural omnivores (Erickson, 1996; Veenstra, 2010). Even in continental Europe the relevance of highbrow culture is going down (Gripsrud, Hovden, & Moe, 2011). Nevertheless, we still have clear examples of cultural activities preferred by particular class groups (Priour & Savage, 2011; Warde & Bennet, 2008). Lamont and Lareau (1988) mentioned that before the notion of cultural capital can be used, its content has to be determined empirically. As Bourdieu, they emphasize that cultural capital is used for social and cultural exclusion and comprises not only highbrow culture, but also “attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviour, goods and credentials” (p. 156). In the educational context, cultural capital is what a child brings to school, e.g. familiarity with books, proficiency in the language of instruction, and behaviour expected from students.

Lareau and Weininger (2003) return to the broad understanding of cultural capital, but they also highlight that in the field of education it is especially important to study micro-interactional processes through which people comply with “evaluative standards of schooling” (Reay, 2004, p. 73). Furthermore, they stress that talent or merit as understood in education cannot be separated from cultural capital. Dominant classes impose their cultural capital as the basis of school evaluation, and as far as the accumulation of objectified capital requires prolonged pedagogical action to inculcate particular tastes and dispositions starting from early childhood, students from dominant groups are positioned to reap most of the rewards due to the social capital inherited from family (Reay, 2004).

In other words, various researchers operationalize cultural capital in various ways. In his study of university students, Grayson (2011) views a post-secondary degree of at least one parent as the most important type of cultural capital available to students, which allows them to boast higher degree expectations, receive more family encouragement for studies, and spend more time interacting with their peers other than students. Likewise, Lehmann (2007, 2009) showed that working-class university students have higher drop-out rates and prefer more vocational occupations due to their habitus irrespectively of their academic performance levels. One successful contender to be the proxy of cultural capital is reading, which is positively correlated with better grades in schools (De Graaf & De Graaf, 2000; OECD, 2010). To better understand the way cultural capital affects educational outcomes, it might be useful to look at two types of cultural capital put forward by Tramonte and Willms (2010). They divided cultural capital into static cultural capital (elite cultural activities of parents) and relational cultural capital (children's activation of communication and cultural interactions between children and parents). The empirical research carried on the basis of data from 28 OECD countries, which participated in 2000 PISA testing, shows strong correlation between relational cultural capital and educational performance with static cultural capital providing modest returns on investment.

An important sub-component of cultural capital is linguistic capital, which has a special value in Canada as an immigrant nation, where an ability to speak the host country's languages significantly affects the integration and well-being of newcomers (Derwing & Waugh, 2012). Multilingualism typical of most immigrants also offers considerable linguistic, cognitive, and academic advantages (Cummins & Swain, 1986). It also provides additional access to ethnic community and school resources. Heritage language skills connect immigrant children to their extended family and its social capital, which reinforces the value of academic achievement. Bourdieu never viewed language as a thing in itself or the product of relations between ideal speakers and listeners who know their language perfectly (Grenfell, 2009). His main interest was in the language as practice situated in social and

economic relations. From his perspective, it operates in the market defined as relations of power, which determine the price of linguistic products (Bourdieu, 1976). Linguistic market is clearly a distinctive field which forms appropriate habitus and uses capital for participants to compete for available scarce resources. The legitimate language is chosen arbitrarily in linguistic terms, as it is usually the language of the dominant social group (Bourdieu, 1976). For example, in France, Parisian French was historically boosted by the bourgeoisie of that region and elevated to the status of the Standard French by the power of the state and *L'Académie française*, as a result, devaluing provincial dialects; at the same time middle-class Standard American English makes African American Vernacular English illegitimate in formal contexts (Perry & Delpit, 1998; Bourdieu, 1992b). Subsequently, speakers of non-standard linguistic forms could be stigmatized and excluded from the distribution of capital in various fields.

Though bilingualism is often valued as an asset, dominant languages (e.g. English in Canada outside of Quebec) enjoy a more influential position and have the power of exclusion together with the capability to shape the identity of individuals (Harrison, 2009). Issues of language politics and language identity are closely associated with power dynamics, when speakers of non-dominant languages can be stigmatized and suffer from a range of discriminatory practices (Gérin-Lajoie, 2011). Moreover, as the number of people who use English as a second language exceeds that of native speakers, the so-called “non-native” speakers find themselves in the asymmetrical position of power. English speakers from Anglophone countries possess a more valuable linguistic capital, which can be in turn translated into social or economic capital (Harrison, 2009). It clearly reinforces the interpretation provided by Pierre Bourdieu (1976, 1992b) who attributed the value of linguistic capital to the power of social groups who used the particular linguistic code.

Similar to other linguistically diverse groups, Eastern European immigrant parents and students might often be viewed as linguistically deficient, because English, which is one of the two languages

of instruction in Ontario alongside French, is not their mother tongue. The ability of immigrant parents and students to read academic texts in their heritage languages is not often acknowledged as their advantage. Despite the promises of democratization, educational systems distribute academic credentials unequally, rewarding students who possess the right type of linguistic capital, i.e. dominant language of a particular society in terms of dialect and accent (Blackledge, 2001). The language of the classroom imposes arbitrary rules of thinking and expression (Grenfell, 2009).

When research focuses on the uneven academic success of students from different racial and ethnic groups, especially immigrants, who have to acquire new forms of social, cultural, and linguistic capital, we should look at the ways different communities manage to become members of the dominant classes (upper and middle class) courtesy of their economic and non-economic capitals. Prado (2008) explored educational trajectories of two Chinese students and one Latina student. He looked at normative support, material resources, and networking, which influence parental ability to fight with discriminatory school policy and practice. The difference between two groups of parents was that if Latino parents merely urged their daughter to perform well academically, the Chinese parents acted more strategically by placing children in more challenging, but at the same time more rewarding honours/advanced placement tracks. Parents have appropriate academic aspirations for their children, but they possess unequal amounts of resources to counteract exclusionary school practices and boast different abilities to pair their children with knowledgeable stakeholders (Prado, 2008). In other words, social capital is closely connected with social inequality which affects most facets of life (Veenstra, 2007) and could be explained by both differences in economic capital and unequal distribution of social capital, especially taking into account the fact that different forms of capital can be mutually exchanged for maximum effect (Grenfell, 2009). Although much scholarship have already focused on social capital among minority students as an explanation of different levels of educational attainment (Kao, 2004; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Khattab, 2003; Noguera, 2004) and ways of activating, and

renewing social capital during the migration process (Neri & Ville, 2008), in all studies the target population belonged to racialized ethnic groups, while immigrants constructed as White were overlooked. The only exceptions here are represented by several studies of Polish immigrants in the UK, which also confirm that cultural and social capital influence the involvement among this group of immigrants too (Moskal, 2014; Tkacz & McGhee, 2016). Parents with good English skills (cultural capital) and mixed networks (social capital) were shown to have the ability to influence their children's academic success, while those with low levels of cultural and social capital struggled in their capacity as parents after moving to the UK (Tkacz & McGhee, 2016).

As far as educational success is associated with valuable social and cultural capital, which is distributed unevenly among different communities due to their social and demographic particularities, the educational experience of Eastern European immigrant students in Ontario and parental involvement in their education could be partially explained by social and cultural capital available to them. Similar to other economic migrants (i.e. 60% of all immigrants to Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017a), who belong to the middle class in their home countries, Eastern European immigrant parents quite often experience downward social mobility in Ontario. Prevented from quick access to their profession due to non-recognition of international credentials (Guo, 2009), immigrant parents see their economic assets diminished and cultural and social capitals devalued. Language barriers and insufficient familiarity with the Ontario school system may further complicate their standing in host country schools.

To sum up, my theoretical framework will be based on Bourdieu's notion of capital, especially in its social and cultural forms, to answer my research questions regarding the types of parental involvement among Eastern European immigrant parents in Ontario. Parental involvement as capital (Lareau, 2011; McNeal, 1999; Tkacz & McGhee, 2016) has the potential to shed light on how involvement as practiced by this immigrant group matches or not the narratives expressed in Ontario

policy documents.

Chapter 3. Methodology

In this chapter, I am first going to focus on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of my research, which are organically connected with the theoretical framework selected for the study. There is a conceptual fit between critical interpretive framework and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital (Levinson, 2011). Then I move onto the literature that provides background to methods of data collection, before describing the empirical study design itself.

To understand immigrant parental involvement in their children's education, qualitative research appears to be the best approach. It helps to understand the parental involvement practices of Eastern European immigrants in Ontario schools in the context of discourses contained in parental involvement policy documents. As an under-researched group of parents, Eastern European immigrants are rarely paid attention to by researchers, teachers, and policymakers. At the same time, similar to other immigrant parents, they have specific prior educational experiences and expectations which define their experience in Ontario. Subsequently, I explored how the social and cultural capital of Eastern European immigrant parents shapes their involvement in children's education in Ontario elementary schools. I analyzed the discourses in Ontario parental involvement policies to see how immigrant parents are represented in the policy context and the influence of such discourses on Eastern European immigrant parents.

Qualitative research is used to observe people in natural settings to become better familiar with the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As far as qualitative research helps to understand the meaning constructed by participants (Merriam, 1998), it is especially appropriate for the study of immigrant parents. At the same time, it requires a researcher who is responsive, adaptive, and can

consider the context of study. An inductive approach moving from data to theory in the context of my analysis allowed generating new concepts based on rich descriptive data to contribute to the research on immigrant parental involvement (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In this study, I was interested in connecting various dimensions of immigrant parents' everyday life with their experiences of parental involvement. Qualitative research paradigm works for this purpose well.

In my research, I follow a critical interpretive framework. It is informed by critical social theories, which are broadly understood as “conceptual accounts of the social world that attempt to understand and explain the causes of structural domination and inequality in order to facilitate human emancipation and equity” (Levinson, 2011, p.2). A critical approach is concerned with issues of power and justice, and how categories of race, class, and gender, to name a few, together with social institutions, ideologies, and discourses, construct the social world (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2002).

Critical researchers employ critical social theories to understand hidden structures and underlying cultural assumptions and make power relations visible (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2002). Scholars working in the critical tradition are not neutral in their values, they have particular concepts of social good and liberation based on equity, and they attempt to offer solutions that could improve people's lives (Levinson, 2011). Moreover, the critical standpoint, which needs alliances and solidarity with members of traditionally excluded groups, constitutes the ethical substance of research (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011). In the case of my study, this required working with Eastern European immigrant parents to shed light on the barriers to their parental involvement in Ontario schools.

A critical framework has significant potential for education research, because it deals extensively with notions of power, knowledge, and identity. Both formal and informal education are precisely the contexts in which knowledge is generated and transmitted. Through early family socialization, in-class instruction, and public pedagogy we learn about who we are, and who we could or should become (Levinson, 2011). Life opportunities of individuals are determined to a large degree

by educational experiences, which are central to cultural reproduction of inequality, and symbolic domination. The last two notions are closely associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1992b). He believed that schools legitimate and reward cultural assets that students from higher social classes already possess, which further increases social inequality. In other words, what children bring to school in terms of their culture, habits, or dispositions, is valued differently based on the background of their parents. To explore the beliefs and practices of Eastern European immigrant parents I used policy document analysis and interviewing, which I will turn to in the following sections.

Policy document analysis

To better understand the complex connections between parents and the school in the process of parental involvement, it is important to analyze the narratives in policy documents, which significantly influence how different types of parental involvement are valued by the school staff. The simplest definition of policy provided by Dye (as cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) explains policy as “whatever governments choose to do or not to do”. The term is far from being uncontested and the definition often depends on the type of policy research one does. Dale (as cited in Ozga, 2000, p. 39) identifies three types of policy research: social administration project, policy analysis project, and social science project. Social administration project was the dominant type of policy research in the golden days of the welfare state between 1945 and 1973. The purpose of research was to improve administrative practices of the state to initiate reform and improve social conditions. The focus of research was on the national level, because the state could not go beyond itself, but social administration could improve the fortunes of clients of the state. Policy analysis project also represents research “for” policy (Ball, 2006), but the main concern here is to deliver social policies regardless of the content. It is technician in

nature and “seeks solutions to given problems” (Ozga, 2000, p. 39). On the contrary, social science project is mainly about understanding how the policy works rather than providing solutions. In this sense, we deal with the research “of” policy (Ball, 2006). Research is oriented towards problems as defined by the discipline, and analysts are accountable to the research community instead of customers or sponsors (Ozga, 2000).

Contemporary policy analysis can also be understood through the dichotomy between the traditional policy analysis, which in historical terms was the first to emerge, and critical policy analysis. Both types of analysis are practiced today, but often for different purposes and by different actors. Traditional policy analysis (TPA), based on positivist assumptions, views policy as a linear and value-free process driven by goals. Policies are planned and managed in a relatively sequential manner with clear steps to follow: “problem definition, goal setting, policy alternative identification, policy selection, implementation, and evaluation” (Diem et al., 2014, p. 1071). In terms of its epistemology, the traditional approach to policy analysis is based on the assumption that if data is collected correctly, then the accurate depiction of reality can be achieved and applied for policy without any problems. Subsequently, policies can be evaluated in a straightforward manner to ensure their improvement. Traditional policy analysis has been influenced by political science and public administration, and it uses multiple approaches, including structural analysis, cost-benefit analysis, decision theory, and political models (Diem et al., 2014).

Critical policy analysis (CPA) began in 1980s in an attempt to challenge traditional analysis. Importantly, the shift towards this type of analysis happened during the period when post-positivist research in social sciences came to be challenged by postmodern and critical approaches during the crisis of representation and postmodern periods in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Crisis of representation is understood by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) as a period when qualitative researchers began to doubt that classical ethnographic research not only provides an attempt to

describe the objective reality, but also creates a particular narrative reality. Notions of validity and reliability, taken for granted earlier, are viewed as problematic, while the role of the researcher shifted from that of a neutral observer to an active co-participant or even activist. Policy is seen as a complex social practice with multiple actors situated in diverse contexts (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). In the field of education, critical policy scholars raised several key concerns to the nature of policy creation, implementation, and analysis (Diem et al., 2014): 1) the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality: how policy work is done, and what rhetorical devices are employed in policy texts; 2) a focus on policy roots and development: why a particular policy was created, what social problem is targeted by that policy; 3) the distribution of power: who wins and who loses from a particular policy; 4) social stratification: how particular policies affect social inequality and privilege; and 5) resistance among members of non-dominant groups. The “father” of CPA, John Prunty (1985), rooted this approach in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and understood policy as “authoritative allocation of values” (Easton, as cited in Prunty, 1985, p. 136). He emphasized that such analysis has to be political with personal values and political commitments of analysts reflecting a moral order based on justice, equality, and individual freedom. The goal of analysis is to expose sources of domination, repression, and exploitation and show how the oppressed are complicit in the hegemony against their interests. The claim that educational policy is neutral means that one supports a status quo, legitimates, and perpetuates inequality (Prunty, 1985).

Policy cycle is then reformulated from the linear “problem definition - goal setting - policy selection - implementation – evaluation” circuit to a more complicated and non-linear arrangement. A good model of this new approach to policy cycle is Ball’s five interrelated contexts: 1) context of influence (socio-economic and political factors, advocacy, prior policies), 2) context of policy text production (creation of often incoherent texts during the power struggle between stakeholders), 3) context of practice (contested interpretation and enactment of policies), 4) context of outcomes

(influence of practice on social justice, equality, and freedom), and 5) context of political strategy (work against inequalities and injustices) (Lingard & Sellar, 2013).

On the methodological level CPA is more likely to use qualitative methods, e.g. discourse analysis (Bacchi, 2000), historical methods (Brewer, 2014; Gale, 2001), or policy archeology (Scheurich, 1994). The first of two historical methods championed by Gale (2001), policy historiography, combines historical thinking with critical theory. This method looks at policy issues in the past and compares them with social problems of the present paying special attention to the nature of change. Another question asked is who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by the existing policy arrangements. The method of policy genealogy also traces the change of policies over time and deals with the issue of policy contestation and negotiation as well (Gale, 2001).

Policy archeology (Scheurich, 1994) borrows from the poststructuralist work of Michel Foucault and expands the critical nature of policy analysis. Policy analysis under this method is concentrated in four arenas: Arena I: Study of social construction of social and educational problems before they become visible in the public domain. Instead of blindly accepting a social problem as given or natural, policy researchers study how and why some “problem” become “problems”, but not others. They critically analyze the naming of the problem. Arena II: Identification of grids or networks of social regularities that shape social problems. Here the focus is on conditions, assumptions, and forces that lead to the emergence of a particular social problem. The above-mentioned regularities are often not intentional, but they define what is considered as a social problem and what is not. Examples of such regularities include concepts of race, class, and gender. Arena III: Study of the social construction of acceptable policy solutions is dedicated to the analysis of how social regularities shape possible solutions to social problems. Finally, Arena IV: Study of social functions of policy studies helps to understand that traditional policy analysis itself is guided by the above-mentioned social regularities (Scheurich, 1994).

Within the CPA, policy can also be conceptualized both as text and as discourse (Ball, 1993). Policy as text is set within frameworks, but it is not limited to them. Policy texts are products of compromises between numerous authors responsible for the creation of such texts. Authors try to control the meaning, but readers have a certain freedom of interpretation. Policy is seen as a fast solution to problems constructed by governmental officials, but particular policies are enacted differently by diverse policy actors (Braun, Maguire, & Ball, 2010). Policy as discourse, in the Foucauldian sense of the term, represents frameworks of sense or regimes of truths (e.g. neoliberalism or management theory). Discourses define what can be said, who can speak, and with what authority (Ball, 1993). Subsequently, some ideas are seen as possible, while others are not. Policy as discourse allows us to uncover how the discourse frames the problem in a way that change seems difficult (Bacchi, 2000). In other words, following in the footsteps of Bourdieu, agency and structure are interrelated in complicated ways (Ball, 1993).

Interviews

Interviewing is not only the most used qualitative method in social science research, but some scholars even talk about the “interview society”, where individuals are interviewed by researchers, journalists, market researchers, and political campaigners (Morris, 2015). Interviewees are usually believed to have some expertise on a particular topic researchers are interested in. Such expertise is based on the interviewees having direct experience on the topic. At the same time, an interview is an opportunity for research participants to tell their stories. Structurally, interviews combine the free flow of a regular conversation with the probing by a researcher, who wants to get as much relevant information as possible (Morris, 2015). Interviewing is an appropriate and effective tool, when the purpose of the study is to understand the participants’ feelings, beliefs, or experiences that cannot be

easily tapped into by the use of observation or questionnaires.

In terms of the organization of interviews, they can be classified into structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Morris, 2015). In structured interviews the researcher usually sticks to the questions and their order while interviewing all participants. The rationale behind this approach is that the interviewer variation and error should be minimized. Interviewers do not reveal much information about themselves to avoid social desirability bias, when participants might give answers they think interviewers want to hear (Morris, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews have topics to cover related to the research questions, but there is scope for participants to digress. Researchers cannot only ask clarifying questions, but the discussion could be quite detailed and even develop in directions not anticipated beforehand. On the contrary, unstructured interviews do not always have a predetermined list of topics, and participants can not only answer at length but even set the agenda for discussions. Unstructured interviews are similar to regular conversations with a lot of spontaneity and contextual information being exchanged.

Traditionally, interview as a method was treated as a neutral instrument to know more about the “real world” of social relations. It was believed that carefully planned and managed interviews could accurately capture and represent the reality. Recently social scientists who take a more critical stance began to pay increasing attention to interviewer-interviewee relationship and its effect on the results of interviewing. Such contextual factors as age, race, ethnicity, gender, and class of the researcher and participants are now often taken into account during qualitative interviewing. Constructivist scholars argue that interviewees construct a particular version of reality in collaboration with the researcher that is shaped by the interview itself and not just by the “real world”. Warren (2001) emphasizes that interview participants and researchers speak from different perspectives which can shift during the interview. A participant might speak first as a former child, when recounting past events, before expressing her current position of a mother or an employee.

Postmodern scholars go even further to question that interviews could be used as “instruments” in capable hands of the researcher during the “human encounter” with interviewees (Alvesson, 2002, p. 112). Instead of seeing interview participants as autonomous individuals, postmodernists often prefer to focus on how dominant discourses produced in specific socio-historic contexts shape the interview talk. In other words, interview accounts are mostly not true and accurate reflections of reality, but they mainly represent the discourses which have power over individual participants (Alvesson, 2002; Scheurich, 1995).

One of the key factors that affect the interview process is power relations between participants and the interviewer (Merriam, 1998). The discussion is often framed around the insider-outsider status, especially related to visible social identities of race, age, gender, and class (Warren, 2001). Some scholars believe that whenever feasible, participants should be paired with researchers who share their social identities to facilitate access, establish rapport, and better understand the subjectivities of interviewees. Others underline that interviewing requires some distance from participants to see patterns in everyday experiences (Merriam, 1998).

As a critical researcher, I see interviews as a tool which can be used to understand how participants experience issues of power, oppression, and inequality. Despite the influence of social constructions and dominant discourses, interviews could provide valuable insight into the material conditions of participants’ lives. Due care should be given to the interview context, rapport with participants, and reflective reporting of data collection and analysis.

Empirical study

In the context of my study, I used two main types of data collection: policy document analysis and interviews. Firstly, I will describe parental involvement policy documents, which might influence how different types of parental involvement are valued by schools. Such documents help to better

understand the complex connections between parents and educators in the process of parental involvement. Document analysis is a very popular method of working with qualitative data. Its main distinctive feature is that it uses documents which are created for purposes other than research (Merriam, 2009). Policies constitute public records produced by social institutions for official purposes (Esterberg, 2002). Specifically, parental involvement policies are created by the Ministry of Education, school boards, and non-governmental organizations to shape parental involvement in children's education. Such policies exist in the form of public documents that are easily accessible and could be used for unobtrusive analysis (Esterberg, 2002).

At the top of the policy-making hierarchy there are five documents developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education. They include the framework *Parents in Partnership: Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools (2010)*, which outlines the roles and expectations around parental involvement, provides examples of existing initiatives, and sets targets for schools, boards, and the Ministry itself regarding parental involvement on Ontario schools. *School Councils: A Guide for Members (2001, revised 2002)* describes the work of school councils in detail from their establishment to day-to-day operations. *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009)* refers to parents on several occasions regarding them as partners in need of welcome, respect, and engagement. *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario (2014)* also underlines the importance to “ensure parents and guardians are welcomed, respected, and valued by the school community as partners in their children’s education” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p.7). Closely associated with these documents is *Ontario Regulation 612/00: School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees (2000, revised 2010)* passed by the provincial government. In its revised form the document makes it mandatory for all public schools to have school councils, while all school boards need to establish parental involvement councils (Ontario Government, 2000). Two documents prepared by Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) were also analyzed: *Parent Tool Kit: What*

Parents Can Do to Help Their Child Succeed in School (2012) and *Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools (2014)*. *School Administrator's Guide to Parent Engagement (2011)*, for its part, was jointly developed by the associations of public, French, and Catholic principals in Ontario. On the school level, the following documents were analyzed: Toronto District School Board *Policy P.023 SCS Parent and Community Involvement (1998, revised 2005)* and its related *Operational Procedure PR558 Parent and Community Involvement (1998, revised 2015)*. I also looked at York Region District School Board *Policy #238.0, Parent, family and Community Engagement (2008, revised 2015)* and York Catholic District School Board *Policy 606: Catholic school councils (1995, revised 2016)*. I selected these school boards in particular because they represent the Greater Toronto Area, the most populous metropolitan area in Canada, and have dedicated parental involvement policies, which are publicly available on their websites. These documents outline responsibilities of all board stakeholders regarding parental involvement, focus heavily on school councils, fundraising, and volunteering alongside practical measures aimed at implementing Parents in Partnership policy from the Ontario Ministry of Education (TDSB, 2015b). Finally, I selected for analysis two parental involvement policy documents prepared by People for Education, an independent organization that supports public education in Ontario. They are *Beyond school councils: Engaging parents to help their children succeed at school (2011)* and *Parent Involvement Committees: Building Parent Engagement in Ontario's School Boards (2015)*.

The rationale behind the decision to look at the above-mentioned parental involvement policy documents is that discourses expressed in such policies might influence the way schools see parents and value their involvement in children's education. To understand the nature of such a transfer between the policy discourse and the official discourse on parental involvement I raised questions in my document analysis such as: 1. How is parental involvement conceptualized in policy documents compared to the latest parental involvement research? 2. Does the discourse empower one group of

parents and marginalize others? 3. How are diverse and immigrant parents represented in policy documents?

Secondly, I interviewed Eastern European immigrant parents. In accordance with my selection criteria, all participating parents came from nine countries in Eastern Europe and attended school and/or university in their home country before immigrating to Canada. At the time of the interviews, parents had at least one child in the elementary schools in Ontario. I had interviews with 19 parents, who represented 15 families. The discrepancy in numbers is due to the fact that parents were offered an opportunity to be interviewed either separately or as a couple. Most of the interviewees were mothers (14), but five fathers also took part in the study. It is important to mention the growing body of research, which focuses on the gendered nature of parental involvement, as these are the mothers who usually take up the extra obligations of checking homework, communicating with schools and volunteering in the classroom (Gillies, 2007; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2013; Landeros, 2011; Vincent, Ball & Brown, 2010). Gender is a crucial element here, but my research was not designed to illuminate this category centering on the immigration status instead. Eastern European immigrant parents were recruited through my personal network. The combination of purposeful and snowballing sampling was used as well. I reached out to individuals that met the selection criteria and asked them if they knew other potential participants. The participants selected for this project share certain characteristics with the majority of immigrants to Canada. They belong to the group of economic migrants (skilled workers, entrepreneurs, international students, caregivers), which account for 60% of new permanent residents in Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017a). None of the interviewed parents came to Canada under family sponsorship or as refugees. Moreover, this group is quite selective in terms of educational credentials (Lee & Zhou, 2015). Almost all participants have post-secondary education, compared to 55% for all Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2017), and speak English relatively well.

Access to participants was gained after the University of Toronto Ethics committee's approval. Interviewees' social status, privacy or reputation did not suffer, because all personal information was kept confidential and their proper names or other easily identifiable data was substituted by pseudonyms or aliases in the transcribed and presented data. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the project in the recruitment letter and consent forms attached in Appendix A, but none of them exercised this right.

As an Eastern European immigrant parent myself, I was interested in looking at how educational experiences of this under-researched group of immigrant parents influence their involvement in their children's education in Ontario. By sharing the similar educational experiences in the post-socialist context and following migration routes from Eastern Europe to Canada, I could relate to and provide better insight into the parental involvement of participants in this study. I did not have any pre-existing relations with the participating parents that involved a power differential.

All participants were interviewed in English, which served several purposes. First, this allowed me to gauge the participants' English language skills, which play a crucial role in the communication between immigrant parents and Ontario teachers. Secondly, by using only one language for interviews the need for translation services and the involvement of external translators/interpreters was reduced. Most importantly, the choice of English as the language of interviews allowed me to avoid dilemmas facing researchers, who use translation/interpretation in multilingual qualitative research. Such dilemmas often include the use of external translators/interpreters and their role in the representation of interview data (Temple and Young, 2004) and the validity of interview data produced through translation as interpretative act (Squires, 2009). Even though the choice of language for interviewing often affects the data due to linguistic (e.g. proficiency in the interview language(s) both for the interviewers and interviewees) and extra-linguistic factors (e.g. insider/outsider status and possible power relations differences between the interviewers and interviewees) (Cortazzi, Pilcher, & Jin,

2011), I would like to mention, that as far as all participants in this study felt relatively comfortable during interviews in English and the discussed topics were not emotionally sensitive, my decision to conduct interviews in English instead of participants' first languages did not affect the integrity of the data.

Interviews took place in public spaces (public libraries coffee shops, community centre), on the university premises (study rooms), or in participants' houses. Parents suggested the best venues for interviews, which facilitated the relaxed, but professional discussion in the environment familiar to the participants. In most cases, we started with the small talk related to our shared immigration and parenting experiences. On average interviews took up around one hour. I used semi-structured interviews with a guide to provide focus for the flow of discussions, while simultaneously allowing for a flexible dialogue to produce knowledge (Morris, 2015). Topics discussed with immigrant parents included questions related to participants' reasons for immigration, their own schooling experience, parental involvement practices (parenting, communication with schools, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community), beliefs about parental involvement and perceptions of school differences between their host countries and Ontario. The list of questions is provided in Appendix B.

I wanted to explore how the social and cultural capital of Eastern European immigrant parents influences their parental involvement and to what extent the capitals they possess are valued by the school. With this task in mind, I asked parents about their communication with teachers, other parents, and professionals in their networks to determine the volume of their social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Questions on parental levels of education, English language skills, and literacy practices shed light on the cultural capital of interviewed parents.

Data collected from interviews and policy documents were coded and analysed from the critical standpoint that is paying special attention to the issues of power in social relations and resulting

inequities and oppression. As a critical researcher, I agree with Merriam (1998) that coding is not neutral, because it reflects the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and methodological stances. Coding not only categorizes data but also offers "conceptualizing, raising questions, and providing provisional answers" (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 31).

First level codes were generated through the combination of some a priori (or pre-set) codes with emergent (or grounded) codes coming up from the data. *A priori* codes were rooted in previous research in the field of parental involvement, for example, six types of involvement according to Epstein (2010). I used such a priori codes as parenting, communicating, volunteering, barriers to involvement, involvement for achievement, involvement as capital, and involvement for equity. During the initial coding a range of grounded codes emerged, e.g. parents as partners, high expectations, importance of home-based involvement, helping parents, and so on.

Second level coding took multiple first level codes reorganized into a smaller and more select group of codes and developed them towards categories (Saldaña, 2009). I started with examining first level codes followed by identifying patterns between them before assigning labels in the forms of categories. Categories were either descriptive (e.g. learning at home, communicating with teachers) or referred to more conceptual processes (e.g. devaluation of cultural capital, non-recognition of foreign credentials). Finally, during the third level of coding, categories were further refined to develop major themes. It is important to acknowledge that pre-established theoretical constructs (e.g. types of involvement) inform later stages of coding, whether researchers are aware of this fact or not. Themes were used to answer the research questions before discussing them in light of the existing literature.

Table 1. Data sources and research questions

Interview question	Data sources
1) How do Eastern European immigrant parents of elementary school children in Ontario define parental involvement?	Interviews with parents (N=19)
2) How do types of parental involvement used by Eastern European immigrant parents match the narratives expressed in Ontario policy documents?	Parental involvement policy documents (N=14)

To sum up, the policy document analysis of parental involvement policies and qualitative interviews with Eastern European immigrant parents allowed me to see how the social and cultural capital of parents shape their understanding of involvement in their children's education in Ontario. I was able to understand how parental involvement, as defined by Eastern European immigrant parents, matches or fails to match narratives expressed in the policy documents. In the analysis that follows, I hope to show that involvement as capital is a useful approach to understand the experiences of immigrant parents, whose social networks are often disrupted, and cultural capital is devalued. The mismatch between what parents bring to school and what is expected of them is especially strong for immigrant families. With this in mind, I turn to the analysis chapters. In Chapter 4, I will provide the description of my participants. In Chapter 5 I answer the question how types of parental involvement used by Eastern European immigrant parents match the narratives expressed in Ontario policy documents. Chapter 6 discusses the ways Eastern European immigrant parents get involved in their children's education both in school and at home. Chapter 7 is the conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter 4. Portraits of participants

This chapter provides the description of 19 participants from 15 families based on interview data and is structured around the following key areas: a) immigration to Canada; b) family composition and characteristics; and c) children's schooling. The background information helps to understand the reasons behind participants' immigration to Canada, their family arrangements, and the role of children's education in their lives. Before moving to the individual participants, I include the following table, which contains essential demographic information provided by the participants.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of interviewed parents.

Name and age	Country of origin	Highest level of education	Current job	Years of living in Canada	Children
Leo (57) and Jarmila (47)	Czech Republic	Bachelor's college	engineer homemaker	24 19	F(17), F(15), F(15), M(12), M(9), F(6)
Petra (38)	Hungary	Bachelor's	homemaker	12	F(9), M(6)
Terezia (44)	Slovakia	Bachelor's	childcare worker	15	F(13), F(10), M(8)
Karina (39)	Romania	Bachelor's	researcher	15	M(10), M(5)
Yana (40) and Stephan (49)	Ukraine	Master's Bachelor's	ESL instructor software developer	12	F(18), M(13), F(2)
Tina (38)	Macedonia	Master's	graduate student	5	F(6)
Andrea (48)	Serbia	Bachelor's	manager (advertising)	24	F(24), M(16), M(11)
Ioana (40)	Romania	Bachelor's	homemaker	9	M(7), F(1)

Nevena (50)	Bulgaria	Bachelor's	manager (accounting)	17	F(24), M(13)
Viktor (40)	Serbia	college	massage therapist	22	F(12), M(10)
Eva (44)	Bulgaria	Bachelor's	costume designer	23	F(12)
Maria (39)	Russia	Master's	self-employed	15	M(13), M(10), F(5)
Marina (42)	Romania	PhD	university lecturer	15	M(10), M(6)
Roman (40) and Kira (38)	Ukraine	Bachelor's Bachelor's	software developer homemaker	7	F(10), F(5)
Oleksandr (37) and Irina (37)	Ukraine	Bachelor's Bachelor's	educational administrator educational assistant	3	M(11)

Leo and Jarmila (Czech Republic)

Immigration

Leo (57 years old) moved to West Germany in 1988 as a refugee from Czechoslovakia. While waiting for his permanent status, which he later received, Leo decided to apply for immigration to Canada and landed in Toronto in 1993. On vacation to Switzerland in 1996, Leo met Jarmila on a bus from Zurich to Prague and they got married the next year. Jarmila (47) followed her husband to Canada in 1998 after 5 years of living in Switzerland. She has always wanted to return to the Czech Republic as she felt at home only there and immigration was never as easy for her as for Leo who felt comfortable both in Germany and in Canada. Leo has been working as an engineer all his life, first in Germany and

then in Canada. He has been with the same employer since 1993. After the birth of their first child, the family decided that Jarmila would take care of the family, so she has been a homemaker for the last 17 years.

Family

Leo's father was a scientist with high expectations for his children. From the age of seven, Leo knew he would be an engineer. He graduated from a leading technical university in the former Czechoslovakia and has always worked in this field in Germany and Canada. Jarmila completed a college education and worked as an accountant in the Czech Republic. Coming from a small village, her parents never viewed university education as a realistic goal for her.

Leo and Jarmila have six children, all of whom were born in Canada: Lilly (6 years old), John (9 years old), Toby (12 years old), and twins Ella and Brenda (15 years old), and Jessica (17 years old). The language of the home is Czech, which gets reinforced when the children spend two months of their summer holidays in the Czech Republic. Some years they even attend school in the Czech Republic in the month of June. Leo says, that compared to the other children in the Czech community in Toronto, his children have the best speaking skills. Reading is mostly in English and sometimes in French, which is taught as a second language in school.

Children's Schooling

At the time of the interview, Jessica attended Grade 11 in the International Baccalaureate Program, while Ella and Brenda were in Grade 9 Extended French. Parents had planned for Toby to enroll in Extended French in Grade 7 as well. Extended French is a public school program in Ontario, where students spend half of their day studying in English and half in French (Lazaruk, 2007). The choice of the IB for their child was made by Leo and Jarmila to make sure that if the family returns to Europe, then their oldest daughter would have a better chance of applying to universities with the internationally recognized high school certificate. Before going the IB route Jessica also started the

Extended French in Grade 7. As far as the parents already speak Czech, English, Russian, and German, when their children wanted to add another language, they enrolled them in the Extended French Program.

All six children have multiple organized activities, both in school and outside of school. Ella, Brenda, and Jessica attend a children's choir in the city, play volleyball, field hockey, and soccer at the school level. John plays hockey, while Toby plays almost all sports his school has to offer including the above-mentioned volleyball, soccer, and hockey. Toby, Ella, Brenda, and Jessica were also performing in the school musical at different times.

Petra (Hungary)

Immigration

Petra (38 years old) moved from Hungary to Canada in 2002 looking for better opportunities in life and work. Her choice of country was influenced by the fact that she already held Canadian citizenship through her grandparents who used to live in Canada from 1929 to 1959. Additionally, Petra's aunt has moved to Canada before and encouraged Petra to come and help look after her children. Petra studied tourism in Hungary at the university level, which required good mastery of foreign languages (German and English in her case). To earn money for her move to Canada she spent six months working in London, UK, which significantly helped to improve her English proficiency. Petra worked as an office manager and flight attendant in Canada, but was a homemaker at the time of the interview, due to health reasons.

Family

Petra comes from a family of engineers, where university education was always taken for granted. On the contrary, Petra's husband does not have university education and works in the skilled trades in Canada. His parents did not encourage attendance of post-secondary institutions, but he

happily worked in the hospitality sector in Hungary. Petra and her husband have two children born in Canada: Barry (7 years old) and Octavia (9 years old). They both attend a French Immersion program. All family members speak Hungarian at home, but Petra reads to her children in English as well to make sure their grammar and vocabulary is on par with peers from English schools.

Children's schooling

Barry and Octavia attend Grade 2 and Grade 4 in the Early French Immersion program offered at the school across the street from their home. It is their neighbourhood school. Many of the parents at their school are immigrants from Eastern European countries, so their home language is neither English nor French, but there is no fear in the community that living with at least three languages might interfere with children's schooling. Both Barry and Octavia take swimming classes as their main organized activities. Barry also has karate and hockey, whereas Octavia takes ballet classes. Petra's relative who recently moved to Canada from Hungary is a music teacher, so Barry and Octavia took up guitar and flute respectively.

Terezia (Slovakia)

Immigration

Terezia (44 years old) came to Canada from Slovakia in 2001 with her husband to “try something new”. They had friends whom they visited the year before, when they heard that their technical and computer science jobs were in demand, and then decided to apply for immigration to Canada. Her husband found a job as a software developer rather quickly, but Terezia struggled with her English proficiency and had to start her career in the fast food industry. Terezia and her husband are divorced now. At the time of the interview, Terezia worked as a lunchroom supervisor in the elementary school attended by her two younger children and provided private childcare services in the community.

Family

Terezia graduated from a technical university in the former Czechoslovakia. She did not study English until the university, taking classes of Russian and German instead. Her father worked for the police and is a university graduate, while her mother has a specialized high school diploma and spent her working career as a secretary and office manager. Terezia has three children, all born in Canada: Adam (8 years old), Adriana (10 years old), and Gabriela (13 years old). Raising children as a single mother has not been easy for Terezia and she finds money tight. Her former husband does not take part in the upbringing of their three children. The language of the home is Slovak, but children read only in English for pleasure.

Children's schooling

A French Immersion program was available at the school in Terezia's neighbourhood, which was very convenient for her. Adam (Grade 2), Adriana (Grade 5) and Gabriela (Grade 8) all attend this school. Terezia decided to send her children to this school because she heard from friends that students who already speak another language other than English do better in the French Immersion program compared to monolingual Anglophones. In addition, Terezia thinks that a bilingual certificate from high school increases chances of good employment afterwards, especially for children of immigrants.

Outside of the school, Gabriela pursues rock climbing and goes to competitions throughout the province. Adriana is a member of the soccer club and Adam attends free basketball classes at the local community centre. As a family, Terezia and her children spend a lot of time outdoors swimming, cycling, and skating. Apart from sports, Adriana is a member of the girl guides, while Adam does scouts.

Karina (Romania)

Immigration

Karina (39) relocated to Canada from Romania in 2001 when her future husband, whom she

dated at the time, successfully applied for immigration to Canada. Right after university graduation, she agreed to marry him and they moved to the new country. Without prior experience of life abroad, Karina experienced some culture shock at the beginning, but studies and work helped her integrate well into the new society. Karina graduated from a Romanian university with degree in Accounting, but she did not have a chance to practice this profession. Soon after coming to Canada she completed a graduate certificate in research methods and she has been working in research and analysis for governmental bodies in Ontario ever since.

Family

Always academically strong in her high school Karina had no choice, but to go to university. She was supported in her aspirations by the parents despite being the first in her family to become university educated. Karina's husband is an engineer. Karina and her husband are bringing up two boys: George (5 years old) and Luca (10 years old) who were both born in Canada. All family members speak Romanian at home, but literacy practices are more influenced by English. Luca can read in Romanian, but struggles with writing in his first language.

Children's schooling

At the time of the interview, Luca attended Early French Immersion program and Karina was planning for George to start French Immersion the following year as well. The family decided to send children to French Immersion, so they learn another language at the academic level. Luca has been playing the piano for three years and he is a competitive swimmer. George is doing only swimming for his enjoyment, because the family decided not to push their younger son as much as they did it with Luca, who started arts classes at the age of four, but he did not do it on a long-term basis.

Yana and Stephan (Ukraine)

Immigration

Yana (40 years old) and Stephan (49 years old) came to Canada from Ukraine in 2005 looking for professional opportunities for themselves and better educational options for their children. They had relatives in Canada, which helped a lot. Nevertheless, the first three months in Canada were very difficult for a family with two little children, until Stephan found his first job. Yana thought they might have made a mistake by moving to a new country, but they are fully integrated now. Yana has always worked as a teacher of English as a Second Language, first in Ukraine, and then in Canada. Stephan has a Bachelor of Science degree from Ukraine and works as a software developer.

Family

After the undergraduate degree in Applied Linguistic in Ukraine, Yana received a Master of Education in Canada and was working towards a PhD in Education when she was interviewed for this study. Stephan always had a technical mind and knew from childhood that he would be involved in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) field. Yana and Stephan have three children: Tamara (2 years old), Alex (13 years old), and Lana (18 years old). Two older children, Lana and Alex, were born in Ukraine. Lana even completed Grade 1 there, before the family moved to Canada. Yana and Stephan are trying to make sure that children speak only Ukrainian at home and despite some resistance they are succeeding.

Children's schooling

Lana has come through the regular English-medium school and is now attending a bilingual university in Ottawa. Alex is in Grade 8 in the regular stream. Both children were tested for a gifted program, but missed the required score by several percentage points. Alex, the only child in the family, who was in the elementary school at the time of the interview, participated in several sports when he was younger, but at the time of the interview, he was only attending the private Math tutoring program. His parents believe that he needs extra Math tutoring to ensure high school and post-secondary preparation.

Tina (Macedonia)*Immigration*

When Tina (38 years old) was pregnant with her daughter Katherine, who was 6 years old at the time of the interview, she decided together with her husband to move from Macedonia to Canada, which they did in 2011. The tumultuous political situation in the country and low level of security influenced their choice. In addition, they have friends who had moved to Canada earlier and encouraged Tina to follow their example. At the time of the interview, Tina was close to completing her Master's Degree in Education from a Canadian university.

Family

Tina has always worked in the non-profit sector as an educational specialist first in Macedonia, and then in Canada. She has an undergraduate degree in education from Macedonia, and a Master's Degree in Human Rights from the Central European University in Hungary. Her husband is a web developer with an undergraduate degree in Science from a Macedonian university. The family has an only child, Katherine (6 years old), who was born in Macedonia, but moved with the family to Canada as a baby. Tina and her family speak Macedonian at home, but Katherine responds mostly in English, which became her dominant language. Tina hopes to teach Cyrillic alphabet to Katherine, so she can learn to read and write in Macedonian.

Children's schooling

Katherine is a Grade 1 student in an alternative school in the public system. The school follows a democratic model without strict division between younger and older children in the elementary stream. Students can float between classrooms and choose activities they want to engage in. This unusual pedagogical approach also requires a lot of parental engagement, which is required in the form of volunteering and fundraising. The school has an open door policy and parents can come to classes at

any time. As an educational professional, Tina was very happy to have a chance of sending her daughter to a school with a very child-centered approach to learning. Katherine is taking ballet lessons as her only organized activity at the present time. Tina does not want her daughter to be busy with adult supervised activities too much after school and prefers to have family time.

Andrea (Serbia)

Immigration

Andrea (48 years old) and her husband came to Canada from the former Yugoslavia in 1992 as independent migrants looking for opportunities. They applied for immigration before the start of the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001), but their move to Canada happened with this historical event as a backdrop. Despite the fact that they could speak English well as a young couple just out of university, Andrea and her husband experienced culture shock, because things worked differently in Canada compared to the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Right now Andrea occupies a managerial position in the advertising company working as a Director of Business Affairs. Her husband is a freelance consultant.

Family

Andrea and her husband have a background in the performing arts. They went to a film school in Yugoslavia, where Andrea studied editing and her husband was in the cinematography department. Andrea has three children born in Canada: Emil (11 years old), David (16 years old), and Mariana (24 years old). Serbian is the language of the home, but if with the older kids Andrea had a Serbian-only policy, with Emil she is more relaxed due to the prevalence of English, which has become the dominant language for the entire family. All three children acquired French at school.

Children's schooling

All three children attended the French-language system for part of their schooling. The focal

child for this interview, Emil (Grade 6), also began school in French, but switched to the English system in Grade 4. The reason why Andrea and her husband sent their children to a French-language school was to give them better educational opportunities, but it was difficult for them to participate in school activities as parents who do not speak French, so they transferred Emil to the English school system. In terms of organized activities, Emil has the fewest commitments of all three children. He is only taking coding classes over the weekend. With the two older kids Andrea was more insistent. They took music lessons, actively participated in sports, and had Math and French tutors.

Ioana (Romania)

Immigration

Ioana (40 years old) and her husband came to Canada in 2007 from Romania looking for a better life. She explains their immigration decision by the economic hardship in Romania and lack of employment in their home country. As a teacher of English and French, Ioana had no issues with the language, but could not get a job as a school teacher, so she had to pick up office jobs instead. At the time of the interview, Ioana was a homemaker taking care of her youngest child.

Family

Ioana was the first in her working-class family to go to university, while her husband has only a high school education. In Canada, he has been working in the manufacturing sector. The family has two Canadian-born children: Roxana (1 year old) and Sebastian (6 years old). Romanian is the home language, but Ioana has noticed that it is difficult for Sebastian to understand her explanations in Romanian when they talk about school, so she switches to English, which is his dominant language now.

Children's schooling

Sebastian attends Grade 1 in a French Immersion school, which was an easy choice to make,

because Ioana was trained as a French teacher and she can readily offer support if required. In kindergarten, he went to Romanian heritage language classes, which he liked, but the focus on Romanian literature and cultural background was not easy for him as a child growing up in Canada. Apart from school, Sebastian goes to the gym and plays soccer with his father. Ioana would like him to attend adult-supervised activities outside of school, but she mentions the cost of organized activities as a key barrier.

Nevena (Bulgaria)

Immigration

Nevena (50 years old) and her husband came to Canada from Bulgaria in 2000. They explain that their decision to immigrate to Canada was based on better medical and education systems for their first child, who was 7 years old at the time. Moving to a new country in their 30s was not easy for the parents, but their English skills were not bad from the outset and they eventually adjusted quite well. Nevena now works as a contract manager in a private company, while her husband always worked as an accountant both in Bulgaria and Canada.

Family

Nevena and her husband studied Economics in Bulgaria. They have two children: Diana (24 years old), who was born in Bulgaria, and Sofia (13 years old) born in raised in Canada. The language of the home is Bulgarian, but over the years the importance of English increased so much that both Bulgarian and English are used for the communication in the family. Children cannot read in Bulgarian and they never attended heritage language classes due to the abundance of schoolwork.

Children's schooling

Diana attended the regular English program and has recently graduated with the undergraduate degree from a local Arts and Design university. The focal child in the study, Sofia (Grade 8), attended a

Montessori school from Grade 1 to 4, before switching to a specialized arts program in a public school. Apart from visual arts activities at her school Sofia goes to an art studio and has an English tutor to develop her writing skills.

Victor (Serbia)

Immigration

Victor (44 years old) moved to Canada in 1994 during the war in the former Yugoslavia. He was not a refugee, but he felt that his country was falling apart and he was looking for a better life. His uncle lived in Canada and sponsored his immigration application. Victor did not speak much English at the beginning and his university program in physical education in Yugoslavia was interrupted by the immigration. Having completed less than two years of his degree program he graduated from a private college in Canada specializing in massage therapy. He has been working as a Registered Massage Therapist for around 20 years. Victor's wife works as a beautician.

Family

Victor's father is an artist and his mother is a doctor. Milos (10 years old) and Maria (12 years old) were born in Canada. They often go to Serbia, attend their grandfather's exhibitions, play sports, and socialize with their family members there. Serbian is their home language, but they read and write only in English. When addressed in Serbian children often reply in English. Parents try to keep the first language in the family and several times Maria and Milos went to a Serbian summer camp.

Children's schooling

Victor and his wife decided to enroll Milos (Grade 5) and Maria (Grade 7) in the French Immersion program, because they were not happy with their neighborhood school. They felt it was not a good school and describe many parents as not caring about their children. The second reason behind this choice was an opportunity to learn French. Victor's children have demanding schedules outside of

school. Maria is a competitive swimmer, while Milos plays competitive tennis. Training and competitions take place at least five days of the week. They also take guitar lessons. Both children used to attend Kumon Math tutoring in early grades, then, switched to a Saturday tutoring program in English and French. At the time of the interview, they had a private tutor, who would come to their home and teach French, Math, and English.

Eva (Bulgaria)

Immigration

Eva (44 years old) came to Canada in 1994 from Bulgaria, which experienced considerable political and economic turmoil after the collapse of communism. The decision was made by her husband, so she just followed him across the Atlantic. In Bulgaria, Eva graduated from university with a degree in English language and literature, but in Canada she switched to fashion design after completing a program at a local university.

Family

Her husband is in the commercial cleaning business working long hours especially in the evening, which makes it more difficult for him to be involved in their daughter's education. The only child in the family, Desi (12 years old) was born in Canada, but she not only speaks fluent Bulgarian, but also reads and writes in her first language.

Children's schooling

Desi (Grade 7) has been in French Immersion since Senior Kindergarten. Her parents made this choice, because she is good with languages and her parents think that the elementary school curriculum in Ontario is too easy, so having an extra language to study would compensate for that. Her organized activities include drama, gymnastics, archery, and Bulgarian as a heritage language. Additionally, Eva bought Bulgarian textbooks for her daughter and they access online resources from the Bulgarian

Ministry of Education. She also found tutors for English, Math, and French. One of the tutors was a Montessori teacher who offered integrated Social Studies and Science program.

Maria (Russia)

Immigration

Maria (39 years old) came to Canada from Russia in 2001 as an international student to pursue a PhD in Geology. During her studies, she got married, had her first child and decided to downgrade her program to the Master of Science, which she successfully completed in 2004. Her husband came to Canada from Russia looking for work opportunities in software development and decided to stay. When she first applied for her PhD in Canada she was not successful, but one of the professors who reviewed her application invited her to come over and stay with his family for two months. This experience helped her to improve the English proficiency and eventually led to an acceptance from another university. After finishing her MSc. degree Maria worked in environmental consulting, but at the time of the interview she was running a small online business. This opportunity allowed Maria to work from home and spend more time with her children.

Family

Maria's parents are engineers, so Science and Math were always important in her family. Maria has three children born in Canada: Emily (5 years old), Eric (10 years old), and Daniel (13 years old). Russian is the language of the home, but it is used more with the older boys compared to Emily. Daniel can read in Russian well, mainly due to his disposition for languages, but Eric and Emily cannot. Maria reads more in English to Emily, which shows a gradual loss of importance of Russian in their life. French is used only for school assignment, so English has become the language of reading for pleasure.

Children's schooling

All three children attend French Immersion schools: Emily is in Senior Kindergarten, Eric is in

Grade 5, while Daniel is in Grade 8. Maria buys Canadian curriculum textbooks to know what children learn at school, but they study well, so she never felt they needed extra tuition at home. Sports organized activities take up all the after school time for the boys. Daniel was a competitive swimmer for five years, training around 20 hours a week, but he switched to running now. At the time of the interview, he was the Grade 8 Boy's City Champion, which made Maria very proud of him. Eric is in competitive gymnastics and belongs to the same running club as his older brother. Maria mentioned that while looking for a high school for Daniel they were mostly interested in sports programs because he wants to pursue an athletic career.

Marina (Romania)

Immigration

Marina (42 years old) and her husband came to Canada from Romania in 2002 looking for a better life. They felt there was no future for them in Romania. They had friends who had moved to Canada earlier and Marina decided to try as well. When Marina came to Canada for the first time, she felt free and did not experience the negotiation stage of culture shock. After the immigration to Canada, Marina completed another Master's degree in Education, followed by a PhD in Second Language Education. She works as a university lecturer now. Marina's husband has a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from a Romanian university and works in the IT sector.

Family

Marina's parents did not have university degrees in Romania, but wanted their children to have the opportunities they missed. As a child, Marina had tutors, extra homework help from her parents, who also went with her to the theatre and other cultural activities. She completed a university degree in Engineering, because of societal pressure to pursue STEM careers, but she did not like this major. After the graduation, she got a Master's degree in English language and Translation. Marina and her husband

have two children born in Canada: Andrew (6 years old) and David (10 years old). Romanian is the only language used in the home. David can read and write in Romanian, but for Andrew it is more of an oral tradition. Their maternal grandmother, who does not speak any English, lives with the family, which helps to reinforce spoken Romanian for children.

Children's schooling

Andrew (Grade 1) and David (Grade 4) attend the French Immersion program. As a Linguistics researcher and lecturer, Marina values languages, so she never hesitated to provide her children with an additional language and French Immersion definitely helps. Both children have French tutors and practice organized sports three times a week. They take swimming classes and are members of a competitive soccer club. David and Andrew often travel to competitions within the metropolitan area where they live.

Roman and Kira (Ukraine)

Immigration

Roman (40 years old) and Kira (38 years old) came to Canada from Ukraine in 2010 looking for “better life and opportunities”. Kira experienced a significant culture shock, because she had never been abroad before and was initially overwhelmed by new experiences of diverse peoples, languages, and foods. Roman, on the other hand, went on business trips before, so when the family moved to Canada, he was not surprised by the peculiarities of local life. At the time of the interview, Kira was taking several courses in a local college to refresh her Math and English skills to pursue a Diploma in Environmental Science in Canada. Roman has a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science. He has been working as a Software Engineer both in Ukraine and in Canada.

Family

Kira graduated from a Ukrainian university with a degree in Environmental Engineering, but

she became a homemaker after the birth of her first child Margarita. Margarita (10 years old) was born in Ukraine, but started her schooling in kindergarten in Canada. Milena (5 years old) was born in Canada. Roman and Kira are trying not to speak English at home. Margarita reads and writes in Russian every day. She likes being read to in Ukrainian, but is reluctant to do it herself.

Children's schooling

Margarita (Grade 5) and Milena (JK) attend the same school, which is a regular English neighbourhood school. Margarita has an array of organized activities that she pursues: swimming and skating lessons, extra Mathematics tutoring, and Russian as a heritage language offered by the school board. Both girls love visiting museums with their parents and often spend weekends exploring local nature, science, art, and history there.

Oleksandr and Irina (Ukraine)

Immigration

Oleksandr (37 years old) and Irina (37 years old) came to Canada from Ukraine in 2013 looking for a better education and environment for their son. They travelled a lot across the Western Europe and North America and decided it would be better for them to move from Ukraine, which has been experiencing political and economic turmoil for quite some time. Irina suffered a significant culture shock at the beginning, because she did not speak much English at the time of immigration. She had to rely on her husband every time she needed to see a doctor or run other errands. Six months prior to moving to Canada, Oleksandr and Irina had a chance to live in the US for six months and send their son to Grade 1, which prepared both the boy and his parents to life and schooling in Canada. They lived in Manitoba for 2 years before moving to Ontario one year before the interview took place. Oleksandr taught elementary school in Manitoba, but struggled to get a teaching position in Ontario. Instead, he is working as an educational administrator in a private career college. Irina is currently working as an

educational assistant at a Montessori school.

Family

Oleksandr graduated from a university in Ukraine and taught English as a second language.

Irina graduated from a Ukrainian university and worked as a psychologist in her home country.

Oleksandr and Irina have one child Daniel (11 years old), who was born in Ukraine and started his Canadian schooling in Grade 3. They speak Ukrainian at home, but literacy practices are mostly carried out in English. Daniel starts to forget how to read and write in Ukrainian. Oleksandr values Ukrainian as the family heritage language, but Irina believes that their son has to concentrate on English because he is in Canada now.

Children's schooling

Daniel attended Grade 6 in a public suburban school at the time of the interview. This school is housed in a new building and has a reputation of being one of the best in the area. Daniel does many sports in and outside of school including track and field, basketball, soccer, and volleyball. He is proud of his successful participation in intramural and regional competitions. The family do not use any tutoring services, but have been thinking about it.

Chapter 5. Ontario policies on parental involvement: Myth or reality for immigrant parents?

How do types of parental involvement used by Eastern European immigrant parents match the narratives expressed in Ontario policy documents?

Introduction

In this chapter I turn to the analysis of parental involvement policies in Ontario to understand how the types of parental involvement practiced by interviewed parents match or do not match the narratives expressed in policy documents. Narratives expressed in parental involvement policy documents are important as a proxy to understand whose parental involvement has capital. Involvement that is aligned with policy expectations is likely to be valued in the school system. As a scholar working from a critical standpoint, I adopt the framework of critical policy analysis concentrating on its five key foci (Young & Diem, 2017):

- 1) difference between policy rhetoric and practice; what policy documents “say” and how parental involvement is practised, as based on prior research and existing Canadian data? I explore the discourses in policies and compare them with what we know about the parental involvement practices from the existing literature (People for Education, 2012);
- 2) roots of policy and its development; how parental involvement policies emerged and what problems they were intended to solve? I investigate the historical roots of parental involvement policies, when and why they became popular internationally and in Ontario;
- 3) distribution of power, resources, and knowledge; does the discourse empower one group of parents and marginalize others? Here I look at power relations between policymakers, teachers, and parents to understand whose voices are represented in policies;
- 4) stratification, inequality, and privilege; how diverse and immigrant parents are represented in the

policy? This is one of the key questions of my study, which is designed precisely to uncover if the parental involvement as practised by immigrant parents is valued in the official discourse;

5) nature of resistance: are non-dominant actors involved in policy to make their voices heard?

In my thesis, I concentrate on the texts of parental involvement policy documents, which represent the official discourse on parental involvement in Ontario. Discourse is understood here as the way of thinking, which shapes social interactions, and can be expressed in talk and text (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Niesz, 2006). I will start with the roots of parental involvement policies to provide a historical and cultural context to the phenomenon before moving to the question of what policy “says” in the Ontario context today.

It has been known for decades that parental background and family factors shape the educational experiences of students across countries. Researchers who focused on social class and education paid significant attention to the ways in which the school reproduces social inequality (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lareau, 2011) and provides differentiated curriculum to students based on their familial characteristics (Anyon, 1980; Luke, 2010). Social reproduction researchers showed that differences in parenting and other aspects of home environment shape the school experiences and achievement of children in profound ways (Lareau, 2011; Reay, 1998). At the same time, the idea of parental involvement as a response to educational problems, which required policy intervention, appeared only during the mid-1960s, but became especially powerful over the last several decades (Mapp, 2012). When the U.S. president Lyndon Johnston began his “War on Poverty”, education was selected as one of the main intervention strategies with *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), 1965* setting aside additional funding for parental involvement in poverty-stricken schools (Mapp, 2012). Parental involvement was defined as “the capabilities of parents to work with the school in a way that supports their children’s wellbeing, growth, and development.” (Mizell as cited in Mapp, 2012, p. 7). A *Nation at Risk* report in 1983 explicitly mentioned that parents were more

important for the educational reform than teachers and policymakers (Fernandez & Lopez, 2017). In the UK, policymakers have been trying to increase social mobility since the late 1990s by “improving” parenting of citizens, including parental involvement in children’s education (Vincent, 2017). Such “improvement” efforts have been centred on raising aspirations among working-class (Spohrer, Stahl, & Bowers-Brown, 2018) parents and helping them make “better” educational choices for their children (Exley, 2013). The 21st century brought parental involvement policies into the spotlight in the field of education, especially in the English-speaking nations. The *Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006* represents one of the few stand-alone legislative documents dedicated exclusively to parental involvement (National Parent Forum of Scotland, 2017), while a *Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools, 2010* offered the first comprehensive document of its kind in Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

In the Ontario context, parental involvement was formalized in the late 1990s, when the provincial conservative government of Mike Harris passed *Bill 160, Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997*, which mandated school councils to be established in all schools (Ontario Government, 1997). In 2000, *The Education Act, Ontario regulation 612/00: School councils and parent involvement committees* clarified that the purpose of school councils is to “improve pupil achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents” (Ontario Government, 2000, p.1). In 2005, *Parent Voice in Education Project*, after consultations with parents across the province, resulted in a report calling for empowering the parental voice in education, creating a more inclusive environment for parents, and recognizing the differences among diverse parents in Ontario (Ministry of Education, 2010). The same year, the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* was introduced as the first policy document in the province dedicated to the involvement of parents in their children’s education followed by an enhanced *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools* in 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2010). The *Parents Reaching Out Grants* program was launched in 2006

to provide funding to school councils and regional parental organizations with the view to eliminate barriers to parental involvement (Hamlin & Flessa, 2016), whereas parent involvement committees for all Ontario school boards became mandatory in 2009 through the amendment of the *Regulation 612/00* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

If parents were always involved in their children's education, albeit in different ways, what lies behind the current proliferation of parental involvement policies? What problems do parental involvement policies are supposed to solve? One of the possible explanations is the discourse focussing on the achievement gap (Carey, 2013; Goodall, 2017) and the need for school improvement in the “knowledge economies” of globalized capitalism (Rawolle et al., 2016). Policy here is used as a solution to the “problem” generated by data (differences in test results from international comparisons (e.g. PISA) and local accountability measures (e.g. EQAO), public outcry and media coverage (e.g. discourse of failing schools), and government pressure (e.g. emphasis on education as the key element of human capital formation (Vargas, 2017). Subsequently, parents are blamed for the educational underachievement, even though the problem of involvement here is a discursive one due to the narrow definition of normative parental involvement (Fernandez & Lopez, 2017). When tests results do not meet the expectations of educational administrators and policy makers, parents are blamed for not being active in the school domain, even though we know that home-based involvement is more effective for achievement (Jeynes, 2007). Not surprisingly, such increased emphasis on parental involvement lauded as one of the best tools for such improvement is disproportionately aimed at student populations identified as disadvantaged (Gewirtz, 2001; Rawolle et al, 2017). Parental involvement policies are getting popular internationally, because similar to other educational policies, they become global and “travel” through the network of international organizations (OECD, 2012; Redding, 2000), mobile educational researchers, and private companies (Ball, Junemann, & Santori, 2017), which leads to the homogenization of policies across nation states.

Against this historical and cultural background, I carried out my analysis of parental involvement policy documents in Ontario guided by additional research questions: 1. How is parental involvement conceptualized in policy documents compared to the latest parental involvement research and data from research participants? 2. Does the discourse empower one group of parents and marginalize others? 3. How are diverse and immigrant parents represented in policy documents?

After the close reading of policy documents, they were coded thematically. For the first level of coding a combination of pre-set and emergent codes was used. Informed by prior research of parental involvement (Epstein, 2010; Lareau, 2011; Mapp, 2012; Saltmarsh, 2015) among the pre-set codes were included the following descriptive codes: parental involvement, engagement, parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, collaborating with community, barriers to involvement, immigrant parents. At this stage, a range of additional descriptive codes emerged: benefits of parental involvement, high expectations, acknowledgement of parental involvement, etc. During the second level coding, I took multiple first level codes and reorganized them into a more select group of codes, which were developed into broader categories: home-based activities, school-based activities, role of parents, role of teachers, diversity, supporting parents. At the stage of the third level coding, categories were refined to develop major themes: normative parental involvement, good parenting, deficit lens, absent teachers. Themes were analysed to answer the research questions.

Description of policy documents

Now I will provide a detailed overview of parental involvement policy documents selected for the analysis. These documents are important for the analysis of immigrant parental involvement, because they shape the narratives around involvement. After all, policy is often understood as the

“authoritative allocation of values” (Easton, as cited in Prunty, 1985, p. 136). When policy is understood as text (Ball, 1993) it allows to see the agendas and compromises of multiple actors responsible for the creation of documents. In the case of parental involvement policies in Ontario, we can distinguish the position of the Ministry of Education, several school boards, associations of school principals, and one non-governmental organization. Texts produced by these policy actors define the range of problems and solutions related to parental involvement in the province. Policy as discourse approach (Ball, 1993; Bacchi, 2000) goes further to look at not only what can be said, but also who has the power to speak, and what ideas are excluded from policies (Fimyar, 2014). Definitely, policies are almost always implemented in non-straightforward and non-linear ways (Braun, Maguire, & Ball, 2010). Nevertheless, some policy documents have significant power, especially when supported by the regulatory requirements (e.g. mandatory school councils and parental involvement committees in Ontario). In other words, parental involvement policy documents play an important role in defining what types of involvement are expected from parents by the school system.

The following table provides the full list of analysed policy documents and names of organizations responsible for the creation of these policies.

Table 3. Analysed policy documents

Policy document	Organisation
<i>Parents in Partnership: Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools</i>	Ontario Ministry of Education (2010)
<i>School Councils: A Guide for Members</i>	Ontario Ministry of Education (2001)
<i>Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy</i>	Ontario Ministry of Education (2009)
<i>Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario</i>	Ontario Ministry of Education (2014)
<i>Ontario Regulation 612/00: School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees</i>	Ontario (2000)
<i>Parent Tool Kit: What Parents Can Do to Help Their Child Succeed in School</i>	Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) (2012)
<i>Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools</i>	Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) (2014)
<i>School Administrator's Guide to Parent Engagement</i>	Ontario Principals' Council (2011)
<i>Policy P.023 SCS Parent and Community Involvement</i>	Toronto District School Board (2005)
<i>Operational Procedure PR558 Parent and Community Involvement</i>	Toronto District School Board (2015)
<i>Policy #238.0, Parent, family and Community Engagement</i>	York Region District School Board (2015)
<i>Policy 606: Catholic school councils</i>	York Catholic District School Board (2016)
<i>Beyond school councils: Engaging parents to help their children succeed at school</i>	People for Education (2012)
<i>Parent Involvement Committees: Building Parent Engagement in Ontario's School Boards</i>	People for Education (2015)

The first group of documents, which has the highest regulatory power and potentially the most significant influence on the parental involvement discourse in Ontario, is represented by four policies developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education and *Ontario Regulation 612/00: School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees* passed by the provincial legislators in 2000.

Parents in Partnership: Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools is a comprehensive document released in 2010 to articulate the “vision of parental engagement in Ontario schools” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.6). It is a framework policy intended to be a reference source for teachers, administrators, and parents. The document also identifies strategies needed to implement this vision, describes discriminatory and systemic biases to involvement, promotes specific parental involvement practices, and identifies the roles of multiple stakeholders regarding parental involvement in the province (the ministry, school boards, parental involvement committees, and school councils).

The vision of parental involvement includes the acknowledgement of benefits of such involvement for student achievement:

Students are supported and inspired to learn in a culture of high expectations in which parents:

- are welcomed, respected, and valued by the school community as partners in their children’s learning and development;
- have opportunities to be involved, and also a full range of choices about how to be involved, in the educational community to support student success;
- are engaged through ongoing communication and dialogue with other educational partners to support a positive learning environment at home and at school;
- are supported with the information and tools necessary to participate in school life.

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.7)

Parents in Partnership policy emphasizes the centrality of parents in the involvement process:

“effective parent engagement policy must actively seek to establish an understanding of families’ backgrounds, cultures, interests, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.12). The document contains a background section on parent engagement and its types. Home and school-based types of involvement are equally represented here.

Special attention is paid to the role of parents in setting high expectations:

Research has shown that positive parental aspirations and expectations for their children's educational achievement have a strong relationship with children's actual achievement. The greater the support that families provide for their children's learning and educational progress, the more likely that their children will do well in school and continue on with their education. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.8).

Schools are encouraged to work with parents to make sure that both families and school support high educational aspirations among students. The policy document mentions challenges that many parents face in the fulfilment of the above-mentioned vision of parental engagement, including “language, parent education level, the challenges of single parenthood, attitude of school staff, cultural influences, socio-economic status, and geography” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.9). Importantly, immigrant parents are briefly mentioned as well as their need to know more about the Ontario education system and involvement opportunities.

To fulfil the vision of parental engagement in Ontario a range of strategies is described.

Strategy 1: School Climate is centred on the welcoming atmosphere in schools, when parental perspectives are heard and valued. Parents are included in a variety of school-related bodies, e.g. Education Partnership Table and Safe Schools team. Ontario faculties of education are encouraged to support teacher candidates in developing skills of working with parents, while Ontario's Leadership Framework identifies knowledge and attitudes school leaders require to meaningfully welcome parents to schools. Strategy 2: Eliminating Barriers includes Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grants, references to the removal of discriminating barriers required by the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and measures to increase the participation of among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit parents. Strategy 3: Supports for Parents has a variety of resources available on the Ministry of Website (e.g. “Parents Matter” brochure, fact-sheets for parents about safe schools, inclusive education, etc.).

Several brochures were developed to provide more information for parents on full-day kindergarten programs, French-language education, character development and special needs education offerings. Strategy 4: Parent Outreach combines policies, programs and initiatives to communicate with parents in a meaningful and sustained way. Examples include Ontario's Early Learning initiative, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, multilingual materials for parents on reading, mathematics, and bullying. Across the entire document there are Parent Engagement in Action sidebars, which provide examples of particular activities in selected schools and school boards. For example, the Durham District School Board has an initiative to involve culturally and linguistically diverse parents by translating documents and welcome packages in nine languages, having an information forum for Muslim parents, and staging multilingual literacy events.

The last section of the Partners in Partnership contains a Parent Engagement Action Plan, which establishes goals for schools, school boards and the Ministry. Schools are encouraged to sustain the welcoming culture where parental input is valued, run workshops for parents and students, and make sure diverse parents are represented on school councils. Parents need to be consulted regarding Individual Education Plans and informed about full-day kindergarten options. Boards are required to continue working on addressing parental involvement barriers, support parental involvement committees and school councils, and implement policies to improve equity and inclusion in education. Finally, the Ministry has to support parental involvement through the Parent Engagement Office, facilitate the work of parental associations in Ontario, and review the effectiveness of the Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grants.

The rest of policies created by the Ministry of Education and the related Ontario regulation have very specific purposes. *Ontario Regulation 612/00: School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees* (Ontario government, 2000) is a legislative document, which sets out the purpose, composition, and proceedings of school councils and parental involvement committees. Readers are

given information about the by-laws, keeping minutes, remuneration, and voting procedures. *School Councils: A Guide for Members* is a technical document of more than 100 pages, which provides a brief overview of regulations that make school councils mandatory in the province (Ontario Government, 2000) before describing in significant detail the day-to-day operations of school councils. The document suggests how to establish by-laws, prepare for meetings, and organize communication between the council and the school community. There are numerous school council templates in the guide, which include a sample code of ethics, council meeting agenda, annual report, and other practical documents.

Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario is aimed at achieving excellence in academic achievement, ensuring equity, so that all children can reach their full potential, promoting well-being of students, and enhancing public confidence in public education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Parents are mentioned throughout the document, which echoes *Parents in Partnership* policy:

Parents and guardians are a critical component of ensuring public confidence in the education system. Parents who are engaged and actively involved in their child's learning make Ontario's great schools even stronger. Most importantly, students are more likely to succeed when their parents are engaged in their learning, and with more students succeeding, public confidence in the education system can be enhanced.

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p.17).

Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy was developed to “strive to ensure that all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 10). Its vision is that all students, parents, and other school community members are valued and respected regardless of their social class, gender, race, sexuality, religion, ability or culture. Schools are encouraged to consult with parents in matters of equity

and inclusion in education. Overall, parents are acknowledged as important stakeholders in children's education:

Parents want our schools to bring out the very best in their children and help them reach their full potential. Everyone who works in education – administrators, teachers, support workers, and the government – shares that same firm commitment. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 24).

The second group of parental involvement policy documents is represented by policies created by associations of school administrators. Ontario Principals' Council created *School Administrator's Guide to Parent Engagement* (2010), which provides school leaders with one resource to answer all questions regarding parental involvement in schools. Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) developed two documents *Parent Tool Kit: What Parents Can Do to Help Their Child Succeed in School* (2012) and *Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools* (2014).

The purpose of these documents and the intended audience shape the structure and content of resulting policies. *School Administrator's Guide* is clearly aimed at school principals and vice-principals, which is reflected in the way how parental involvement is understood. Here educational leadership literature is cited:

Parent engagement in school is nurtured when parents come to understand that such involvement is a key part of what it means to be a responsible parent, when parents believe they have the skills and know-how to make meaningful contributions to the school's efforts and when they believe that school staffs, as well as their own children, value their participation in the school.

(Leithwood, 2010, as cited in Ontario Principals' Council, 2011, p. 9)

A significant section of the *Guide* is dedicated to executive summaries of Ministry policies related to

parental engagement, including *Parents in Partnership* and *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*. As far as this document was written to help school leaders with parental engagement work, the most space is dedicated to samples of supporting resources. There are templates of a parent involvement survey, school council survey, tips for councils, parent engagement activity planner, information on Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grants, and tips for parents. Finally, the *Guide* has three case studies in the parent engagement part.

Parent Tool Kit: What Parents Can Do to Help Their Child Succeed in School has been developed for parents:

It is intended to support the work parents do as the first and most important teachers of their children. The Parent Tool Kit provides ideas for families to use as they support learning at school and at home. Students whose learning is supported at home are more successful in school and stay in school longer. (Council of Ontario Directors of Education, 2012, p. 3).

Parent Tool Kit groups ideas for parents under sections: Be a Coach, Be a Mentor, and Be an Advocate. Suggestions for parents here include reading at home, finding opportunities for Math in everyday life, helping with homework, and preparing for a science fair. Additionally, parents are given advice on organizing free time and dealing with teenage children:

Extracurricular activities are great for keeping children healthy and well balanced. Families and friends enjoy times together and build a strong sense of community while cheering for their child's team. There is a large time commitment to organized sports. Consider hiking, biking or swimming together as ways to stay fit and save time for the family. (Council of Ontario Directors of Education, 2012, p. 30).

Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools was developed to complement

the *Tool Kit*. It was written for “parent groups and schools to use in planning school-based activities to complement and support parents' efforts at home” (Council of Ontario Directors of Education, 2014, p. 3). A key section of the document explains how to connect the *Parent Tool Kit* to school-based activities. Examples include a student-led workshop on the technology use, a community guest speaker event, getting ready for science fair demonstration, or hosting a community event about food and health. Each sample activity has detailed instructions to follow and provides the rationale and additional online resources for parents and teachers. The *Guidebook* also has sample parent satisfaction surveys and tips for parental engagement annual implementation plan together with recommendations on parent-teacher communication strategies.

The third group of parental involvement policy documents analysed for the study comprises policies developed by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), York Region District School Board (YRDSB), and York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB). The documents in this group were originally drafted in 1990s, but were updated several times to follow the requirements of *Ontario Regulation 612/00* and reflect latest initiatives including *Parents in Partnership* policy. *Policy P.023 SCS Parent and Community Involvement* is the shortest document of two pages, which establishes the framework for parent and community involvement in the Board:

The TDSB believes that education is a shared responsibility among parents, the community, students, staff and the Board. By working together we all contribute to the improvement of our schools and to the success of our students. The Board shall provide parents with the information they need to support their children's education and shall involve them in decisions, which affect their children and their schools. The Board is committed to ensuring that all parents and members of our diverse communities have opportunities to participate in the school system, and shall provide the support necessary to achieve that goal. (Toronto District School Board, 2005, p.1).

The Policy refers to *Ontario Regulation 612/00* and requires every school to have a school council. Understandably, a more detailed document was created in the form of *Operational Procedure PR558 Parent and Community Involvement*. The first half of the *Procedure* describes the steps to ensure communication between parents and teachers, outreach programs aimed at marginalized parents and communities, and day-to-day operations of school councils. The structure and functions of Parent Involvement Advisory Committees, Community Liaison Groups, and Early Years Advisory Committees are outlined as well. Interestingly, the second half of the *Procedure* is dedicated to parent volunteers with main focus on extracurricular activities in the school (e.g. school clubs and athletic activities). Detailed requirements for the recruitment and management of volunteers are provided alongside with Volunteer Application Form and Volunteer Reference Check. The technical nature of the *Operational Procedure* is enhanced by the reference page with 14 relevant policies on the board and provincial levels (e.g. Dealing with Abuse and Neglect of Students Policy, Physical Education Safety Guidelines).

Policy 606: Catholic school councils was prepared by the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) in 1995, but underwent multiple updates throughout the years. It deals exclusively with Catholic school councils and outlines their parameters, membership, and responsibilities. Due to the religious mandate of schools in the Board the definition of Catholic school councils adds reference to that function:

A Catholic School Council will assist the school in engaging parents, developing positive communication links with home, church and the broader community. The Catholic School Council will also assist the school in realizing its goals and mission as well as the Board's vision. (York Catholic District School Board, 2016, p. 1).

Overall, the document is quite technical in nature and contains cross references to other Board policies (e.g. School Fundraising, Volunteers in Schools) and details of ongoing procedural issues

(e.g. role of the chair, the frequency of meetings, etc.).

Policy #238.0, Parent, family and Community Engagement (York Region District School Board, 2015) has been published later than the other three board documents in this group. As a result it has several references to *Parents in Partnership* document and the discourse of partnerships in particular:

Partnership refers to a relationship in which the Board, its schools and staff members are involved with parents, families, caregivers, business partners, various levels of government, volunteers, community service agencies and parent groups. In general, it refers to those who contribute to and have an interest in supporting student achievement and well-being in York Region public schools. (York Region District School Board, 2015, p.2).

The overall structure of the document is still in line with other school board policies, as far as the most space is devoted to the responsibilities of diverse actors (Board of Trustees, Director of Education, principals, students, school staff and parents) in terms of parental and community involvement. It also includes a supplementary Policy #238.1, Supporting Community and Fundraising Events, which outlines the rules for the cooperation between the Board and external community organizations with the goal to hold fundraising events in the interest of students, staff, and families in the Board.

The fourth group of documents is represented by the two policies developed by the People for Education group: *Beyond school councils: Engaging parents to help their children succeed at school* and *Parent Involvement Committees: Building Parent Engagement in Ontario's School Boards*. Unlike, actors responsible for documents in the first three groups (Ministry, associations of school leaders, and school boards) People for Education is a non-governmental organization established in 1990s to support public education in the period of cuts to public services initiated by the Mike Harris government (Winton & Brewer, 2015). Due to its history and mandate as “an independent, non-

partisan, charitable organization working to support and advance public education through research, policy, and public engagement”, People for Education is free to generate alternative policy solutions, which is telling in the structure and content of the two analyzed policies.

Beyond school councils: Engaging parents to help their children succeed at school was published in 2012 and incorporates an earlier report *Doing What Matters Most: How parents can help their children succeed at school*. The main emphasis here is that “Parents do more to help their children succeed in school by chatting about what they learned today or asking questions about a TV show they watched together than by “drill and skill” homework sessions, endless nagging, or racing off to a meeting at the school” (People for Education, 2012, p. 8). The document cites research evidence that it is home-based involvement that benefits children’s achievement the most. Having high expectations, talking about school, and reading together are named as some of the best ways parents can get involved in their children’s education at home. Subsequently, data from the Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAQO) is provided to show that Ontario parents do not talk about school with their children enough and the same applies to reading together (People for Education, 2012). Gaps in communication between teachers and parents are highlighted, especially at the secondary level.

To improve the situation, People for Education generate a number of solutions. Tips for Parents include talking about school matters, developing good work habits (e.g. persistence, asking for help, and planning), and reading for enjoyment together. Although most suggestions deal with home-based involvement activities at school are mentioned too:

Whether it is attending a school concert, cheering on a school team, or participating in community events and meetings planned by your school council, parent involvement in school activities can foster a sense of community within the school. It can build stronger relationships between teachers and parents, and provide an opportunity for parents to connect with and support each other. (People for Education, 2012, p. 3).

Tips for Teachers section follows the same structure, having high expectations, talking about school, developing work habits, and reading. The nature of recommendations is different, because here teachers are advised to have high expectation for students and support aspirations parents have for their children. Similarly, ideas for communication with parents and sample activities to connect home and school events are given. Teachers are encouraged to send books home to provide access to quality reading materials for students. Likewise, Tips for Principals include such ideas as distributing materials to school councils on successful parental involvement practices (having high expectations, talking about schools, developing good habits, and reading together), keeping the school library open before and after school, and setting parental involvement goals for the school.

Parent Involvement Committees: Building Parent Engagement in Ontario's School Boards was released in 2015 and is dedicated specifically to the encouragement of parental involvement initiatives at the Board level. This policy is based on survey results data collected by the People for Education from parental involvement committees in 67 of Ontario's 72 publicly funded school boards. We get information about the composition of councils, their structure, and main activities. These are not merely policy statements, but empirical data in the Ontario context, which gives voice to committee members:

Our main activities focus on a series of events that serve as a resource for parents in areas like literacy, math, faith formation, and mental health. We are also launching our annual volunteer recognition award this year, to honour one outstanding parent volunteer from each of our schools. (People for Education, 2015, p.8).

The policy describes how parent involvement committees communicate both with parents and teachers and mention challenges their have in their work:

The main challenge is getting the buy-in of all stakeholders. It needs to become a common belief and part of the educational system, that 'Parents are Partners' in education and need

to be treated as such. Parents need to be viewed as part of the educational community — not as an unwanted outsider or annoyance. (People for Education, 2015, p.11).

At the end of the document People for Education come up with their recommendations for the Ministry of Education and school boards. These suggestions are mostly of technical nature: ensure that committees share information among each other; provide committee funding details to school boards; develop websites for committees, etc. Best practices are shared with parental involvement committees: establish clear goals for the year, identify other parent groups and partner with them, translate key messages for parents into languages other than English, and cooperate with other board committees, including those on special education and aboriginal education (People for Education, 2015).

Conceptualizations of parental involvement in Ontario policy documents

How is parental involvement conceptualized in policy documents compared to latest parental involvement research and data from research participants?

Over the last several decades, multiple discussions among critical scholars of parental involvement have highlighted the importance of the fact that the way parental involvement is conceptualized in policy and research affects parental involvement practice in schools and families (Auerbach, 2007; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Discourses around parental involvement generated in policy documents circulate in the media and find their way into teacher education, which adds to their internalization by educators (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Traditional understanding of involvement is seen mostly as parental participation in school-based and school-sanctioned activities (volunteering, fundraising, homework help, advocating for their children). This discourse is problematic on two levels. First, as prior meta-studies showed, it is parental involvement at home (setting expectations, providing academic socialization, etc.) that brings the most

improvement in academic achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007). It is understandable that schools as institutions are interested in parents' help which could directly benefit schools by providing voluntary labour and additional funds raised in the community (Winton 2018), but ignoring home-based involvement means that we lose the opportunity to harness its benefits for better student achievement and well-being. Secondly, if the emphasis is placed only on school-based parental involvement it privileges the practices typical of parents from dominant groups (i.e. White, middle-class, and native born in case of Ontario), who are more comfortable participating in the school domain (Stitt & Brooks, 2014). As a result, if home-based involvement, which is preferred by parents from non-dominant groups (visible minorities, working class, and immigrants) (Tang, 2015; Thomas-Duckwitz, Hess, & Atcherly, 2013; Zhong & Zhou, 2011), is over-looked on the policy level, the above-mentioned parents lose their voice in the eyes of the teachers and could be seen as "hard to reach" (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Crozier & Davies, 2007). We know that parents from dominant backgrounds possess social and cultural capital valued by the school, and feel more confident participating in school-based involvement (Dyson, 2001; Hajisoteriou & Angelides 2016). Subsequently, even in situations when parents from non-dominant backgrounds practice the same activities at home as do parents from dominant backgrounds, it is the latter group of parents who benefits more from this involvement.

In the Ontario context, policy-makers have significantly improved their understanding of parental involvement compared to the earlier period. In 2005, parental involvement was defined by the Ministry of Education as "good parenting, helping with homework, serving on school councils and board or provincial committees, communicating and meeting with teachers, and volunteering in the classroom or on school trips" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p.3). Problematic moral undertones of the notion of "good parenting" (Thomas, Keogh, & Hay, 2015) and school-centred emphasis on homework, councils, and volunteering were heavily mismatched with home-based

involvement preferred by parents (e.g. supporting students' well-being and organizing learning at home) (Hamlin & Flessa, 2016).

Participants interviewed for my study also see their home-based involvement as more meaningful to them. When asked about the goals of parental involvement in children's education none of the parents mentioned school-based activities:

I think, to be supportive and to be there, and we had a discussion, a chat with our son, and he kept commenting how he likes that his dad, my husband is freelance, so he is home. He said, oh, you are there, so, because he is there, he is open to questions and just to start different conversations about different things. We find that when we start talking about homework it really becomes business and there is all of a sudden this defensiveness. When we talk about different things and ensure that we are available for help when they need it, they will reach out. (Andrea)

The kid spends 6 hours a day there. That should be enough. I should be here to monitor. To fill in the gaps and to motivate. Simply when they learn something, you know. Like they learn something new. They learn electrical circuits and I'm electrical engineer I can start asking questions. And did you know this and did you know that. And when I notice some interest, I'm supposed to, simply empower it. (Leo)

I think the key here is the first years of life. You really have to spend this time with the kid and, play with him or her, read with him or her... think most of the parents job is before the school starts and then if the school is structured appropriately there shouldn't be too much support required, but I think you should know what the kid is going through, what they are thinking, what they are doing. (Yana)

Several parents mentioned that their role is also to make sure that if children are not learning enough at

school, then the family should compensate. The fact that they need to step in when the school is not delivering does not make parents happy, because they prefer “just be with them, talk with them”, while the school provides academic curriculum and socialization required by the society. Parents are reluctant to be heavily involved in the school-based activities, but some of them believe that you cannot trust the school with their kids'd education only and parents should be always on guard:

Now we see that there is a gap and their level where they are, where we expect them, at least, we think that in this grade they should be, they should know those things, so we have to invest ourselves... The thing is here, you see, if parents don't actually pay so much attention to how their kids, their kids will end up with this gap and they won't be able to...and here [in their child's school] parents really push you, and I am sure those kids were doing so good, because of their parents. It's not because of school, school actually doesn't do much to get them to the level where they should be, that's the problem here. (Stephen)

As a result, it is important that the current framework policy *Parents in Partnership: Parent engagement policy for Ontario school* offers significant improvement by acknowledging both home and school-based involvement in its expanded definition of involvement as:

The policy acknowledges all aspects of the important parental role in education. These include providing home conditions that support children as learners at all grade levels, supporting parent peers, and taking parents' leadership roles. Some parents play a leadership role and serve on school councils, Parent Involvement Committees (PICs), or Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs). Some volunteer for field trips or help with various school activities. Parents meet with teachers to discuss their children's needs, progress, and goals, and they attend assemblies, performances, and sports events. Many parents read to their children every night or talk to them about their school day. These activities all reflect engaged parents who are contributing to their children's education. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 11).

The document *Parents in Partnership* acknowledges barriers based on language, immigration status, poverty or the unfamiliarity with the education system. Still, a more in-depth textual analysis shows that the deficit view of involvement is evident here, when support is offered mostly to parents, who “do not understand the language of the school” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) or have to be “reached out” (Crozier & Davies, 2007). The document contains 13 sidebars with brief description of particular initiatives that “illustrate some of the ways in which these organizations are breaking down the barriers to parent engagement and supporting parents as welcomed and valued partners in education” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 8). The intentions of policymakers are clearly positive here, but heavy emphasis on support, however necessary, outweighs the acknowledgement that parents already possess considerable home resources at their disposal (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). Parents are merely acknowledged in several brief sentences, for example: “Parents in Ontario care about their children and want to be involved. They want their children to succeed in school and are willing to help in as many ways as possible” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 25). On the contrary, possible types of support are comprehensive and can be classified into the following groups: 1) suggestions about how parents can help their children's learning at home and in school; 2) information for parents to participate in school life and engage in literacy activities; 3) resources available at schools. The word “support” is used a staggering 108 times in the *Parents in Partnership* policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

One of the key omissions in policy documents, especially in *Parents in Partnership* policy, is the absence of teachers. Multiple case studies of successful parental involvement in schools are presented, but every time the emphasis is on parents, who have to be helped, surveyed, things have to be explained to them, so they are more aware of why parental involvement matters. There is almost no word on teachers and teacher readiness to work with parents, even though prior studies showed that parental involvement suffers when teachers are not prepared to work with parents collaboratively

(Patte, 2011; Uludag, 2008). Unfortunately, the material on school-family partnerships is rarely included in initial teacher education programs internationally (Thompson et al., 2018) or in Ontario (Petrarca & Kitchen, 2017).

This gap is important, because interviewed parents who had good communication with teachers were more satisfied with their children's education, had a better idea of what was going in the classroom, and felt empowered that they can influence children's learning both in school and at home. On the contrary, parents who experienced various barriers to parent-teacher communication, were left uninformed, dissatisfied, and disempowered: "I am not sure what they are doing in school, but it was my job to explain and I was thinking why I am sending you to school" (Eva). As far as immigrant parents and Ontario teachers have different educational experiences of their own, quite often there was miscommunication regarding the curriculum content and pedagogical methods. Clearly, more attention needs to be paid to family-school communication with more support to teachers to be ready to work with parents successfully.

Policy documents produced by actors other than the Ontario Ministry of Education have a slightly less school-centric view of parental involvement. For example, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) in their *Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools* that accompanies *Parent Tool Kit: What Parents Can Do to Help Their Child Succeed in School*, published in 2012, mentions specifically that the "key messages in the Parent Tool Kit identify the importance of families supporting their children in more ways than attending meetings or volunteering at school" (CODE, 2014, p.17). Parents are told that "learning at home is one of the most beneficial ways to help your child succeed" (CODE, 2012, p.11), but the former "don't need to know how to do homework to help" (CODE, 2012, p. 17). Nevertheless, the purpose of these documents is quite instrumental. *Planning Parent Engagement* guidebook has as its stated aim "for parent groups and school staff to use [the document] in planning school-based activities to complement and support

parents' efforts at home” (CODE, 2014, p.3). *Parent Tool Kit* helps parents to reinforce classroom learning at home, prepare for a science fair, or stay informed about school events (CODE, 2012).

Policies written by the three Ontario school boards (TDSB, YRDSB, YRCDSB) in the Greater Toronto Area acknowledge the “invaluable role [of parents and families] in supporting students learning both in the home and by making valuable contributions to classrooms and schools” (YRDSB, 2015, p.2). Moreover, “TDSB believes that education is a shared responsibility among parents, the community, students, staff and the Board” (TDSB, 2015b, p.1). At the same time, these policies are concerned, mostly, with such issues as school councils, parental advisory committees, volunteering, and fundraising, while the definition of involvement is referenced from the *Parents in Partnership* policy provided by the Ministry of Education. It is important to mention that under the *Education Act, Ontario regulation 612/00: School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees*, school boards are required to ensure the day-to-day operation of the above-mentioned councils and committees, subsequently, this topic is paid significant attention.

Finally, only People for Education, a non-governmental organization supporting public education in Ontario (Winton & Brewer, 2015), in its *Beyond School Councils: Engaging Parents to Help Their Children Succeed at School* toolkit puts parents at the centre of its discourse. Parents are reassured that according to the latest research “The evidence is clear. Parents make a difference. And the way they contribute most to their children’s education is through what they do at home. Being a parent can be challenging, but the good news is that you don’t have to be ‘volunteer of the year’ or an expert on the war of 1812 to help your child succeed at school” (People for Education, 2012, p.2). The centrality of parents is achieved by providing tips for parents first and then switching to supporting roles for teachers and principals to play. Having reviewed the available literature on benefits of parental involvement (People for Education, 2012), authors of *Beyond School Councils* distinguish four successful strategies for parents: 1. Have high expectations for your children; 2. Talk about

school; 3. Help your children develop a positive attitude toward learning and good work habits; 4. Read together (in any language). Crucially, teachers and principals are then given ideas how to “support parents in having high expectations for their children, how to help parents talk with their children about school by giving them something to talk about, how to encourage parents to read with their children” and support parents in developing their children's work habits and learning skills (People for Education, 2012, p. 4). How effective this welcome shift of focus from schools to parents in the policy discourse on parental involvement is a difficult question to answer. Alternative policy-making by People for Education was not always enough in the past to change the terms of the debate, but their work is an important step in this direction (Winton, 2018).

To sum up, the current narrative in Ontario parental involvement policies shows a slow change of conceptualization of parental involvement from a very school-centric model to the one, which includes activities that parents practice at home as well. Despite this important expansion of “parental involvement” as a concept, many of the improvements are either superficial or not significant enough. Overall, the involvement that supports school activities (e.g. homework, science fairs, serving on councils) is privileged by the amount of space and the level of detail provided to such types of involvement in 14 analyzed documents. Subsequently, parental involvement, which is aligned with the policy expectations, is likely to be seen as more valuable by the schools. Such types of involvement will function as capital for parents, who can and are willing to participate in such activities.

Crucially, the types of parental involvement practiced by Eastern European immigrant parents interviewed for this study do not always match the narratives in Ontario policy documents. They get involved in their children’s learning at home, especially when it comes to literacy activities in their first language, and use supplementary learning in the form of tutoring. At the same time most parents do not participate in the school governance and have little involvement with fundraising initiatives. Half of the participants have classroom volunteering experience and the majority attends parent-

teacher conferences whenever they are offered. Narrow conceptualization of parental involvement in policy documents might not value such meaningful activities reported by all parents as setting high educational expectations, and developing first language literacy. These activities take place in the home and/or community settings, which are rarely visible to educators, who are located in the school settings.

How parents and parents' involvement are represented in policy documents

How are diverse and immigrant parents represented in policy documents? Does the discourse empower one group of parents and marginalize others?

Having briefly analyzed the conceptualization of parental involvement in Ontario policy documents, I will now focus on parents whose involvement is sought to make good schools even better (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The most dominant narrative associated with parents in all analyzed documents is that of “parents as partners”, because “essential understanding must be the recognition that meaningful partnerships among parents, educators and communities are the core of parent engagement” (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011, p.8). The word partner(ship) is used no fewer than 40 times in *Parents in Partnership* policy with other policy documents not further behind. Despite the democratic rhetoric, the discourse of parents as partners (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013), used extensively in the document produced by the Ministry, supports agendas, curricula, and mission of schools rather than the interest of parents: “The positive results of a genuine partnership between parents and schools include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, positive student behavior, and increased confidence among parents in their children’s schooling” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.8). The Council of Ontario Directors of Education puts it in a

straightforward manner: “It will be worthwhile to formulate an annual implementation plan to engage parents in their child’s learning at school and at home. The goal of the plan is to align the goals and objectives in the school improvement plans with activities that engage parents” (CODE, 2014, 17). Supporting learning is understood as improving achievement and well-being, where academic achievement clearly takes precedence over well-being, even though the latter was found to be especially important for parents in Ontario (Hamlin & Flessa, 2016). Once again, it reinforces the notion of school improvement, so that “good schools become even better when parents are involved” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 5). Interestingly, *Beyond School Councils and PICs: Supporting Links Between Ontario's School Boards and Ontario Parents* by People for Education barely mention the idea of partnership. This fact contributes to the idea that “parents as partners” discourse is generated by the educational community for its own purposes (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013) and is not necessarily shared by parents and their organizations.

Needless to say, that interviewed parents did not invoke the notion of partnership. Growing up in Eastern European countries immigrant parents were accustomed to the school being responsible for children’s learning, whereas parents provide for the material and emotional well-being of children at home. In the new context many parents realized that the relationships between schools and parents are different in Ontario and more is expected of parents. Some participants “play” by the new rules: “I spent a morning of each week here to photocopy and cutting and whatever the ... I took it like if she spends that hour or two hours doing something with the children it was worth it for me.” (Terezia). On the other hand, most parents do not think they should help schools through fundraising or other activities on the school premises evident in resistance to “selling muffins” or helping to fund the purchase of smart-boards or laptops. Such activities are often seen by parents as not relevant to schooling as they see it.

Partnership as understood in policy documents seems not to be favoured by parents, which is hardly surprising as their interests are not very much taken into the account by the current school-centric arrangements. The supporting role of parents is confirmed in the policy documents by defined boundaries between parents and teachers. There is a clear discouragement of teaching by parents: “The concept of help at home refers to families encouraging, listening to, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing schoolwork with their children and not whether or how they teach school subjects” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 10). “[Parents] believe that they should be reading the textbook and trying to teach their child how to solve a problem or complete the homework. Although understandable and well-intentioned, using this approach can create confusion and frustration for both parents and children” (CODE, 2012, p.16). Even People for Education recommends that “rather than trying to directly “teach” your children, focus on helping them handle distractions and crises of confidence, praise them for effort and persistence and demonstrate a positive attitude about school as a whole” (People for Education, 2012, p. 3). Such a discouragement of teaching by parents at home is somewhat understandable, because it not only supports the professional autonomy of teachers, but also avoids excessive pressure on parents, especially those with limited education. The downside of this approach lies in the fact that many immigrant parents like to follow the curriculum of their home countries to complement learning in school (Guo, 2011) and ignoring it takes away the agency from this large group of parents. As a result, some immigrant parents send their children to complimentary schools (Asanova, 2005) or pay for tutoring (Byun & Park, 2012). Both strategies may increase educational inequality between those who have access to such shadow schooling and those who cannot afford it (Bray, 2010). A significant share of Eastern European immigrant parents in this study finds it meaningful to buy textbooks, access the curriculum of their home countries, and resort to tutoring. This data supports earlier research with Asian immigrant parents in North America, who were also involved in “teaching” their children at home (Dyson, 2001; Klein, 2008):

Homework time we do it together, we sit side by side at the table and when he's got free time we do activities together...I am not happy with the level he has in Grade 1, because in my mind I always compare him with what children in my country know at this age, yeah. So, I even bought books and I brought them here from Romania and we study the English curriculum, the Canadian one plus the Romanian one. (Ioana)

Unfortunately, policy documents do not mention school satisfaction among parents and that parental belief about the quality of education shape their decision-making regarding additional learning at home or tutoring.

The second most evident narrative in analyzed policy documents is that of barriers to parental involvement. While the discussion on the nature of parental involvement and its benefits to children's achievement and well-being are described in several policy documents quite well, the concept of barriers and related notion of “diversity” are taken for granted and rarely analyzed in detail. Only the description of *Parents Reaching Out Grants* initiative, inaugurated in 2006 and created specifically to tackle perceived barriers to involvement (Hamlin & Flessa, 2016), contains a workable definition of such barriers. “[It] supports school-based initiatives focused on engaging parents who may experience barriers as a result of language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to Ontario's school system, or other factors” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 19). *The Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* also “directs school boards to implement strategies that identify and remove discriminatory barriers that limit engagement by students, parents, and the community, so that diverse groups and the broader community have better board-level representation and greater access to board initiatives” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 19). An expanded definition of diverse learners in the Ontario education system, according to the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, includes students who are targets of racism, homophobia, religious intolerance, and/or could be at risk of lower academic

achievement (recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special education needs) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

The idea that diverse parents have barriers to their involvement requires the normative understanding of effective involvement that all parents should aspire to. It also creates a dichotomy between those who do not face barriers and those who do. Acknowledging real barriers is the first step towards dismantling them, but recognition alone is not enough if not followed by systemic action to challenge the social arrangements that lead to the emergence of such barriers. The role of policy documents is important in generating discourses that look at parental strengths and see parents as central players in their children's learning. At the same time, inequality among parents in terms of cultural and social capital they have, needs to be recognized to move away from the deficit assumptions towards meaningful improvement. Prior research showed that middle-class parents of dominant backgrounds (non-racialized, non-immigrant) have advantages when it comes to effective involvement (CODE, 2012, 2014). They can advocate on their children's behalf more successfully, because their cultural capital is recognized and valued by the school, while their social networks provide significant information regarding the school system (Lareau, 2011). Sufficient economic resources and non-hostile institutions give such parents better return on their involvement. Despite the acknowledgement of different types of involvement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), more space is dedicated to specifics of serving on school councils (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001), participating in parental involvement committees (People for Education, 2015), and volunteering in the school (CODE, 2014; TDSB, 2015b), which are precisely the types of involvement that immigrant parents are less involved in compared to parents from dominant backgrounds. Policies mention the salience of learning at home and setting high expectations, but no elaboration or examples are provided. This is an important omission, because immigrant parents are more often involved

specifically in home settings (Hamlin & Flessa, 2016; Poza, Brooks, & Valdes, 2014; Sohn & Wang, 2006).

On the other hand, the word “diversity” in the texts is used together with “increase”, “better”, “outreach” and “barrier”. There is a lot of emphasis on how diverse parents have to be engaged (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010; Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). “...it is especially important to find ways of encouraging participation from the various and diverse ethnocultural groups that make up the school community. For a number of reasons, some parents from these groups may be hesitant to involve themselves in local education matters regarding their children” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 39). The text provides no explanation of reasons behind this hesitancy. Parents who face barriers are viewed from a deficit perspective, which especially trickles down to “culturally and linguistically diverse parents”, whose “funds of knowledge” are hardly recognized. This is both discriminatory and wasteful. The current approach to parental involvement among parents from non-dominant backgrounds resembles liberal multiculturalism in its attitude to “diversity”. Although “diversity” is acknowledged, it has to be managed to keep the status-quo to the benefit of the education system already in place (McCarthy, 1993). Parents from diverse backgrounds are offered support in the spirit of generosity, but policy documents remain silent about the issues of class inequality, which is the most strongly evident in children’s parenting leading to social reproduction in education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Finally, I would like to mention that the *Parents in Partnership* policy does offer a sensible definition of challenges many parents might face regarding their children's education, which could improve the way parents are seen by policymakers and educators if it is applied to all parents without exception:

With their busy lives, it can be challenging for parents to play as active a role as they would like in their children’s education. Research has shown that parent involvement can be

influenced by many factors such as language, parent educational level, the challenges of single parenthood, attitudes of school staff, cultural influences, socio-economic status, and geography (for example, the local challenges facing urban, rural, and northern communities). As well, parent engagement tends to lessen at the secondary school level, resulting in, for example, reduced parent volunteerism. In addition, parents sometimes come from countries where the school culture and opportunities to participate in school activities are different from those in Ontario. Access to knowledge about the Ontario's educational system and how they may become more involved in their child's education are essential for such parents. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 8-9).

Conclusion

In this chapter, my goal was to investigate the dominant narratives expressed in parental involvement policy documents produced in Ontario in order to understand how parental involvement is conceptualized in those documents and how diverse and immigrant parents are represented. My analysis has shown that over the last decade policy-makers in Ontario attempted to shift the conceptualization of parental involvement from the exclusively school-centred agenda towards a more inclusive approach, recognizing that classroom volunteering and participation in bake sales and fun fairs are not the only legitimate ways of parental involvement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Renewed focus on home-based involvement is welcome for several reasons. Home-based involvement is more effective for academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005, 2007, 2009), its recognition allows for parental agency to be taken into account (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013), and it validates activities of non-dominant groups of parents (working class, ethno-racial minorities, immigrants) who historically tend to feel more comfortable being involved at home (Stitt & Brooks,

2014). At the same time, although many policies pay significant attention to involvement at home, the goal of such involvement is mostly to reinforce lessons learned at school (CODE, 2012, 2014). Parents that I interviewed for this research view education holistically and prefer to develop the capacities of their children at home (e.g. developing literacy in the first language) or in the community (e.g. tutoring, minority ethnic learning centre). School-based activities (volunteering, fund-raising, serving on councils) are seen as less meaningful by Eastern European immigrant parents in my sample. Subsequently, their parental involvement is undervalued in the policy context, where school-based activities are given preference.

As to the representation of parents in policy documents, I found that parents are seen as partners, but their role is valued as much as it supports school agenda (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), improvement plans, and increased academic achievement as measured by the standardized tests (CODE, 2014). Discourse of barriers (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018) adds a deficit perspective, because these are parents that have to be helped, while their own agency and funds of knowledge are much less accepted (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). Interview data shows that immigrant parents are far from uninvolved, but the focus of their involvement does not always match the school expectations. Parents who are not satisfied with the school curriculum use alternative strategies of learning at home, send their children to tutoring classes, and use textbooks from their home countries. The omission of focus on teachers, their beliefs and preparedness to cooperate with parents is telling. Family-school partnerships and parental involvement cannot fulfill their true potential if parents continue to play the supplementary role. Only the non-governmental organization People for Education (2012) provides an important voice in the Ontario policy context by centring parents, affirming the types of involvement already practised by them before moving to teachers and principals with suggestions on helping parents to be better involved in their children's education. In other words, in most policy documents produced by the official bodies (Ministry of Education, school boards and

associations of principals) diverse and immigrant parents are mentioned, but the focus still remains on normative (school-based) involvement, while non-dominant parents are viewed mostly through a deficit lens.

Chapter 6. Parental involvement among Eastern European immigrant parents of elementary school children in Ontario

How do Eastern European immigrant parents of elementary school children in Ontario define parental involvement? How does the social and cultural capital of Eastern European immigrant parents influence the way they understand their involvement in Ontario schools?

Introduction

Increased migration from the Global South to the countries in the Global North made local classrooms more diverse than ever before (Migration Policy Institute, 2010; TDSB, 2013; United Nations, 2017). Immigrant parents represent a significant and growing group with specific involvement experiences (Theodorou, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009), which makes the focus on immigrant parental involvement especially timely at the present time. Traditionally, educational researchers and policy-makers focus on unique barriers that immigrant parents face, especially low language skills and low-familiarity with host countries' schools (Zhou, 1997).

Many immigrants come from working-class backgrounds and studies that analyse the parental involvement among this group of parents provide rich details of how physically demanding jobs and inflexible work schedules make school-based involvement especially difficult for them (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Johnson et al., 2016; Miano, 2011; Al-deen & Windle, 2015; Mogouerou & Santelli, 2015). The physical and psychological toll of employment in low-paid occupations with limited autonomy and flexibility is by no means a prerogative of immigrant parents, but rather characterises many working-class parents regardless of their immigrant status (Lareau, 2011). At the same time, immigrant populations are especially vulnerable, as far as they often suffer from higher unemployment rate (Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010; OECD, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2015) and downward social

mobility in the case of middle-class parents (Gans, 2009). Despite the diversity of immigrant populations in many contexts, teachers and educators often view most immigrants as low-skilled manual workers who cannot help their children at school, have poor majority language skills and are not familiar with the school culture (Adair, 2015; Ali, 2012; Sirin & Ryce, 2010). Ali (2010) interviewed Canadian teachers and immigrant parents and found that educators saw immigrant parents as passive in personal communication, due to respect, putting too much emphasis on the academic performance of children. Such generalizations were made despite the fact that according to teachers they knew little about parents' culture and circumstances. Parents from Pakistan were seen as very conservative, while Chinese parents were considered too ambitious (Ali, 2010). Due to such stereotypes, parental culture and involvement could be mis-recognized and undervalued for most immigrant parents if their parental involvement practices differ from those of native-born peers (Stitt & Brooks, 2014).

The demographic characteristics of most immigrant groups in North America, Europe, and Australia are varied, but the Canadian immigration system favours especially economic immigrants with higher education, good English or French language skills, and middle-class job experience with around 60% of immigrants meeting such requirements (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017a). Nineteen immigrant parents from nine countries of Eastern Europe that I interviewed for my study have higher education acquired in home countries and/or in Canada, speak English relatively well and work mostly in non-manual occupations.

Apart from looking at parental involvement in the interconnected domains of home, school, and the community, I suggest to view parental involvement as family strategies that bring educational rewards (Davies & Rizk, 2018). The effectiveness of such strategies is shaped by varying amounts of cultural and social capital that parents have. In this study, I conceptualize cultural capital as parental

education level, English language skills, and literacy practices. Social capital is defined here by communication with teachers, social networks that contain people in professional occupations, and relationships with other parents.

Bourdieu (1986) distinguished three types of cultural capital: institutionalized (educational qualifications), embodied (dispositions of mind and body, e.g. manners, linguistic skills, body language), and objectified (pictures, books, musical instruments). Parental education (institutionalized cultural capital) has been shown to positively affect children's academic success (Grayson, 2011; Lehmann, 2007, 2009) as parents with positive educational experiences feel more comfortable advocating on their children's behalf (Posey-Maddox, Kimbelberg, & Cucchiara, 2016) and have high expectations for their children's schooling (Crozier, Reay, & James, 2011). English language skills (embodied cultural capital) are of crucial importance for immigrant parents in their communication with schools. As reported before, language barrier is one of the most important challenges to parents' involvement (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Doucet, 2011; Zhong & Zhou, 2011). Literacy practices, which are often influenced by book ownership (objectified cultural capital), play a key role in cognitive development of children and if aligned with school expectations have significant benefits for learning (De Graaf & De Graaf, 2000; Notten & Kraaykamp, 2010; OECD, 2010). Literacy practices would be used as a proxy for the objectified cultural capital.

Communication with teachers is the key mechanism, which allows parents to convey their interest in children's learning and be on the same page with teachers regarding the school life (Lareau, 2011). Unfortunately, not all parents have an equal opportunity to have open communication channels with teachers due to differences in cultural assumptions regarding such communication with working-class, ethnic minority, and immigrant parents facing barriers (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Dyson, 2001; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002). Keeping contact with other parents increases the motivation and self-efficacy related to parental involvement (Curry & Holter, 2015), so much so

that parents with larger social networks tend to be more involved in their children's education both at home and at school (Sheldon, 2002). The social capital received from parental networks also depends on the social class of participants in such networks. It is advantageous to have connections with professionals (teachers, psychologists, managers, etc.), who are comfortable connecting to schools, are familiar with the educational expectations, and can mobilise their rich networks to the benefit of their children (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003).

Immigrant parents occupy a specific place in the school context, where their role in children's education is often influenced by the possible devaluation of cultural capital acquired abroad, and disruption to social networks as a result of migration.

Against this background, I will turn my attention to the way Eastern European immigrant parents, interviewed for the present study, get involved in their children's education. I will try to answer the following questions: How do parents see their role in their children's education? What do they say they do in terms of involvement in their children's education? How do the social and cultural capitals of immigrant parents shape their involvement? The six types of involvement classification by Epstein (2010) (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, collaborating with community) will be my guiding framework for the analysis of parental involvement in school, at home, and in the community.

Immigrant parents' involvement at home

“The children have only got one education and you have to make sure it's a good one”

(Vincent, 2017, p. 541).

All parents want the best for their children, which is especially true for immigrant parents who often move in pursuit of improved opportunities for themselves and their children. Faced with downward

social mobility, disrupted networks and discriminatory barriers, immigrant parents have high hopes for their children in the host countries. Prior research from the European and North American context shows that immigrant parents have higher educational expectations compared to the native-born population (Crul et al., 2012; Lee & Zhou, 2015; Pong, Hao, & Gardner, 2005). Moreover, parental expectations are among the most effective components of parental involvement for the academic achievement of children (Jeynes, 2003, 2007).

We know from the literature on immigrant parental involvement that immigrant parents see their role mostly in the home, where their efforts are directed at parenting and learning at home (Klein, 2008; Poza, Brooks, & Valdes, 2014; Sohn & Wang, 2006). As I mentioned earlier, there is a lack of studies on parenting practices among Eastern European immigrants compared to other immigrant groups (Nesteruk & Marks, 2011). Nevertheless, the few available sources acknowledge that despite the cultural and socio-political differences among former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, their societies were significantly shaped by common experiences of life in communist nations.

Schools and families tried to instill obedience in children and focused on the moral education of future adult citizens as much as on the curriculum (Bronfenbrenner, 1970). Families in Eastern Europe traditionally had one or two children, whose development and future were central to the well-being of the entire family (Robila, 2004). Parents were heavily involved in the lives of their children, while the latter were expected to show obedience and respect towards parents, and by extension teachers and other adults in the position of authority (Zhurzhenko, 2004). Since the collapse of the communism in 1989-1991 in Eastern Europe, parenting practices became more liberal and child-centered, but parents in this region still exhibit higher levels of strictness and control over their children, compared to parents in North America, which could create conflict and tensions after immigration (Nesteruk & Marks, 2011). While many parents continue to follow the strict parenting typical of their home countries in Eastern Europe, the children who are often born and grow up in the Western countries,

learn from their school and neighbourhood interactions that in the host societies less disciplinarian parenting is considered the norm (Nesteruk & Marks, 2011). This study provides new data on parenting among Eastern European immigrants in Canada to add to the existing body of knowledge.

Parenting.

Parenting is an important factor, which affects children's academic experience and success due to emotional and practical support received from parents (Mayo & Siraj, 2015). "Concerted cultivation" (Lareau, 2011) characterized by structuring children's time around organized activities, instilling the sense of entitlement for educational success, and advocating on children's behalf in schools, has been shown to benefit children in their education more than other types of parenting (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008; Carolan, 2016). Prior research showed that parental expectations and aspirations for children's academic success have the strongest effect on students' performance compared with other types of parental involvement, such as homework supervision and volunteering at school (Fan & Chen, 2001). Students' perception of parental expectations also has positive influence on their math and reading scores (Bowen, Glennie, Rose, & Hopson 2012). Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) in their meta-analysis of 21 studies distinguish four mediating processes which allow parental expectations to influence children's academic trajectories: a) children's internalization of high parental valuation of achievement; b) children's higher competency beliefs; c) more effective parental involvement; and d) more positive teacher perception of children's abilities.

Participants in the study reported high levels of parental expectations. University education is a minimum requirement they have for their children. Maria summed up this sentiment quite well:

I do want them to go to universities. I think I grew up not even thinking I had a choice not to go to university. So, I want them to kind of not have this choice.

Several parents expect a graduate degree, but they combine high expectations regarding the level of

education with the freedom to choose one's major, which can often lead to family arguments:

I guess I want them to go quite far, in the same time we have these conversations in the family, because for my husband, he believes that kids should not be necessarily allowed, but should be told what to do, meaning, he decided that at least one of them would be a doctor and at least one of them would be a lawyer... there is a push towards that. My expectation is that they will go beyond Bachelor. (Karina)

Most participants are unlike Karina's husband and show quite a liberal approach to future educational choices of their children without any insistence on a particular field of study. Higher education remains a natural choice for almost all of them (Roksa & Robinson, 2017). Only one person, Terezia (44-year-old lunchroom supervisor from Slovakia), was not sure if her children should go to university, but this feeling can be explained by the fact that, as a single mother of three children, she finds such prospects challenging from a financial point of view. Prior research showed that Eastern European immigrant parents do not see higher education just as a means to a job, but they also appreciate its intrinsic value (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009). Parents from Eastern Europe want their children to get good education, develop themselves, and become good persons. Education is as much about self-actualization as it is about career opportunities (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009). Participants in my sample echo this sentiment:

He has to go through university, without that you can't, really. You need to get an education, I do understand, it might not get you a better job, I mean, not for everybody, but I do want for him to have that experience, to learn how to learn, to have like a... to be a well-rounded educated person, I don't know if he is gonna go there, but that's what I expect. (Yana).

Parents talk about the importance of post-secondary education, promise to help with tuition and fees as much as they can and clearly articulate it to their children. Daniel, the 12-year-old son of Oleksandr

and Irina was so serious about his future opportunities that according to his mother it made him very stressed: “Mom, I have to do my test very good. If I'm not going to do good on this test, then no education for me.”

Oleksandr believes that immigrants have higher expectations towards children's education compared to the Canadian-born population. According to his experience as an educational administrator in a private career college, many children born in Canada drop out of high school and struggle to pursue any post-secondary education: “Seriously? School? Even not school, not finished? Come on. I understand college or university you decided not to complete, but not the high school.”

The main reason for high educational expectations among interviewed parents is that most of them completed undergraduate or graduate degrees themselves. In this case, parental education serves as institutionalized cultural capital. University-educated parents expect their children to attend university as well and are ready to provide them with financial or emotional support. Their own academic success makes post-secondary education of their children seem like a natural choice (Crozier, Reay, and James, 2011). Nevertheless, participants did not feel as confident and assured of success in their children's education compared to home-born middle-class parents from previous studies (Brantlinger, 2003; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Lareau, 2011). Their own learning experiences in school and at the post-secondary level took place in post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, where education systems were quite different compared to Ontario schools in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and roles of parents (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009; Pustulka & Slusarczyk, 2016).

High educational expectations among Eastern European immigrant parents are combined with significant involvement in organized activities both in school and outside of the school. According to Annette Lareau (2011), sending children to organized activities run by other adults is one of the signs of “concerted cultivation” practiced by middle-class American families, which is supported by

comparative data from other Western nations (Irwin & Elley, 2011; Vincent & Maxwell, 2015).

Organized activities help children to learn how to interact with adults in social situations. Apart from practicing an activity that is enjoyable and/or useful, children (with the parents' help) acquire such positive non-cognitive traits as managing time and staying focused (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005).

These skills are readily transferred into the field of education but require considerable dedication of time, money, and efforts. Moreover, unequal access to and distribution of organized activities among students from different social classes increase inequality, when certain elite activities (e.g. tennis, rowing, community help abroad) increase chances of attending prestigious universities or even obtaining elite jobs (Reeves & de Vries, 2018; Rivera, 2011; Stevens, 2007).

Parents in the study enroll their children in multiple activities that most often include sports.

The following table provides an overview of activities practiced by children who represent 15 families of interviewed parents:

Table 4. List of organized activities practiced by children of the interviewed families in school and outside of the school.

Interviewed parents	Organized activities
Leo and Jarmila	Choir, volleyball, field hockey, soccer, hockey
Petra	Swimming, karate, hockey, ballet, guitar, flute
Terezia	Rock climbing, soccer, basketball, scouts
Karina	Piano, swimming
Yana and Stephan	Soccer
Tina	Ballet
Andrea	Coding

Ioana	Soccer
Nevena	Art studio
Viktor	Swimming, tennis, guitar
Eva	Drama, gymnastics, archery
Maria	Swimming, running, gymnastics
Marina	Swimming, soccer
Roman and Kira	Swimming, skating
Oleksandr and Irina	Track and field, basketball, soccer, and volleyball

Parents value their children's organized activities, which shape important family decisions:

Extracurriculars are so important to them, that we were discussing this moving back to Europe. The main reason why we stayed was that at that time we felt that they have so much extracurriculars in the school, that we cannot take them simply from it. (Leo).

If they don't finish their homework they don't go to do their extracurricular activities, so that's little bit of a motivator 'cause they really love their sport activities, so they try hard to finish everything. Also sometimes when, you know, we are very happy with the way they are doing at school, but we are not happy if they come home with poor marks, so when they don't get, you know, good marks, sometimes it happens, because they don't study, then It's either we take away the activities or we take away the devices. (Marina)

At the same time, there is a considerable diversity among parents. Some of them (Karina, Maria, and Viktor) have children who participate in several competitive sports requiring financial investment and allocation of time. Regular training sessions and competition shape everyday schedules

of such children. Despite the pressure of very early morning practices, having one's child involved in several sports on a competitive level keeps them busy and focused on activities. Unfortunately, not all parents could provide as many sports activities for children as they wished. Parents, who grew up in socialist countries of Eastern Europe, were accustomed to easy access to affordable sports or arts activities for children (Bain, 2013), but in the Canadian context they had to make some serious financial choices:

I would like to be more involved in his extracurricular activities. Right now, everything he does outside of school with me or my husband it's free, so we don't go anywhere, so we don't need to pay any money. I would like him to go to various clubs, but all these involves lots of money. Money for the equipment, so all kinds of fees, so this would be my main worry and thing that doesn't satisfy me about, because everything is very expensive. (Ioana).

Having children participating in several organized activities affects the way children's time is managed. Schedules become structured around several activities and even time outside of school becomes organized (Lareau, 2011). Parents make sure that no time is wasted for learning opportunities:

...they usually come home from school, they eat and they get to relax. I always let them relax for half an hour or so, and then it's homework time. They need to sit down and do their homework and after they finish their homework either they have activities, so they go and do those activities or if they have no activities then they do the extra homework, let's call it homework that I give them. (Karina)

Despite the stress, children who experience such structured routines receive benefits in school, where they are seen as good students by teachers, because their home environments resemble school schedules, when one activity is followed by another. They learn how to manage their own time and use

it productively, which becomes helpful for their school and post-secondary careers (Lareau, 2011).

Learning at home.

Staying in the family domain, I would like now to move to learning at home to see how Eastern European immigrant parents practice this type of involvement. I define learning at home here as a range of parent-led activities aimed at sustaining their children's academic learning in the home with the purpose to facilitate or improve their educational achievement. It may include such elements as help with homework, activities related to the school curriculum, or supplementary schooling. Learning at home could be of a particular importance for immigrant groups due to its compensatory function for communities that face barriers of language, lack of familiarity with the school system in the new country, and discrimination.

Among immigrant populations, learning at home is especially popular with middle class parents who have been accustomed to such practices in their home countries and have resources to arrange for their children's learning outside of school. Immigrant communities differ in the availability of ethnic capital at their disposal. Lee and Zhou (2015) in their analysis of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants in the US, found that due to a high proportion of hyper-selected individuals, whose educational level is both higher than in China/Vietnam and the US, members of these groups possess significant levels of ethnic capital. Subsequently, immigrant communities rich in ethnic capital can provide to all its members valuable information about the school system in the host country, reinforce the importance of education, and create institutions offering supplementary education (Lee & Zhou, 2015).

Eastern European skilled migrants, who took part in my study, do not concentrate in particular neighbourhoods and have insignificant levels of ethnic support (Nesteruk, 2009). Oleksandr and Irina were actively involved in the Ukrainian community in Manitoba where they spent two years after moving to Canada. Leo's family take active part in the life of the Czech community in Ontario, but

other parents in the study did not participate in the community organizations created by immigrants from their respective home countries and could not benefit from the ethnic social capital (Birani & Lehmann, 2013). The situation described by Tina is typical of most parents I interviewed:

We are sort of disconnected from the Macedonian community because they live in specific ... Most of them live in specific places and we live downtown, so not a lot. I don't know any Macedonians in downtown actually. We have one family friend that we knew even before we came, but also, their experiences are different because their child goes in a private Montessori school.

Nevertheless, because Eastern European immigrant parents move to Canada as skilled migrants, they have higher education and practised middle-class jobs in their home countries. Despite a certain level of downward mobility, when a psychologist became an educational assistant, and one teacher was employed as an office worker, most of the participants in my study managed to continue their employment in the field they had worked prior to immigration. One can expect that Eastern European immigrant parents can offer significant support to their children in terms of learning at home. My data allows to analyze such elements of learning at home as homework help, *supplementary learning* (literacy activities, use of textbooks/online resources, attendance of community learning centres), and tutoring.

All parents mention that they supervise their children when they are doing homework. Such involvement varies from asking children, if they have homework for the next day, to sitting down with them and following what they are doing. Despite the variation among families, parents of younger children monitor the homework more closely, but the level of involvement in homework changes when children progress through the school system, and parents believe that independent learning is a goal in itself:

I would ask them what their homework is, when they come home, and I don't, I kind of

supervise them, but I don't sit down and... I want them to learn how to study, I don't wanna be there and kind of guide them through the homework and it's all in French, and I don't speak French. (Petra)

As skilled migrants, who possess high levels of institutionalized cultural capital due to their university education, participants in my study were always ready to help their children with homework, especially in Math and Science:

...if he has some Math assignment and already, he figured out that I know Math. At some point he started trusting if he has a problem he would come, dad I cannot solve this problem, please, help me. (Stephan)

What he does, he works on Math with his dad at home. So, he, after school, he, if he needs to improve certain thing, then he would work with dad on multiplications... We don't have to reach out, he is tutored by his dad, when things start squeaking a little bit, dad will work with him, so it's in a sense is the same kind of support he would get on the outside. (Andrea).

Similar to other immigrant parents in North America (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Klein, 2008) and in line with the research by Nesteruk, Marks, and Garrison (2009) with Eastern Europeans, immigrant parents in my study think that children in Ontario do not have enough homework at the elementary school level. Several participants decided to complement school homework with extra assignments. Ioana, used to be a schoolteacher in Romania, which gives her confidence to provide additional homework to her son:

Okay, so here my son is in Grade 1, he has very little homework. He finishes, it is only once a week and he finishes it in 20 minutes, but I make him work, so I give him extra activities every single day and we practice Math, English, and French.

One of the reasons for parental beliefs regarding insufficient homework in Canada lies in their own experiences of schooling in post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, where children had shorter in-class time (from 8 am to 1 pm), but more homework (Goldhill, 2015). Helping with homework in Ontario elementary schools is more difficult for parents, who themselves attended schools where textbooks were central to the curriculum and allowed parents to follow the topics students covered in class. Not so in Canada, where the vast majority of participants find it difficult and inconvenient not to have set textbooks for most school subjects in the elementary school:

...usually you don't need to, because there is a textbook, you know this is what they are studying and you can help your kid with this. Here it is a collection of photocopies scattered all over the place and more often than not he can't find the page, because it was in the locker, he lost it at school, he lost it in his bedroom, so there is nothing you can work with. (Yana)

Several parents explicitly mentioned they would prefer to have a set textbook in order to follow the material covered in all of their children's classes. They expressed frustration from meetings with teachers when parental questions regarding the absence of books were never properly discussed:

Give them books, we've been crying to the teachers to give books and they were just shrugging their shoulders and saying, yeah, no books, like, you know. People cannot afford to have books. I said, come on, people cannot afford in Canada to have books, and you have some third world countries where the kids go. In Serbia kids go Grade 1, there are plenty of books for them, and it was given to them by the government. The parents don't have, even if the parents have to pay the money I would pay the money to have books. Why can I not get the books for Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, you know, I think it's the biggest problem with Canada. (Viktor)

An alternative solution, practised by several parents I interviewed, is to purchase textbooks or access

online resources from their home country as part of their supplementary ethnic learning. Eva purchased Bulgarian textbooks for several subjects including History, Biology, and Physics. Her daughter also accesses supplementary resources from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education. Ioana not only brought books from her home country, but was also lucky to have a Romanian teacher in her son's elementary school, who agreed to give him additional homework using Romanian textbooks.

Supplementary learning in for-profit organizations has been used by immigrant communities to either make up for perceived deficiency of the host country's school system or to ensure extra support for one's children to guarantee their academic success and upward social mobility alongside serving as cultural hubs for a particular immigrant group (Tereshchenko & Cardenas, 2013; Zhou & Kim, 2006). The best known example of such hubs is represented by supplementary schools, which are “community-led, out-of-school education programmes that offer one, or a combination, of core curriculum support, language tuition and cultural activities and classes” (Ramalingam & Griffith, 2015). In my study I use a broader definition of supplementary learning by including not only the attendance of community learning centres or supplementary schools, but also the development of literacy skills in several languages and the use of textbooks/online resources from immigrants’ home countries described above.

Literacy practices in the home play significant role in children’s learning and represent parental cultural capital. Here I conceptualize literacy practices as the objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), because they are shaped by the access to print through book ownership and use of libraries (De Graaf & De Graaf, 2000). Some researchers prefer to use ownership of musical instruments or objects of art (Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2010), but books and literacy practices could be seen as elements of objectified cultural capital that are more aligned with school practices (OECD, 2010) and can have more direct benefit for academic achievement due

to their cognitive benefits (Mol & Bus, 2011).

I found that parents value reading, sometimes in several languages. Their plurilingual repertoire (Piccardo, 2017) includes first languages acquired in respective Eastern European countries, English, and sometimes French or another European language (e.g. German or Russian). As far as half of interviewed parents sent their children to French Immersion classes, they ensured that children read in both official languages of Canada:

I do read in English, because I think their grammar has to come up, like they have to catch up with their peers, I mean, those who either have like English-speaking parents or are in the English school, so we have many, many books. And my daughter, she is in Grade 4, she can read and write in Hungarian, French, and English. (Petra)

Parents of younger children read to them and encourage independent reading, because many believe in the importance of this practice:

So, when they were younger I read for them, now they kind of read along, sometimes the older brother reads to the younger, so they like that as well, but they all have, they both have their books, their rooms with their desks and so, they spend a lot of time with books by themselves. (Marina)

Many parents value literature, especially classics, but it is not always working with children in middle grades:

I bought her all those classics, which I read at her age. She, some of them she finds totally stupid and she can't relate to, but some of them she find, like, Tom Sawyer, she found very interesting, and stuff like that. (Eva)

It seems that another strategy adopted by other parents is to give their children some choice in terms of the reading material. Roman and Kira make sure their children read or are read to on a regular basis in English, Russian, and Ukrainian:

Yeah, it was like a request from her teacher, that she needs to read something beyond her, any regular, like her textbooks, anything. It could be a comic book, there's no regulation of whatever she could read, but it's just like ... She can have anything. Which is fun.

As far as children live in the English-speaking environment reading for pleasure is mostly done in English despite the parental efforts to develop literacy in other languages as well:

So, if they want to read something, they would read French if it's for school. If they say like, "This is assignment. You have to read this book." They will read in French. But, mostly, it's in English. Especially if they want just for enjoyment to read something. (Maria)

They prefer English. They read French because they have to. They wouldn't read Slovak. We have like kid Slovak books. When they were smaller, they were read to, but they never kind of started to read. I taught them. (Terezia)

Eastern European immigrant parents also pay significant attention to the development of literacy skills in their children's first languages. It allows immigrant communities to keep their linguistic identity and develop a sense of belonging to an immigrant group they represent (Cummins, 2001). Almost all interviewed participants mentioned that keeping their first language for children, born or growing up in Canada, is very important for them. Jarmila, a 47-year-old homemaker from the Czech Republic, summed up the salience of keeping the first language in the family quite well:

It's very important. Because all our, like, people, like, relatives, my mom, Leo's mom,

they don't speak any English. And I think it's nice, because Czech language is very difficult. And then it's better, if they learn from when they little. And still it's my language. I don't know, I love it. I'm not really comfortable in English. And yeah, I think it's very important. It's much more, like, important. And they really, they are very fluent [in the Czech language].

Keeping the language is much easier in its oral form due to the ubiquitous nature of English in all walks of life in the Anglophone Canada (Cummins, 1997; Lee & Norton, 2009). Out of 15 families only Leo and Jarmila have children, who can confidently read and write in their heritage language. The rest of the interviewed parents have to be content mostly with the successful development of speaking and listening skills. Similar to many parents in my study, Kira tries to read to her daughters (aged 5 and 10) both in Ukrainian and Russian every evening hoping that they will develop literacy in those languages. Parents never mentioned the lack of access to print in English, but the support of literacy activities in their heritage languages was more challenging:

... that's a problem. They don't have unfortunately, even the library here doesn't have a lot of Romanian books. We buy them sometimes in Romania, but I think that one thing that my kids are missing are the academic experiences in Romanian and for this reason whenever I buy books with Romanian stories the words used there are so archaic or, you know, older words that we don't use on a daily basis and they don't understand often. I read a story and they kept asking what's that, what's that, what's that. (Marina)

Many Canadian provinces have provisions for school's children to study their heritage languages, for example, in Ontario almost 50 languages are offered in schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). The majority of interviewed parents are aware that such classes are provided by the government free of charge, but find it difficult to schedule them for their children. Heritage language classes are usually

offered on Saturdays or after school, so most children prefer to spend this time with family or friends. Only Yana, Kira, and Ioana had experience of sending children to heritage language classes, but the attendance was often irregular. Apart from time commitments, there is a feeling among parents that the quality of instruction is inadequate or that classes are appropriate only for very young children, who mostly play there. Parents believe that children “will learn as much as they need to” in the family.

It seems that despite the well-documented cognitive advantages of multilingualism (Cummins, 2017), immigrant parents and their children find it challenging to capitalize on the rich linguistic opportunities they have to develop literacy in several languages simultaneously due to the dominance of official languages, especially English, in the Ontario education context. Heritage languages of multilingual students are often not adequately supported in the Ontario schools (Piccardo, 2014), and as can be seen from my study's data this type of cultural capital is not valued to its full potential.

As for the community learning centres, not all participants had a chance to send their children to such centres, because they are available only for the largest immigrant groups. Parents from the Russian-speaking community (Maria, Roman and Kira, Stephan and Yana) have access to more ethnic resources, because members of this group have moved to Canada recently, they are fairly numerous and invest a lot into the cultural and educational institutions. For example, they could send their children to Puchemuchka, a community centre that offers instruction in Russian, Mathematics, History, and Science together with organized activities (e.g. art studio, chess club, music classes) and summer camps. Eva, who is from Bulgaria mentioned that she wished her smaller Bulgarian community had similar opportunities: “I feel bad, because she cannot, I know in Russian, there are lots of schools, it's really good for the Russian community...they have all these book-stores and the schools have really good curriculum. We are not like that.”

Finally, an important element of learning at home is tutoring. It is a popular activity, practised by eight families in my sample of fifteen. Parents choose to pursue tutoring for different reasons. The

most obvious one is to provide extra support when parents believe their children are not doing well enough in school. As I did not collect data on students' achievement, it is not possible to define what level of achievement was considered by parents as insufficient and requiring remedial action. Parents who sent their children to French Immersion (ten out of fifteen families) often had French tutors, because most of parents do not speak French, and also come from countries where extra tutoring for foreign languages is widely spread (Silova, 2010). The most popular choice was definitely math tutoring (six out of fifteen parents). There is a belief among parents, especially those coming from East Asia (Dyson, 2001; Klein, 2008) and Eastern Europe (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009), that math instruction in Western schools is not adequate to meet the disciplinary demands at the university level or labour market requirements. Yana was quite strong in her criticism, which was expressed by several other parents too:

We found another school, which costs, like, enormous amount of money and we could only afford one course there, which is math, because I think this is the worst, I am sorry, the worst-taught subject in school. It's on the weekend, two hours a week and the most interesting quote [from my son] he says, he has a two-hour-long class on Sundays. He says that this two-hour class feels so much shorter than 45 or whatever minutes at school and it's so much more interesting and he just loves it.

Karina decided not to send her two sons to extra math classes yet, but she knows many Romanian parents who, according to Karina, pay fees comparable to those of university tuition to compensate for the perceived deficiency of mathematics education in the public system. She says that in Romania "I wouldn't go home and try to compensate, because they [children] missed teaching this stuff." Jarmila went even further and expressed her ideas around tutoring in the following way:

There's no need, and I hate it. I think they have to learn in school. Tutoring, paid tutoring, what is it? The kids have every day until 3 o'clock 3:40 in school. I hated tutoring, I

won't have it, they have to learn in school.

Two families (Ioana and Oleksandr/Irina) suggested that, as professional educators themselves, they do not need any external tutoring for their children, at least at the elementary school level, while several other parents expressed an opinion that as far as their children were doing well in school no extra tutoring was required. Overall, immigrant parents I interviewed were responsive to their children's struggles in school and were quick to provide extra help via tutoring. Some resorted to tutoring due to what they saw as deficiency in public school provision. Nevertheless, the use of tutoring seems not to be as normalized and taken for granted as it is by the immigrants from East Asia (Byun & Park, 2012), and it is reserved for dealing with "problems" rather than to get ahead in the academic competition.

To sum up, Eastern European immigrant parents in this study see their role at home, where they set high expectations regarding educational success. An undergraduate degree from a university is seen as the basic requirement. In the eyes of the interviewed parents, academic attainment has to be accompanied by organized activities with sports being the most popular. Due to the available economic, social, and cultural capital associated with higher education acquired by all participants in Eastern Europe prior to immigration to Canada, they provided children with significant support in learning at home. Parents help with homework by loosely supervising the time use, and pay for tutoring and supplementary learning (literacy development activities, use of textbooks/online resources, attendance of community learning centres).

We know from prior studies that parental involvement at home has the most benefits for children's academic achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007) and the interview data in this study confirms that Eastern European immigrant parents are very involved in their children's education at home. Now, I will be turning my attention to parental involvement in schools, which is more visible for educators and is often more valued by the official discourse than home-based involvement.

Immigrant parents' involvement in schools

Although parental involvement at home has more direct influence on children's academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2007), it is in the school contexts that parental socio-demographic characteristics (class, race, immigration status) shape their interaction with educational institutions and their stakeholders (teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, etc.). In North America particular parenting strategies typical of parents from dominant backgrounds (treating adults as equals rather than respecting them as authority figures, instilling entitlement among children to receive support from teachers, monitoring of time use by children with the help of extracurricular activities) have been traditionally accepted as normative by educators (Brantlinger, 2003; Lareau, 2015; Reay, 1998). Subsequently, the way parents raise their children and interact with schools makes the involvement of some groups more valued compared to others. Communication between parents and teachers has been found to be of particular challenge in case of immigrant parents due to language barriers, different cultural expectations and prior experiences (Dyson, 2001; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). In educational contexts that reproduce social inequality (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), the academic, social, and psychological outcomes of students are significantly affected by the parental ability to activate their capital while interacting with schools (Lareau, Evans, & Yee, 2016). Parents who are not only familiar with the school system, but also capable of meeting teachers' expectations (e.g. not threatening teachers' authority in the classroom and curricular matters, providing help to schools in the form of volunteering and fundraising) receive benefits for their children in the school context (Lareau, 2001). In this section I will look at how Eastern European immigrant parents get involved in their children's elementary school in Ontario focusing on such types of parental involvement as communicating, volunteering and decision-making (Epstein, 2010).

Communicating.

Prior research shows that communication between immigrant parents and host country teachers is a significant barrier, which has both linguistic (Dyson, 2001) and cultural components (Huntsinger and Jose, 2009). The most obvious barrier is when parents are not comfortable with the language of instruction and schools cannot offer translation support (Ladky & Stagg Peterson, 2008). Even when the language is not a barrier for comprehension, different cultural norms adopted by immigrant parents and native-born teachers makes the communication complicated if the both sides have different ideas about the roles of parents and teachers (Doucet, 2011). Consequently, parental ability to speak the language of the school and meet communicative expectations of teachers is a form of social capital.

Communication between parents and schools personnel can be described in terms of method (in person, over the phone, through agenda or via e-mail), frequency (once a week, every month, several times a year), and content (topics discussed) of such communication (Dyson, 2001). The frequency of communication practiced by immigrant parents in my study showed significant variability. Stay-at-home mothers (Maria, Petra, Terezia), who could volunteer or spend extended time in schools communicate with teachers as often as several times a week. Terezia worked as a lunch supervisor in her children's school, so she would spend all lunch breaks at school. This allows her to talk to teachers face-to-face whenever she has a question. Tina, whose daughter attended an alternative school with an open-door policy, was a graduate student at the time of the study and went to school once a week and stayed in class for the entire day, which also facilitated the personal communication with teachers. On the other hand, full-time working parents communicated with teachers significantly less:

Sorry, because, because my kids, I always worked, and my husband always worked...because you are always at work, so I would actually, consciously, okay, once a year I would go on a field trip or my husband will go on a field trip or I would

always be at their whatever Christmas concert. (Karina).

As a result, parents, who find it hard to be on the school premises physically, would mostly use electronic means of communication. Several families find e-mail or phone application useful for receiving notifications about school activities, homework. This way they could also ask questions and arrange for a face-to-face appointment with teachers:

Mostly via e-mail and if, if I have an issue, a question or want to discuss something I just send them an e-mail and they would reply pretty promptly and we can either have a meeting, a face-to-face meeting or a call. (Nevena)

The teacher-parent conference, usually it's not common thing, face to face here in Canada. Only during teacher-parent conference, and for last three years, school's so much into technology, so we have now apps. The apps ... yeah apps. We have apps where teachers will present what they did, what to review, they have reminder app, they have even ... this year they started text messaging automated, to remind what to do, what to finish. It's really excellent, because I get the message, I copy to my son, forward it to him, "Hey, you remember you have to do this?" and it's easy. (Oleksandr)

The embrace of online tools was not unanimous, because many parents still prefer face-to-face communication. Understandably, when parents whom I interviewed, especially in their mid-40s or older, went to schools themselves, the use of online or mobile tools was non-existent, which partially explains the resistance among some of them. At the same time, Eastern European immigrant parents think that local teachers are not approachable enough and hide behind phone calls, e-mails, and reminder apps:

Well, at the beginning was face-to-face, but and then it started, like, telephone calls, then it started e-mails and they have websites and stuff, so mostly we now communicate

through e-mails. The teachers don't wanna see you anymore. (Victor)

Basically, there is no way for us and no communication. They only give us once or a couple of times a year that we can communicate with teachers, other than that you have to book an appointment. Anytime you could come, in Ukraine you can come to a teacher anytime and talk to them. (Stephan).

Parent-teacher conferences, as a means of communication in Eastern Europe are organized very differently compared with those in Ontario schools. Parents in Eastern European schools are supposed to come and sit in one class where teachers would discuss in public the educational and behavioural success of all students often focusing on negative developments. Several participants (Leo, Oleksandr) believe that such approach was successful in telling parents about areas of improvement for their children in school. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of interviewed parents reported the feeling of humiliation, shame, and despair during such meetings. They value the privacy of individual parent-teacher conferences in Ontario schools, where only the parents of a child have access to the information about his/her performance in school. At the same time Eastern European immigrant parents in my study mention that they would like to have a more detailed feedback about their children's academic performance, so they can work on improving their grades:

You have allotted time. The teacher talks to, the fact is that the teacher does a lot of lip service. All the children are the greatest in the world, so you have to filter it out. You have to really ask practical questions. (Leo)

At the end of the term when it's too late, you can't do much, he or she already got their mark and they have already worked with this material and there is something new ahead of them, I wanna be informed on a day-to-day basis. It doesn't mean I am gonna check

every day, but in case there is a problem and the kid is asking you, I can go to the textbook and see, be able to help. Yeah, parent-teacher interviews, I think it's just a formality, just to put a check mark. (Yana)

I think a 10-minute interview is not enough to find out how your child is doing at school, and I think that it should be longer and it should be more of a dialogue than the teacher, you know, having prepared a little bit of information and then before you have a chance to figure things out your time is up. (Marina)

Communication with teachers represents a subsection of social capital, which has potential advantages for parents, but it is not spread out evenly. Overall, those parents who were satisfied with the frequency of communication and the quality of information received, seemed to benefit from it. Parents, who followed the local practice of volunteering, felt comfortable to use the new online communication tools or had teachers from the same country, had a better chance to follow their children's progress at schools, became more familiar with the school culture, and felt welcome. This point was well summarized by Marina, who contrasted her experiences with those of less informed parents:

I think that for one thing they don't know exactly what's happening at schools. They feel that if there is not that strictness, and, you know, very clear tough expectations of the children, then the children are not learning anything. I don't think that's true. I think that a lot of children learn a lot of very good skills that we didn't have even we arrived in Canada.

On the other hand, parents who did not have a possibility to communicate with teachers regularly, felt as if the classroom was a black box for them. Lack of communication often resulted in lower satisfaction with school, which diminishes the benefits of parental involvement for children's achievement (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016):

I would like to have camera in the school and to see what they do, like, how the

classroom looks like. I have no idea, but my kids are coming from school and I cannot get anything from them. (Victor)

Some parents were lucky when their children's teachers were immigrants themselves and moved to Canada from the same or neighbouring country. In this case, parents and teachers shared the same language and ideas about school, curriculum, and pedagogy. This allowed immigrant parents to receive accommodations regarding homework, modification of assignments, and also be generally understood as to their beliefs on the roles of school and parents.

It is important to mention that the communication between parents and teachers functions not only on the level of method, frequency, and content of communication, but also works as a ritualized practice (Doucet, 2011). The unwritten rules of who initiates the communication, what topics are appropriate to raise, who has the expertise in academic and developmental matters, and what is the implied purpose of parent-teacher communication define the success of such communication. Immigrant parents often have to negotiate new boundaries and acquire new skills of communication with schools, which go beyond information exchange. Due to differences in schooling experiences between immigrant parents and native-born teachers, significant learning is required of parents. For example, Karina realized that communication with teachers sends signals that parents are involved and care about their children and their school lives:

That's because teachers tend to assume that if you are not involved then there is something wrong with the family or the parents they don't care, so I learned in time, which wasn't there at the beginning was that I have to show them that I am interested, so they perceive my son differently. It's exactly, I am interested, I am here, I want to know if anything happens, I also make them aware that I do understand, I hear things from school, that I listen to my son.

Similarly, Irina learned from her colleagues at school that in Canada “those parents who ask the teacher, and talk and mention about their kids, teachers pay more attention to those kids and we use this insider experience for our son”. The success of communication depends on how closely the parents follow the expected patterns of communication and observe the fine line between “hard to reach” (Crozier & Davies, 2007) and “too involved” (Doucet, 2011). If the communication initiated by a parent is seen by teachers as not supportive of the school, then the outcome of such communication is unlikely to be successful. One of my participants, Eva, shared her experiences during the interview. When her daughter Desi was in Grade 6, her English class had several essay topics dealing with current economic and political issues. Eva, who was accustomed with the focus on literature rather than on current affairs, found the choice of topics inappropriate for this age group:

And I wrote an e-mail to the teacher asking where she got her materials, and she said she is following whatever curriculum guideline and I see the Principal and whoever else and they started calling me back and they were very insulting at the beginning...The explanation was, in the end, tell you the truth, they told her [daughter], they'll spend more time with her, she is not getting it. It was, everything was her fault, that she wasn't getting the information.

As far as Eva questioned the curriculum choices made by educators she went against the school purposes rather than supporting the existing practices (Guo, 2011). The communication breakdown happened because a parent and teachers had different ideas about how English curriculum should look like and they were not aware of the rationale each side had in that argument. The potential for such miscommunication has been greatly increased by the gap between experiences of an immigrant parent and non-immigrant teachers. Parents, who cannot get their message across, usually stop trying and

support their children's learning at home.

Volunteering.

Similarly, the field of in-school volunteering is an area for potential differences between Eastern European immigrant parents and Canadian-born and educated teachers. Over the recent decades, parents in Western classrooms have often been seen as “helpers”, who can provide extra support to struggling readers, make photocopies, run lunchtime clubs, assist on field trips, and run fundraising events (Christianakis, 2011; Zhang, Keown, & Farruggia, 2015). This practice is very different from what Eastern European immigrant parents experienced before immigration. Beyond parent assemblies, parents were normally not expected at schools, unless their children faced academic failure or exhibited behavioral issues. Schools were, and to a large extent still are, constructed as spaces for teachers to organize children's learning without any help from parents or community members. This is what Petra had to say:

They [teachers] didn't even want any of the parents to get involved, they don't think it's a good idea. They would think that most of the parents would be kind of pushy and they would want to take advantage of the fact that they are closer to the teacher or get some gossips or more information about or whatever and they don't think it's a good idea.

After their immigration to Canada, many immigrant parents in my sample learned about the practice of volunteering and its benefits for children. Interviewed parents, mostly mothers, who stayed at home or had flexible working hours endorsed the practice as far as it helped them to see how their children are doing at school, and they also understood that teachers need their help. Families with two parents in full-time employment volunteered no more than several times a year:

I do volunteer sometimes, I volunteer for their field trips if they need volunteers I

volunteer for, they have activity called Science, Scientist in School, so I go to those, but not very often. A lot of parents, I guess volunteer, because sometimes we are told there were many parents wanting to volunteer, so our name was not picked. (Marina)

We tried, not very often. Not as often as I wanted to. We, I applied for the school council I think a couple of times now and I was never selected, which that took me out. From volunteering on school trips and this kind of things we try to do once a year. We would go, I used to volunteer when my older one was in Senior Kindergarten, I used to volunteer to read with the kids and that was really, it's really rewarding work, but it's just with working. At that time, at that time I was actually on maternity leave with my second one, so I had time. (Marina)

Several parents questioned the importance of volunteering for their children's learning. They understand that it is useful for teachers to get help, but prefer to invest their efforts elsewhere, especially when they have demanding jobs.

I probably did it in the very first years when I wasn't still working, but after that no, you know what, it's all fun, bake sales and pizza lunches, it's the social part that I think is emphasized here, but I don't see how it will help my child learn, so, the school is doing great on the social kind of dimension, and I don't think it needs more investment in that from my point of view. Unfortunately, yes, as busy as I am I have to make those choices and I usually have to skip on volunteering, I just cannot fit it into my full-time schedule. (Yana)

Decision-Making.

Participating in the decision-making was found to be the least popular type of involvement among the

19 immigrant parents from Eastern Europe that I interviewed for my study. Although, “the purpose of school councils is, through the active participation of parents, to improve pupil achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents” (Ontario Government, 2000, p.2), participants in my study had a feeling that the main activity of the school council was to organize fundraising activities. Even Andrea, who was one of the most active community members in my sample, did not have any experience in governance:

I think it's useful, I have huge respect for people that do. We participate in some other, but not at school. We served on different boards, just not in school. I find that, my husband wouldn't be interested, for me it's mostly time, time factor.

It's important to mention that in Eastern European countries parents were normally not expected to take part in school governance, so this practice might not be very familiar or meaningful to them. On the contrary, taking part in decision making via school councils and parental involvement committees is a type of involvement that is clearly highlighted in many policy documents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; TDSB, 2015b).

Final type of parental involvement in the classification by Epstein (2010), collaboration with community was also not very prominent in the interview data. Parents did not mention any activities that connect communities with school programs or resources provided by schools for families.

School satisfaction and curriculum orientations

Sociologists of education have shown that parental class position shapes parenting practices, communication with schools and other types of parental involvement (Lareau, 2011; McNeal, 1999; Reay, 2004). Children's education has been always very important for parents, but the stakes are

getting higher in the current neoliberal period with its higher levels of economic, social, and educational inequality (Vincent, 2017; Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014). As the number of students, who successfully complete high school and attend different forms of post-secondary education increases, the centre of educational inequality shift away from schools to universities (Davies & Guppy, 2018). The undergraduate education is no longer the guarantee of social mobility, which makes even middle-class parents anxious about their children's academic success and future labour market outcomes (Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014). Increase of university tuition and resulting growth in student debt disproportionately affect working-class students (Callender & Mason, 2017). As a result, students from working-class families have a difficult choice between student debts or further falling behind their middle-class peers due to ever growing premium for university education (Goldin & Katz, 2008). Immigrant parents are especially invested in their children's education. Many parents view education as an opportunity for their children's upward social mobility (Lee & Zhou, 2015; Platt, 2005). Additionally, parents who experienced downward social mobility as a result of immigration make sure their children reverse this downward social shift via educational success (Guo, 2009). As far as their own schooling took place in different educational contexts, immigrant parents perceive their children's education through a dual frame of reference (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995), always comparing education in the two countries. Subsequently, school satisfaction, for them, is shaped by such duality. Participants in my study constantly compared the education they received in Eastern European countries with the education of their children in Ontario. Although school satisfaction seems to mediate the positive benefits of parental involvement (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016), the relationships between school satisfaction and parental involvement are not linear. The understanding of school-parent roles (Radu, 2013) and school characteristics (e.g. safety, perceived school effectiveness) (Friedman, Bobrowski, & Geraci, 2006) might explain parents' school satisfaction more than the dichotomy between high involvement/high satisfaction versus low

involvement/low satisfaction.

Regarding school satisfaction there were two positions in my sample of 19 participants. The first position is shared by parents who were broadly happy with their children's education in Ontario, whereas the second group expressed significant criticism. Some parents have mixed feelings, while several couples have different opinions regarding their satisfaction with schooling in Ontario. First, I will describe both positions before providing an explanation behind such difference.

Parents who express overall satisfaction with their children's education in Ontario see benefits in child-centred pedagogy, development of critical thinking and presentation skills, and emphasis on applied knowledge. Almost all participants believe that child-centred pedagogy that focuses on students' needs rather than on the curricular content is beneficial for their children. Parents appreciate that children can express their opinion in class, pursue many of their interests, and are generally happy to go to school in Ontario. This feeling has been succinctly summarized by Maria:

I would prefer my children to be here than there. I think back in Russia was more strict.

It was more kind of rigid. Kids have here more flexibility. They can pursue ... If they like something more they can pursue it. They have more options.

Parents think that their children are feeling more relaxed and comfortable in Ontario schools compared to their own experiences in Eastern Europe. One of the reasons behind lower levels of stress, according to the parents, is emphasis on creativity and the development of critical thinking and presentation skills, which contrasts significantly with heavy influence on content knowledge in Eastern European schools:

I think that a lot of children learn a lot of very good skills that we didn't have even when we arrived in Canada. We didn't know what an oral presentation was, we didn't know how to speak up, we didn't know how to express an opinion, how to, you know, critique

a book or anything like that, so I think the kids get a lot of good things at school.

(Marina)

Skills development is also prioritized by hands-on projects and the preference to applied knowledge, which is seen by such parents as practical and useful. They say that instead of memorization and regurgitation, children in Ontario schools have an opportunity to acquire learning skills that could be applied in different contexts:

My experience with education was that education in Macedonia was very strict and very much about learning as much as possible and only factual knowledge, not very critical learning, and just getting as much as possible in your brain and not thinking much about that. (Tina)

Moving to the second position, the criticism of schools expressed by Eastern European immigrant parents, it is necessary to mention that advantages and disadvantages of Ontario schools are seen by parents dialectically. Strong and weak points of curriculum, pedagogy, and school organization could often be understood as interrelated. The key questions raised by interviewed parents regarding the quality of elementary education in Ontario are concerned with the lack of academic knowledge in the curriculum, necessity to pay for tutoring with compensatory purposes, low expectations from teachers, and challenges in receiving information about the curriculum.

The majority of participants report that local elementary schools do not provide sufficient foundation early on, especially in math, which makes it too easy for students to fall behind:

They are not building the basis as much as we did in Romania, so in Romania we would start from the beginning and build your, like, a kind of scaffolding and after that you would get the fluff over, they do lots of fluffy stuff here without necessarily structuring

it, you know, in a helpful way for kids to understand later on and applied that knowledge to other things. (Karina)

Parents believe that the elementary curriculum is too easy, covers few concepts, and leaves too many gaps. Special emphasis is placed on mathematics, which is usually considered hard and requiring on-going practice: “The math is definitely not in the strong position than what parents could be expecting” (Roman). As a result, several parents remarked that they had to pay for tutoring for their children in order to compensate for the perceived gaps. The practice seems to be wide-spread and many respondents have other parents in their networks, who spend significant amounts on tutoring services. Parents in my sample are not using tutors, so their children get ahead, but are merely trying to compensate for what they think is missing in school:

...my kids always went beside school they were going to some other programs to kind of enhance math. We emphasized on math, English and French mostly. Even today I have to pay tutoring for them, you know, somebody actually to work with them. (Victor)

Parents, who have older children, who completed high school and were in university at the time of the interview, also think that parental involvement plays a crucial role in children's academic achievement. They believe that the school does not offer adequate preparation to pursue post-secondary education and students owe most of their success to their parents. Vigilance on behalf of parents is made difficult by the fact that, unlike in the countries of Eastern Europe, Ontario elementary teachers do not rely on the heavy use of textbooks. Subsequently, many parents are not very familiar with the curriculum in specific subjects and cannot monitor their children's academic progress as well as they would like to.

Finally, parents mentioned that teachers do not have high expectations towards students as long

as their performance is meeting the provincial standard:

I think that the main focus here in the Canadian school system is having fun in school instead of really learning something. They build on them very high level of confidence, but sometimes this level has no real grounds. (Ioana)

Here you see there is no, if you are not working hard there is no pressure, I don't mean the pressure should be, but there is no, encouragement, even something like expectations, because here if you say, if you are doing so-so they always tell you that you are great, you are perfect, this is the way here, but there they will tell you, no, you could do better. (Stephan)

Parents find it difficult to explain their position to teachers due to differences in prior educational experiences and beliefs about teaching and learning between parents and teachers:

And I tried to indicate to the teacher, like in a recent interview at X, which we attended together. I tried to tell her look you have a semester of English and all you do is basically one book and left and right. And I tried to ask her what they will learn from it. She was not getting it. (Leo)

Similarly, the complaints from parents that they would like children to have textbooks instead of photocopies, did not elicit understanding from teachers either.

What are the reasons, behind such a difference of opinion among Eastern European immigrant parents regarding the quality of education their children are receiving in Ontario elementary schools with more than a half focusing on drawbacks and barely mentioning the advantages? Interestingly,

prior studies of immigrant parents from other ethnic groups show similar results. Many immigrant parents, especially those coming from East Asia and Eastern Europe, think that mathematics curriculum and instruction in Western schools are too “easy” (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009). Some parents mention insufficient amount of homework (Li, 2006) and lack of feedback on students' learning (Dyson, 2001; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009) as factors contributing to their perception of schools in host countries as not rigorous enough and lacking explicit focus on academics (Tobin & Kurban, 2010).

I believe that the explanation lies in parental beliefs about the nature, purpose, and content of the curriculum. Deng and Luke (2008) define several curriculum orientations (academic rationalism, social efficiency, humanism, and social reconstruction), which should be seen as ideal types, but in the lived experience of teachers, parents, researchers and policymakers they are often found in hybrid forms, while individual allegiances shift over time (Schiro, 2008). Academic rationalism is the oldest approach to curriculum and views the transmission of disciplinary knowledge as the main task of schooling both for the intellectual development of students and reproduction of culture (Eisner, 1985). Social efficiency orientation puts emphasis on preparing future citizens, who have to be equipped with skills, knowledge, and human capital required by contemporary societies and economies. Humanist orientation views individual learners' self-actualization, personal development, and growth as the main objectives of schooling. Schools are seen as enjoyable places for the natural development of students in harmony with their intellectual, social, and emotional characteristics (Schiro, 2008). Social reconstruction moves the pendulum back to the sociocultural context from the emphasis on the individual in its attempt to change and improve society through education (Eisner, 1985). Learners have to be made aware of social inequality and empowered with tools to generate social agency.

Having experienced academic rigour and intensity back home (Ispa & Elliott, 2003), Eastern

European immigrant parents interviewed for this research show clear preference for academic rationalism. They expect curricula to be filled with content knowledge derived from academic disciplines. On the other hand, Western teachers, whose own schooling and teacher education was mostly based on the social efficiency model privileging job preparation, skills and outcomes, despite the superficial humanist rhetoric, often respond to academic demands of immigrant parents with incomprehension (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009). The reason for that is that in public schools of most Western countries, including Canada, academic rationalism orientation is less prevalent nowadays, at least at the elementary level (Schiro, 2008). The mastery of academic knowledge rooted in specific disciplines is viewed by host country teachers as secondary to the acquisition of skills required by local societies (e.g. teamwork, self-presentation, confidence).

Similarly, the humanist orientation to the curriculum might also lead to misunderstanding between immigrant parents and host country teachers. The humanist curricular orientation has been closely associated with constructivist pedagogy, where the teacher acts as facilitator for learners to co-construct knowledge together instead of reliance on direct teaching to transfer knowledge (Tobias & Duffy, 2009). Although the constructivist approach was initially met with significant resistance from teachers (Wildy & Wallace, 1995), it is now considered the dominant pedagogical approach in Western schools and among progressive educational policy-makers. On the contrary, in many immigrant-sending countries, including Eastern European nations, traditional teacher-centred pedagogical approaches remain popular, while humanistic orientation is understood as lacking strictness and high standards (Elliot & Tudge, 2007).

When parents adopt the curriculum orientation (e.g. academic rationalism), which is different from the orientations dominant in the school (e.g. social efficiency and humanism), their satisfaction with school decreases. Such difference in curriculum orientations might explain the critical position of

the second group of immigrant parents described earlier.

Challenges to parental involvement and resistance to normative involvement

To complete the description of parental involvement among Eastern European immigrants, who send their children to elementary schools in Ontario, I will now turn to challenges parents face in their involvement and the way they react to normative expectations. Hornby and Lafaelle (2011) developed a four-area model of barriers to parental involvement, which can be applied to all parents. The first area includes such individual parent and family barriers as parental beliefs about involvement, life contexts of parents, their perception of invitations from teachers to be involved, parental social class, ethnicity, and gender. The second area focuses on child factors, e.g. age, learning abilities or difficulties, and behavioural patterns. Parent-teacher factors belong to the third area, which includes differences in attitudes, agendas, and language between parents and teachers. Fourth area includes societal factors, i.e. historical, demographic, political, and economic issues (Hornby & Lafaelle, 2011).

As for the immigrant parents specifically, prior literature shows that the most important barriers parental involvement for this group are the lack of proficiency in the dominant language and low familiarity with the education system in host countries (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009). Ji and Koblinsky (2009) interviewed working-class Chinese immigrant parents and found that they had high expectations, but only half of respondents had accurate knowledge of their children's academic performance. Limited English was one of the key barriers reported in the study (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009). Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2016) in the Cypriot study also found that parents were willing to participate in school-based activities, but were embarrassed to take part due to their low proficiency in Greek. Data from my study shows that for skilled migrants, in

this case represented by Eastern Europeans, the familiarity with the new school system is a considerably more significant challenge compared to the language barrier. Several participants attended government-funded ESL classes to improve their language skills and acquire friends in the new country, but most of my participants were comfortable with English when they arrived to Canada. To immigrate to Canada the principal applicants had to take a language test (e.g. IELTS) to qualify, which makes this group quite selective linguistically (Shohamy & McNamara, 2009; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017b). Only two participants mentioned difficulties they experienced with English:

Yeah, I thought I was fluent in English, but when I came I didn't understand. It was different, the written and the language, like how you learn there and when you have to use the everyday language is just completely, it's kind of new. It helped that you can read and understand, but like it was hard, so I was learning from TV with the subtitles and like the first part-time job was the fast food, so you learn the menu and you learn how to connect with people. (Terezia)

I didn't speak English in that time, just a little bit. So, I had big problems, so I couldn't go to the doctor, for example. Anywhere, without my husband. (Irina)

Others explicitly mentioned language as a possible barrier to parental involvement for immigrant parents, but reiterated that they had no issues with English themselves and felt comfortable using it in school. Some participants mentioned that their spouses were not as proficient in English as they were, but it did not necessarily affect the ability of families in question to be involved in their children's education. We know that most interviewed parents speak English well, especially those in professional or managerial occupations (accountant, business manager, engineer) that require significant soft skills. At the same time, the present study did not provide data on how teachers perceived this group of

parents and evaluated their language skills. Daily interactions between teachers and parents are shaped by the “economics of linguistic exchanges” (Bourdieu, 1977), where some voices are heard more than others. Proficiency in the language of instruction intersects here with the perception of accents and power relations based on social class, citizenship, and ethnicity (Guo, 2013; Kayaalp, 2016). Linguistic capital includes not only the capacity to speak, read, write, and listen in a particular language, but also an ability to use a particular variety of the language that is considered normative in a particular field (Bourdieu, 1977). Further research is required to better understand how teachers value the linguistic capital of immigrant parents and its effect on parental involvement in schools.

On the other hand, learning about the new education system in Ontario after immigration was not easy for many participants. Even the most educationally experienced participants with graduate degrees found the information on school boundaries, enrolment, alternative schools, and everyday classroom routines baffling:

I guess it's being a foreigner you are not, you don't have the knowledge, for example, with me, I didn't know and I still don't know enough about the programs that are offered, educational opportunities. That's a challenge for me, I find it a challenge that I would like, I realize I am missing something, but I don't know who to ask. It normally comes to friends, many times your friends are people, who have been through the system as long as you have, so they don't necessarily know more, so that was my challenge most of the time. To have that, I want, I would like to offer them the best opportunities, but I don't know where to get information from. (Karina)

You know, when you go and ask and, personally I haven't been through the system and I am not familiar with what kind of resources are there. And I find it difficult to ask them, like, for example, there is no grammar at all. How can you learn a language with no

grammar, which I find totally absurd. (Eva)

One of the key reasons behind this difficulty lies in the lack of social capital represented by the size and composition of social networks developed by immigrant parents. We know that parents with large networks, which mainly contain middle-class professionals (e.g. doctors, psychologists, professors) as opposed to working-class parents (e.g. routine and manual workers), can generate significant social capital to the benefit of their children's education (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). For example, their networks include not only parents, who live in the neighbourhood or send their children to the same organized activities, but also friends and co-workers with the similar levels of education and employment. These networks allow their members to have access to valuable information regarding access to best schools, choice of more prestigious school tracks and programs, and details about possible accommodations to fit the needs of their children (Lareau, 2015).

In this context, the position of immigrant parents interviewed for this study is very different. Born, raised, and educated in various host countries of Eastern Europe before relocating to Canada, they initially created their social networks outside of North America. The decision to move to Canada made them leave these networks behind and start in many cases from scratch (Bhattacharya, 2011; Neri & Ville, 2008). Communication with schools becomes crucial, but while some parents get enough information from their social networks to be successfully involved in their children's education, others struggle to establish contact and cannot avoid such labels as "hard to reach" or "too involved". Many parents are acutely aware that because most of their friends in the host country are also immigrants they lack information, familiarity, and confidence with the schools typical of their native-born peers. Tina, Karina, and Terezia mentioned that their friends do not know about schools more than them, so cannot provide much additional information. On the contrary, parents with more diverse networks that contain native-born middle-class professionals feel more confident about access to vital information about schools. For example, Andrea and Nevena who spent almost 20 years in Canada have rich

experience of navigating the school system in Canada and never felt confused about what is going on in their children's schools and the best course of action to take:

Our experiences of integrating were fairly painless, I think, there is two types of people: people who can integrate easily, they speak the language, they can integrate very easily in terms of they are not closed in, open-minded, they can navigate through all these things. (Andrea)

Several immigrants also benefited from social networks created in Canada due to their work in the field of education. Oleksandr works as an educational administrator in a private career college, while his wife Irina is an educational assistant in a Montessori school. Yana teaches adult ESL at the community organization, while Marina works as a university lecturer. At the time of their interview, Yana and Tina were pursuing graduate degrees in education. Such parents had more information about schools both on the theoretical and practical levels. This allowed parents to access tacit knowledge of school practices and expectations. Oleksandr said that because his wife worked in the classroom they learned a lot about Ontario schools, including parental involvement expectations. Parents acknowledge that for their friends who grew up in the country and came through the local school system it is much easier to send their children to school and monitor what is going on, because they experienced Ontario schooling as students themselves.

Overcoming the challenge of the lack of familiarity with the host country's school system is not a guarantee that immigrant parents would embrace the normative understanding of parental involvement. Parent and family barriers (Hornby & Lafaelle, 2011) come into play here mostly in the shape of beliefs about parental involvement. The majority of the participants in the study learned relatively fast that schools are seeking such forms of involvement as volunteering in the classroom, fundraising, and attendance of school events. At the same time, many respondents were resistant to such forms of school-centred involvement. Parents in question have sufficient income to participate in

fundraising, have no language barrier to talk to teachers, and are familiar with school expectations, but they do not find them reasonable:

...from what I see it's mostly about fundraising, you know, for extra pencils or laptop, which I think it's not the heart of the matter. I think they have, compared to Ukraine much more resources than, I mean, they have the basic resources, they don't have a smart-board, but I don't think...Do you think they have a smart-board at that school? No. That's not what makes learning more high quality and more effective, so I don't wanna be doing selling muffins, I am sorry. (Yana)

Moreover, despite rejoining their pre-immigration middle-class career trajectories, Eastern European immigrant parents I interviewed are not always eager to practice intensive middle-class parenting. “I am not used to that way of life when Saturdays and Sundays are all planned and from 9 to 10 you have gym, then you have mathematics, then you have Robotics. For me it’s important, for us as a family to have free time, she [my daughter] is working five days a week and I think it’s plenty” (Tina). This sentiment was also echoed by Leo:

That's another story a whole concept. This is not education. This is extracurricular activities. Soccer clubs, hockey clubs, choirs. Everybody wants to have you full time, become a professional soccer player. We are having a really hard time to coordinate everything. And there is rarely anytime left.

A possible explanation of such resistance in the absence of traditional challenges that immigrant parents face (language barrier, low familiarity with the school system) could be the experiences of parents themselves who grew up and were educated in post-socialist Eastern European countries. According to parents, during the socialist period in their countries of origin schools were responsible for the academic side of education, while parents cared for children's well-being at home. Parents were not invited to the classroom and were not asked to help. The expertise related to teaching and learning

lay with the teacher and parents trusted schools to provide the appropriate level of education to their children. Post-socialist changes in the economic and social life of Eastern European countries affected education and resulted in the introduction of more individualistic and neoliberal approaches to schooling (Silova, Piattoeva, & Millei, 2018). Struggling schools asked parents to partially cover the cost of repairs and maintenance, while tutoring emerged as a viable option to make up for the perceived failure of the public education (Silova, 2010). Despite the rhetoric of modernization and “return to the West” parental involvement in Eastern European countries is more home-based compared to the Ontario context. As a result, normative expectations of school-based involvement and “concerted cultivation” among middle classes in the West could be seen by many immigrant parents as “strange”, which further adds to the mismatch between the involvement practised by parents and expectations coming from host countries' schools.

As we see from this data on parental involvement in school, Eastern European immigrant parents feel ambiguity regarding their role in this context. They embrace the communicative openness of Ontario teachers and seemingly democratic involvement where parents are considered partners on the policy level (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). On the other hand, they feel more comfortable in the home domain, which is explained by their own schooling experiences in the Eastern European countries. Their own ideas about the role of parental involvement are centred not on schools and their agenda (CODE, 2014), but on children and their lives. As Andrea put it: “School has to teach curriculum, parents’ function is an educator in life”. The immigrant parents interviewed for this study think that their main goal is to be there, when children have questions and support their emotional and intellectual growth.

Eastern European immigrant parents have relatively high levels of cultural capital due to their high levels of education, good English proficiency, and developed literacy practices. Such socially desirable skills make them relatively confident to get involved in their children’s education, especially

in the home context. Nevertheless, education acquired abroad, accented English, and insufficient familiarity with the school system could devalue this cultural capital in the eyes of educators. Unsurprisingly, the social capital of immigrant parents does not cross the borders well. Eastern European immigrant parents had to recreate their social networks, learn how to meet the communicative demands of Ontario teachers, and find new ways to get information about the education system in the host country. Some parents managed to renew their social capital better than others.

Influenced by this particular combination of cultural and social capital available to them, Eastern European immigrant parents feel competent to support their children's learning at home. Institutionalized cultural capital (higher education) allows parents to have high educational expectations and provide help with homework. Objectified cultural capital (literacy practices) helps parents to develop the literacy skills of their children in several languages, but it is mainly English that is valued in Ontario. Embodied cultural capital (English language skills) of immigrant parents is sufficient for relatively effective communication with teachers. Nevertheless, Eastern European immigrant parents are not as confident as Canadian-born middle-class parents when it comes to involvement in the school domain. Social capital is not evenly distributed among the participants. Parents who have opportunities to communicate with teachers effectively have a better understanding of their children's achievement in school. Similarly, parents who have varied social networks are more familiar with the school system and can activate this knowledge to improve their children's learning and well-being. Further research with non-immigrant teachers is required to better understand how they see immigrant parental involvement, but we can reasonably expect that the involvement practiced mainly in the home could be less valued than involvement that is visible in schools.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Summary of findings

The purpose of this study was to understand how Eastern European immigrant parents, whose children attend elementary schools in Ontario, get involved in their children's education. I analyzed their parental involvement through the lens of Bourdieu's capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Moore, 2008) to see how the social and cultural capitals of Eastern European immigrants shape their involvement. Additionally, I wanted to know if the types of parental involvement used by this group of under-researched immigrant parents match the narratives expressed in Ontario policy documents.

The study of immigrant parental involvement is urgent for several reasons. First, the number of immigrant students in today's classrooms is growing in many countries (Migration Policy Institute, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Moreover, many first-generation students have at least one immigrant parent within this group reaching 70% in such places like Toronto (TDSB, 2013). Immigrant parents bring unique schooling experiences from the immigrant-sending countries, which affects their parental involvement in immigrant-receiving nations. They often face additional challenges of language barriers and low familiarity with the school system in the new country (Turney & Kao, 2009; Zhou, 1997). Secondly, parental involvement has been increasingly seen by educators and policy-makers as a solution to the perceived ills of public education ranging from the "achievement gap" (Jeynes, 2012) and "school underperformance" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) to low economic competitiveness (Rawolle et al., 2016). Subsequently, parental involvement became an object of education policy, which resulted in the creation of numerous policy documents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010; People for Education, 2012; YRDSB, 2015). Legislation was also passed that made parental involvement initiatives mandatory at the school and board levels in the province (Ontario Government, 2000).

The focus of this research was on Eastern European immigrant parents, who constitute one of the largest immigrant groups in Canada, who are not visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2016). Coming from post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe with their distinctive education systems (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009; Pustulka & Slusarczyk, 2016) immigrant parents in this study differ significantly from White middle-class parents in North America in terms of their beliefs about curriculum, pedagogy, roles of parents and schools, and interactions between parents and teachers (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009; Robila & Krishnakumar, 2004).

In accordance with my study design, I first carried out a critical analysis of parental involvement policies in Ontario to understand the official discourse around parental involvement that may shape the expectations of teachers towards the Eastern European immigrant parental involvement. I found that Ontario policymakers have enhanced their understanding of the multi-faceted nature of parental involvement over the last 10 years and moved beyond the exclusive focus on school-based involvement (volunteering, fundraising, school councils), which was dominant before (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Now, official documents prepared by the Ministry of Education of Ontario (2010), the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (2012, 2014), and the Ontario Principals' Council (2011) acknowledge that parental involvement at home could be more effective for children's achievement than activities that take place at school. Nevertheless, the official discourse does not go far enough. The textual analysis of policy documents showed that parents are described as partners, but their role is valued only if parents support the school agenda (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) and improvement plans (CODE, 2014). There is considerably more space dedicated to the barriers to parental involvement (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018) compared to the appreciation of parental agency and funds of knowledge (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). The focus in documents produced by the Ministry of Education, school boards and associations of schools'

principals still remains on normative (school-based) involvement in the shape of school councils, parental involvement committees, and volunteering (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, 2010; TDSB, 2005).

Secondly, I interviewed 19 immigrant parents from 9 Eastern European countries with the goal to understand how they get involved in their children's education in Ontario and in what ways their involvement is shaped by parental cultural and social capital. I found that Eastern European immigrant parents see their role mostly in the home, where they are active in setting high expectations for their children, monitoring time use, and arranging organized activities for them outside of school. Parents in my sample are heavily involved in their children's learning at home: they develop literacy in children's first language (e.g. Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Ukrainian, etc.), supplement the curriculum by using additional textbooks or online resources, and paying for tutoring. Eastern European immigrant parents communicate with teachers regularly, but there is a significant variation here: some parents attend events at school and volunteer in the classroom, which allows them to see teachers often, while others only attend parent-teacher conferences and curriculum nights. Parents who see teachers more often also enjoy the use of e-mail and online communication tools more than the members of the other group. More than half of parents do not volunteer in the classroom often due to their busy work schedules and life circumstances. Governance in the form of school councils and parental involvement committees was found to be the least popular type of involvement.

Particularities of parental involvement practised by Eastern European immigrants interviewed for my study were significantly influenced by their own educational experiences in the home countries before immigration to Canada. Participants in the study grew up and went to school in socialist and post-socialist countries characterized by centralized provision of education, clear boundaries between the roles of school and parents, and academic curriculum orientations. As a result, many participants resisted the normative parental involvement expected in Ontario classrooms with its focus on school-

based activities. They expected curriculum to be more academic with heavier emphasis on content knowledge and attempted to compensate for what they saw as curricular weakness with additional homework, tutoring, and academic socialization. Such beliefs were typical of half of interviewed parents. Members of the other group were mostly satisfied with the curricular orientations dominant in Ontario schools that blend social efficiency and humanism. They valued child-centred pedagogy, emphasis on critical thinking and presentation skills, and acquisition of applied rather than academic knowledge. Parental beliefs regarding the nature of schooling and different roles of teachers and parents influence how parents get involved in their children's education.

Parental involvement of immigrant parents in my study was shaped by their cultural and social capital. Cultural capital is understood here as levels of education, English language proficiency, and literacy activities. Eastern European immigrant parents who participated in my study possess high levels of education, do not have significant language barriers, and meet the school expectations regarding literacy activities. Further research involving teachers is required to understand if the cultural capital of immigrant parents is valued by the mostly non-immigrant educators. The possible reasons for the undervaluing of cultural capital are foreign credentials (Guo, 2009), use of non-Canadian English accent by parents (Munro, 2003), and the devaluation of literacy practices in languages other than English (Piccardo, 2014). Regarding the social capital of immigrant parents, I define this term as successful communication with teachers, networks containing middle-class professionals, and relationships with other parents. In my study, I found significant variation among the participants. Parents who communicated with teachers more frequently and followed school expectations had a chance to monitor their children's learning better and were more satisfied with schools. They had an accurate understanding of their children's academic performance and a clear picture of school expectations towards students' learning. Immigrant parents who had less contact with teachers were less sure about what was going on in the school and found it more difficult to advocate on their

children's behalf. Understandably, the social networks of parents were disrupted by the immigration to Canada. Parents who managed to recreate more diverse networks in the new country, especially those that have native-born educators, received more benefits from such resources compared to parents whose networks had mostly fellow immigrants.

As far as the official discourse expressed in the analyzed policy documents privileges school-based involvement and does not allow for significant agency on parents' behalf, while staying silent on the role of teachers in parental involvement, it is reasonable to conclude that the home-based types of parental involvement practiced by Eastern European immigrant parents are undervalued in Ontario elementary schools. It is important to go beyond the acceptance of barriers to involvement and diversity among parents. We need to acknowledge that it is the social inequality and narrow definition of parental involvement that produce discourses of "hard to reach" parents (Crozier and Davies 2007) and deficit view of barriers to involvement (Ontario Ministry of Education 2010). Furthermore, if the change in conceptualization and discourse around parental involvement is followed up with emphasis on teachers and their preparedness (or unpreparedness) to work with parents, we will have a much better chance to have effective and democratic parent-school partnerships for all.

Contribution to the field

Based on these results, my thesis contributes to the research in the field of parental involvement by putting forward a new classification of parental involvement research: involvement for achievement, involvement as capital, and involvement for equity. It helps to make sense of a large body of parental involvement studies based on various theoretical and methodological assumptions. Projects centred on achievement, capital or equity rely on different epistemological stances and often

have contrasting goals in research and practice. Involvement for achievement studies focus mainly on benefits of parental involvement for academic achievement of students and school improvement (e.g. increased graduation rates, higher standardized tests scores, etc.) (Epstein, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007). The involvement as capital approach uncovers the unequal distribution of cultural and social attributes that are valued by the school system (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 2011; McNeal, 1999), while involvement for equity goes one step further and tackles the issues of discrimination and racism (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). The above-mentioned tripartite classification of parental involvement studies into those that focus on involvement for achievement, involvement as capital, and involvement for equity is merely a heuristic tool. In the research field, some studies combine elements of more than one ideal type (achievement, capital, equity).

In my thesis, I view involvement as capital adding to the work already done by several researchers in the US (Lareau, 2011; McNeal, 1999). I analyzed the parental involvement of Eastern European immigrant parents as a form of capital, which is unequally distributed among participants. Those whose cultural and social capital allowed them to get involved in their children's learning in ways expected by the school received benefits in the Ontario context. Better informed about the school system in general and their children's performance in particular, such parents had more frequent and satisfying communication with teachers, which allowed them to get more detailed feedback on children's performance and even receive modified homework. On the other hand, parents with smaller social networks, who did not have a clear understanding of the way schools function in Ontario, felt left out and not listened to. Focus on involvement as capital allows to explain particularities of parental involvement beyond the traditional approach, where involvement is understood mostly as an effective practice to increase achievement by enlisting the help of parents in reaching the schools agenda. Involvement as capital sheds light on how unequal amounts of cultural and social capital among

parents shape their involvement in children's education, which in turn adds to overall inequality in education. Viewing parental involvement as capital is in no way intended to perpetuate the inequality among parents in terms of their involvement or judge the value of such involvement based on the amount of social and cultural capital they have. I believe that the dichotomy that “funds of knowledge [are] for the poor and forms of capital for the rich” (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011, p. 163) is a false one. Stating that the involvement of some parents might be valued by the school system more than that of others does not imply that some forms of involvement are inherently more valuable. The notion of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) helps to understand the arbitrary nature of assets, which are valued, even though the resulting inequality has material consequences. This is an important contribution to the ongoing discussion on parental involvement.

As mentioned earlier, the fact that my thesis uses involvement as capital approach as its theoretical lens, the issues of achievement and equity also have important presence here. All parents want the best education for their children with the academic achievement playing a significant role. Learning at home organized by parents in my sample serves specifically this function, as do the high educational expectations Eastern European immigrant parents have for their children. Taking into account the likelihood of unequal access to information about schools and barriers to successful communication with teachers among immigrant parents compared to native-born peers from the same social class, the issue of equity in parental involvement cannot be overlooked as well.

The thesis also adds to the critical work in the field of parental involvement research with its emphasis on the unequal returns on parental involvement based on social class (Lareau, 2011; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011) and immigration status (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009). I emphasize how parental involvement cannot be discussed as a neutral practice, because it clearly privileges parenting practices of parents, who belong to socially dominant groups (Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Vincent & Ball, 2007). My focus was to shed light on the parental involvement

strategies among immigrant parents, who often face specific challenges to their involvement (Turney & Kao, 2009). Finally, I add to prior research evidence that shows a rich array of home-based involvement practiced by immigrant parents (Guo, 2011; Miano, 2011; Tang, 2015), which is often undervalued by the official discourse (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Moreover, this study provided new data on parental involvement among Eastern European immigrants, which are under-researched compared to many other immigrant groups (Nesteruk, Marks, & Garrison, 2009; Silova, 2014). I show how their unique experiences in post-socialist countries (hard boundaries between schools and parents; preferences for academic curriculum) shape parental involvement in the Ontario context. Parents, who grew up in countries where parental involvement in the schools was not encouraged, often feel uncomfortable attending school events beyond parent-teacher conferences and rarely find volunteering and fundraising meaningful.

My thesis also contributes to the field of curriculum studies by explaining how curriculum orientations of parents (academic rationalism, social efficiency, humanism, and social reconstruction) (Deng & Luke, 2008) serve as a key determinant of their school satisfaction and experience of the education system. Mismatch between the curriculum orientations adopted by parents and those shared by teachers is more likely in the case of immigrant parents, who grew up and attended schools in one educational context before relocating to countries with different ideas about the nature of curriculum, best pedagogical practices, and roles of teachers and parents (Schiro, 2008).

Implications for policy and practice

In terms of implications for policymakers, I believe that future parental involvement policies should go beyond the declarative acknowledgement of parents as partners and put parents rather than schools at the centre of policy initiatives. At the moment most policies mention how parental involvement is crucial for students, but mostly focus on the school interests (e.g. school improvement,

performance on standardized tests) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) rather than on issues of main importance for parents (involvement at home, well-being of students) (Hamlin & Flessa, 2016). Janet Goodall (2017), in her book *Narrowing the achievement gap: Parental engagement with children's learning*, makes an important distinction between involvement in learning (acquisition of knowledge, values, and skills), involvement in education (facilitating learning in formal or informal contexts), and involvement in schooling (formal education). Current parental involvement policies focus most of their attention on schooling, while ignoring broader education and learning. Going forward, more attention should be paid to parents' involvement in children's learning rather than involvement in schooling. Deficit thinking found in the discourse concerning barriers should be replaced by parental agency and the emphasis on funds of knowledge available to parents. Policy documents should not only acknowledge social inequality and its effects on parental involvement, but also include concrete measures that will disrupt unequal power relations and ensure a more equitable and democratic involvement of parents in their children's learning, education, and schooling.

Implications for schools include suggestions to improve teachers' familiarity with the students and their families. Teachers need to know how parents, and immigrant parents in particular, are involved in their children's learning. One promising approach is home visits that showed positive results in the US and Britain (Cremin et al., 2012; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). By visiting the homes of their students, teachers can understand the life circumstances of families and observe home-based activities parents take part in together with children. Home visits to multilingual families would also shed light on literacy practices in languages other than English. Immigrant parents in my study were interested in supporting the maintenance of first languages among their children for the purposes of identity and culture. They report that it is important for them that their children can speak the family language to be able to communicate with grandparents, feel comfortable while visiting the parents' home countries, and pass the language and culture to their children in the future (Liang, 2018; Yan,

2003). Currently, the policy documents remain silent regarding heritage language learning taking place at home and visits by teachers would be able to compensate for this neglect.

Both policy-makers, school boards, and university departments of education could join forces to provide support for teachers to feel confident working with parents in several ways. Policy-makers can demand initial teacher education programs to include content on parental involvement in programs that lead to teacher certification in their jurisdictions, while school boards could develop workshops and other related learning opportunities for teachers as part of their professional development. Prior research shows that teachers feel ill-prepared to work with parents, especially those who differ from them in terms of class, race, and immigration status (De Bruine et al., 2014). At the same time, we know that when such support is provided to teachers, it brings significant benefits for teaching practice and parent-school relations (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones & Reed, 2002). As far as the teacher education curricula are already packed with content and in-service educators have multiple accountability requirements, finding space for new material on parental involvement will require concerted efforts on behalf of policy-makers, school leaders and teacher educators (Goodall, 2018; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). I am confident that the benefits of teacher readiness to collaborate with parents would clearly outweigh disadvantages.

Further research

The research design of this study focused on the beliefs and experiences of immigrant parents, which they expressed during interviews. My goal was to investigate how parents who grew up in Eastern European countries and later moved to Canada make sense of their parental involvement in Ontario elementary schools. I wanted to learn how they define parental involvement and what they say they do in school, home, and the community to help their children learn. Viewing parental involvement from a capital perspective, where involvement is seen as a valuable and scarce resource not equally

distributed among all parents, made me inquire if types of involvement practised by participants matched the narratives of the official discourse. Narratives in policy documents function here as a proxy for expectations that educators have for parental involvement.

Such narratives provide an important, even though, imperfect insight into how parental involvement is valued by schools. As a result, an important avenue for further research would be to work with teachers in order to understand their conceptualization of parental involvement, their expectations towards parents, especially from minority and immigrant groups, and their preparedness to develop democratic family-school partnerships. We know from prior studies that teachers often view immigrant parents from a deficit perspective (Guo, 2011; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt & Moll, 2011). In addition, several studies reported that teachers are rarely supported in learning how to work with parents during their initial teacher education or as part of their professional development (De Bruine et al., 2014; Willemse, Thompson, Vanderlinde & Mutton, 2018). Working with parents is encouraged or even required at the policy level (Mapp, 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, 2005, 2010), but when it comes to the implementation of various family-school initiatives they all too often take a back seat to leave room to more “urgent” sides of teacher work, e.g. increasing test results (Thompson et al., 2018). Subsequently, the next step would be to work with teachers to learn more about their position and role in parental involvement, which shapes the learning experiences of children they work with (Pushor & Amendt, 2018). An important practical implication of researching teachers and school leaders would add to the understanding that parental involvement should go beyond its narrow school-centred definition to also include home learning environment (Goodall, 2018). The expanded body of knowledge on teachers’ beliefs and practices related to parental involvement could be used for professional development purposes and teacher training programs. In other words, it is the attention paid to teachers' role in parental involvement and understanding of the complexity of parental practices at home, at school, and in the community that will allow us to avoid

looking at parents from a deficit perspective (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander & Hernandez, 2013).

A second area for further research should be to conduct an ethnographic study of immigrant parental involvement in the natural settings of the home, the school, and the community. In my study, I relied on interview data to understand the participants' conceptualization of parental involvement and their accounts of activities they do, as parents of elementary school children. A richer and more nuanced picture could be obtained by an observational study to go along with interviews. It would allow to better understand how parental meaning-making shapes their interactions with children, teachers, other parents and community members. This new vision of parental involvement would help to ensure that the involvement of all parents has value for their children's education (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt & Moll, 2011).

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter and Consent Form for Parents

October 21, 2016

Dear Madam or Sir,

My name is Max Antony-Newman and I am a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto at the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning working under the supervision of Professor Diane Gerin-Lajoie. I am writing to inquire if you are interested in participating in my doctoral research titled *Parental Involvement of Eastern European Immigrant Parents of Elementary School Students in Canada*. The study aims at understanding the parental involvement of Eastern European immigrant parents, whose children attend elementary schools in Canada. I would like to learn how parents are involved in their children's education at home, in school, and in the community. The research shows that parental involvement affects the academic and behavioural outcomes for school children, but we do not know much about Eastern European immigrant parents in Canada in particular. The objectives of the study are to learn about how immigrant parents see their role in their children's education and how their understanding of such a role matches the expectations of the school.

Participating parents come from the countries of Eastern Europe and attended school and/or university in their home country before immigrating to Canada, where their children currently attend elementary schools. I am planning to interview 15 pairs of parents. Your participation will include an interview of between one and two hours conducted in the place you find the most convenient (home, University of Toronto campus, coffee shop, public library, etc.), and it is absolutely voluntary. Interviews will start only after you sign the consent forms, and they will be audio recorded as long as

you give your consent for such recording. Responses will not be judged and you will have the opportunity to withdraw from the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question without any negative consequences. In case of withdrawal no data will be used. No real names of participants, their children's teachers, educational establishments or geographical locations will be used in analyzing or presenting the data.

Gathered data will be accessible only to me, Max Antony-Newman, and my supervisor, Professor Diane Gerin-Lajoie. Additionally, research ethics program may have confidential access to data to ensure that participant protection procedures are followed. All audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study, while interviews transcriptions will be encrypted and stored on my personal computer for 5 years before being deleted.

By participating in this study you will have an opportunity to discuss the issues related to parental involvement in Canadian schools. You will be able to talk about your experiences and views in a friendly, accepting and positive setting. I will gladly send you a summary report when the project concludes in April of 2017. If you agree to participate in accordance with the above-mentioned conditions please return the consent form with your signature, date and name to me. Please keep one copy for your reference.

Thank you for your time and cooperation. Feel free to contact me if you have any queries by sending an e-mail to XXX@XXX.XXX or calling (647)111-1111. You may also contact my supervisor Professor Diane Gerin-Lajoie at (416)111-1111 or by e-mail XXX@XXX.XXX. If you have any questions about your rights as participants, you can contact the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board.

Your participation in my study would be greatly valued and appreciated.

Sincerely,

Max Antony-Newman

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 Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
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Thesis Supervisor:
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Parent Consent Form

The signing of this form is strictly voluntary. I acknowledge that I have read and understood details of the research described in the recruitment letter written by Max Antony-Newman on October 2, 2016.

I fully understand that my participation will involve the following activities and conditions:

Activity:

- 6) an interview (between one and two hours) to be audio recorded

Conditions:

All my personal information will be kept confidential. Research ethics program may have confidential access to data to ensure that participant protection procedures are followed

I will be free to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences

I agree to participate in the study *Parental Involvement of Eastern European Immigrant Parents of Elementary School Students in Canada*.

I am returning this signed and completed consent form to Max Antony-Newman, and I have been given a copy of the recruitment letter and this consent form.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Could you describe your immigration to Canada (reasons for immigration, experience of job hunting, language and cultural differences)?

How can you compare your school experience in your home country with the education your child is receiving in Canada? Is there a difference in curriculum and pedagogy?

How would you describe your involvement in your child's education both in the home country (if applicable) and in Canada?

Describe me your child's school? Do you talk about school with your child? What educational expectations do you have for her?

Tell me about your child's extracurricular activities. Describe how you supervise your child's time use and behaviour.

How do you communicate with your child's teachers? How often do you go to your child's school?

How useful do you find parent-teacher conferences? Are you satisfied with the information you receive during parent-teacher conferences?

How often do you volunteer in your child's school or in field trips? What activities do you participate in?

Do you help your child with homework? Are you children receiving any tutoring (e.g. Kumon, Oxford Learning, etc.)?

Tell me about your experience of going to museums or exhibitions with your children.

Do you do any reading activities with your child at home? What language do you read in? Is keeping L1 important for your family?

What types of parental involvement do you think are the most effective for academic achievement and good behaviour?

What are the greatest challenges you face as a parent in this country? What would help you to be more/better involved in your child's education?

Demographic information

Name: _____

Age: _____ Country of origin: _____

First language: _____

Language spoken at home with children: _____

Education (high school, college, university, etc.): _____

If you got degree from a university outside of your home country, which one(s)?

Occupation: _____

How long have you been living in Canada? _____

Children(s) gender and age(s) _____