At the Intersection: Examining the Meaning of School Participation for Parents

by

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the meaning of participation for parents in the education of their children. Ten parents with children enrolled in primary school were interviewed and invited to a group discussion, a process of individual and collective inquiry focused on parent perspectives on the nature and relevance of their participation. Data from semi-structured interviews and the small group discussion were analyzed using thematic analysis. Three themes emerged as core tensions, between parents’ sense of responsibility to their children and the challenges of their lives; compliance with school expectations and a need to be vigilant; and finally their perceptions of self and of other parents. The study takes place in Mexico City, focusing on parents with children in the public school system, which serves the majority of families in this country.
At the Intersection: Examining the Meaning of School Participation for Parents

This study examines the meaning of participation for parents, in the education of their children, by engaging with primary school parents directly. The study takes place in Mexico City, focusing on parents with children in the public system, which serves the vast majority of families in this country (Guichard, 2005). Much of the recent national debate on public education has focused on teacher evaluation for greater transparency and quality, however this should be complemented by continuing research on the factors influencing parent participation and the forms it takes in Mexico (Valdés Cuervo & Urías Murrieta, 2011) and on the qualitative impact, at the micro level, of educational policies aimed at parent participation (Hernández, 2013).

According to Santizo Rodall (2010), in Mexico, there tends to be little or no connection between schools and their surrounding communities, especially in urban settings.

The links between parent engagement and student academic achievement have been extensively documented, including major reviews and meta-analyses of available research (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Despite the benefits of home-school collaboration and the existence of multiple models for engaging parents (e.g. Epstein et al., 2009; Hornby, 2000; Martiniello, 1999; Vincent, 1996), a significant gap remains between theory and practice, due to the many barriers that exist to parent participation (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Barriers for working-class families may include a lack of time available to be involved in the ways schools allow or encourage, in some cases because of a demanding work schedule; a mismatch between families’ values and expectations and those of school staff; a lack of teacher training and expertise in how to partner effectively with families; and insufficient funding for specific school programs and resources designed to include parents (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This study will focus on parent participation and voice (Vincent & Martin, 2002), with an emphasis on “how

While parent engagement is often framed in terms of benefits to individual children and families as well as to the educational organization (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), at a broader level, social participation is central to a democratic society (Anderson, 1998; Jiménez-Guzmán, 2005; Bernstein, as cited in Reay & Arnot, 2004; van der Riet, 2008). As stated by Vincent and Martin (2002), “parent–school interactions contribute to an understanding of the ways in which citizens have been conceived by and involved in the public sphere” (p. 110). Parents’ right to participate in the schools their children attend is formalized in Mexico through Chapter VII of the General Law of Education (*Ley General de Educación*) (LGE) (Schalla, 2015; Secretaría de Educación Pública [SEP], 1993). As stated by Jenlink (2004), “those individuals who most directly experience the consequences of [a] system must be involved in designing and creating the system” (p. 238). However, questions of how and to what extent parents should participate are highly contested and politicized (Anderson, 1998; Bovaird, 2007; Corrales, 2006; Vincent, 1996). For example, certain school-based management (SBM) initiatives in Central America have increased parent participation, but were motivated in part by efforts to disrupt existing teachers’ unions (Corrales, 2006). As stated by Corrales (2006), “in Nicaragua and El Salvador, most evidence suggests that a key objective…was to weaken the stranglehold of existing unions, strongly affiliated with opposition parties” (p. 457).

The objective of this study is to contribute to the development of inclusive, democratic practice in public education by listening to parents and applying relevant theory, adding to the current understanding of “the multiple realities that different stakeholders experience” (Burns, 2007, p. 7) in the school context. This study explores the following question: What does participation mean to parents, in the context of their children’s education? It also examines two
sub-questions: What opportunities do parents perceive to participate at school? What barriers do they perceive to their participation?

This study is based on a qualitative analysis of parent perspectives. It was expected that parents may be outside of school decision-making processes but perhaps perceive this as normal and even appropriate, given that within the traditional organizational structure of schools in Mexico, teachers and the principal are at the center and parents participate from the margins (Santizo, 2011). It was also expected that when asked, parents would have strong opinions about their children’s schools, as well as potentially valuable knowledge to contribute based on their lived experience, but may be unaccustomed to speaking openly and critically about their beliefs and opinions. As Dyrness (2009) writes, marginalized families can offer a “rich critique” (p. 36) as stakeholders in public education, but they are not often heard; however, “parents, even in very poor communities, are willing to participate in school activities” (CERCA as cited in Corrales, 2006, p. 464).

**Definition of Terms**

**Parents**

In the context of this study, the term parent may refer to a child’s biological mother or father or to any legal guardian, family member, or adult responsible for the child. This term will refer primarily to a person’s self-reported role and responsibilities in caring for a child, regardless of their legal or biological relationship.

**Participation, Engagement, and Involvement**

The term participation will be used in this study, rather than engagement or involvement. Though participation is a vague term employed across the political spectrum with different meanings (Anderson, 1998), it is appropriate when exploring parent input in the public education
system as an institution in a democratic society. As stated by Jiménez-Guzmán (2005), participation means “members [of a society] take part in every aspect of collective life” (p. 17). Specifically at school, social participation means collaborating and making shared decisions between the principal, teachers, parents and students, with the collaboration of former students and other community members (Santizo, 2012). According to Anderson (1998), participation is authentic “if it includes relevant stakeholders and creates relatively safe, structured spaces for multiple voices to be heard” (575). Ackoff (as cited in Jiménez-Guzmán, 2005) states that participation “involves the extent to which individuals take part in making decisions that affect their satisfaction” (p. 30). Therefore, to participate means to have influence and share power (Delgado-Gaitan, 2012) in decisions that affect the participants. Furthermore, this study adopts Anderson’s (1998) view on the purpose of participation:

The ultimate ends of participation should be the constitution of a democratic citizenry and redistributive justice for disenfranchised groups, or, in educational terms, more equal levels of student achievement and improved social and academic outcomes for all students. (p. 575)

**Decision-Making**

Decision-making refers to the process of arriving at school-level decisions in one or more areas of an educational organization, including curriculum, health and safety, recreation and extra-curricular activities, fundraising, administrative processes such as teacher hiring and firing, teacher salaries, school budget and spending decisions (Sawada & Ragatz, 2005).

**Literature Review**

Considerable research has been conducted on the relationship between what is referred to as parent engagement or involvement and student achievement (Epstein et al., 2009; Henderson
Different forms of engagement can have a varying impact (Fan & Chen, 2001) and many barriers exist for parents, at the level of individual families and parent-teacher relationships (e.g. attitudes and beliefs) in addition to broader, societal-level factors (e.g. public policy) (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Teachers and administrators often hold a deficit view of parents (Dyrness, 2009; Schalla, 2015; Vincent, 2014), especially when there are social class and race differences between the two groups (Delgado Gaitan, 2012; Dyrness, 2009; McMahon, 2007). If certain parents seldom visit the school, for example, teachers and administrators may believe it is because they are not interested (Vincent, 1996; Delgado Gaitan, 2012). DeMoss and Vaughan (2000) point out, however, parents may not visit their child’s school for entirely different reasons. It may be out of respect and represent an expression of trust. In the United States, there is often a social class and race gap between the majority white, middle-class teaching and administrative staff and the students and families they serve, who may be recent immigrants or belong to another race and social class (Dyrness, 2009; 2011). While issues of race, class, and gender intersect in the relationships between parents and teachers (Vincent, 2014), the influence of these factors in Mexico is not well documented.

Recommendations from the literature and models for parent engagement provide a range of parent roles, from child-rearing and assisting with homework to supporting school activities and participating actively in school decisions (Epstein et al., 2009; Hornby as cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Martiniello, 1999). Vincent (2014) states that the home has become a pedagogical space. Swap (1993) describes a hierarchy in parent engagement: the lowest level of engagement occurs under the protective model, followed by school-to-home transmission and curriculum enrichment models, with the highest level of engagement occurring under the partnership model. In Latin America, there is evidence of an additional model: publicly funded, community-
managed schools, which “constitute the most far-reaching [form of parent engagement] because they confer on parents the greatest degree of decision-making powers in school administration” (Corrales, 2006, p. 452). At community-managed schools, administrative responsibilities are transferred to local organizations, usually comprised of parents, “authorized to spend on infrastructure and, more significant, to hire and fire teachers, as they see fit” (Corrales, 2006, p. 451). In Mexico, there have also been alternative community-run education initiatives among Zapatista communities in Chiapas, when families were displaced by conflict and state education services were absent, moving beyond the legal framework for social participation and the parent roles specified in the LGE (Hernández, 2013). Families chose to continue self-organized indigenous language and culture instruction after returning to their communities (Hernández, 2013).

The introduction of policies and programs for parent engagement does not necessarily lead to improved relationships between home and school, and in some cases simply reinforces existing power structures and forms of control (Anderson, 1998). This study adopts instead the term participation, as a political concept. While “the idea of participation has been associated with political democracy for more than twenty-five hundred years” (Jiménez-Guzmán, 2005, p. 14), as Anderson (1998) points out, many initiatives purportedly aimed at increasing participation are in fact “potential disciplinary practices which represent efforts to normalize and control individual and collective action” (p. 580). Jenlink (2002) states that “parents and community members have increasingly been disconnected from political, economic, and civic responsibilities while educators and policymakers work to ensure ideological controls over educational systems” (p. 397). The fact that parent and community participation in education are legally permitted does not guarantee effective participation in practice (Vélez Lopera, 2009).
In Mexico, Jiménez-Guzmán (2005) identifies a persistent lack of social and political participation as a key challenge for the country’s development, stating, “development is as much a matter of motivation and learning as of wealth” (p. 15). It remains unclear what exactly constitutes effective or appropriate parent participation at school, however. In countries such as England and the United States, school choice has emerged as an accepted means of parent participation, linked to notions of parental freedom (Exley, 2012; Vincent, 1996) and voice (Hirschman, 1970; Smith & Rowland, 2014). Parents are positioned as consumers (Vincent & Martin, 2002), free to select a school between competing options. However, according to Hirschman (1970), voice entails that “dissatisfied consumers (or members of an organization), rather than just go over to the competition, can “kick up a fuss” and thereby force improved quality or service upon delinquent management” (p. 30). Smith and Rowland (2014) found only limited and temporary parental voice in California, for example, where parent trigger laws were introduced under the promise of increasing “local authority by amplifying parental voice” (p. 95). The view that school choice or exit (Hirschman, 1970) equates participation contrasts sharply with literature on authentic participation, which Anderson (1998) characterizes as “[moving] beyond concerns with legitimacy and public relations to shared control” (p. 595). According to this view, participation, as an ideal to work toward, is “important for the development of the individual, important for the creation of democratic institutions, and important as a means to increase learning outcomes” (Anderson, 1998, p. 595). Vincent (2014) also distinguishes between school choice and participation, advocating instead for dialogue between home and school. A literature review by Kim et al. (2012) further reinforces the need for greater dialogue in home-school relationships.

In Mexico, there are three types of school councils and associations involving parents:
Consejos de Participación Social (Councils for Social Participation), which are in place at the school, municipal, state and national levels. At the school level, they are referred to as Consejos Escolares de Participación Social (School Councils for Social Participation) or CEPS. These include parents, teachers, union representatives, the principal, alumni, and community members. In practice, many teachers and school administrators view the CEPS as a nuisance and an imposition (Hernández, 2013). The second type are Consejos Técnicos (Technical Councils), which include teaching staff and the CEPS, and meet monthly to discuss pedagogical and classroom issues, though they tend to discuss a broader range of topics. Finally, the Asociaciones de Padres de Familia (Parent Associations) are responsible mainly for fundraising and volunteering (Santibañez, Abreu-Lastra, & O’Donoghue, 2014; Santizo Rodall, 2010, p. 85). Gertler, Patrinos, and Rubio-Codina (2012) found that in Mexico, “while parent associations exist by law, they are rather dysfunctional and typically have little or no access to schools” (p. 99).

As Vincent (1996) points out, terms such as community, participation and empowerment are frequently used in elementary school contexts but remain vague in practice and carry different meanings for different stakeholders. Dyrness (2011) also documents cases in which the use of language related to social justice and community contrasts with the experiences of families, who are consistently excluded from school decisions. Institutions and individuals in positions of power may use this type of language to legitimize initiatives that in fact reinforce the professional autonomy of teachers and administrators, and undermine parent participation in school matters (Anderson, 1998; Vincent, 1996). Santizo (2011) affirms that teachers often feel concerned that conflict may arise if parental involvement in school decisions increases.

According to Santibañez et al. (2014), “in Mexico, parental involvement has traditionally
centered on fundraising and school maintenance activities as well as attending parent teacher conferences” (p. 100). These authors also point out that federal education law in Mexico “prevent[s] parents and parent associations from attempting to influence or make decisions regarding key school-level matters: teacher hiring/firing, teacher training and evaluation, pedagogy, and curriculum among others” (Santibañez et al., 2014, p. 100). Decision-making in Mexican public education is highly centralized. As stated by Guichard (2005), “schools have some autonomy in the organisation of instruction, but have no autonomy at all in personnel management and resource allocation, and only very limited autonomy in planning and structure” (p. 16). In spite of the legal limitations to parent participation, cases exist at the school level which demonstrate the positive influence of community participation in improving education in Mexico (Hernández, 2013).

While important strides have been made in improving access to education and certain educational outcomes in this country (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013), there is room for significant improvement. Santizo Rodall (2010) states that while coverage and access to education have improved greatly since 1960, the quality of education has not. According to Guichard (2005), “Mexicans spend comparatively few years in formal education, and the quality of the education they receive is lower than in other OECD countries” (p. 2). Primary schooling is provided to most students by the public system, with over 90 percent of students in basic education enrolled in public schools (Guichard, 2005, p. 8). In Mexico City, however, a greater proportion of children are enrolled in private schools – approximately 20 percent (Guichard, 2005). Certain programs have been implemented in Mexico to promote greater accountability and parent involvement, such as SBM initiatives Apoyo a la Gestión Escolar or Support to School Management, Programa Escuelas de Calidad or Quality
Schools Program, and *Programa de Fortalecimiento e Inversión Directa a las Escuelas* or Program to Strengthen and Invest Directly in Schools (Santibañez et al., 2014). As stated by Santibañez et al. (2014), these programs provide cash grants to schools, “in exchange for collaboration between principals, teachers and parents for school planning and decision making” (p. 98). In a study by Gertler et al. (2012), SBM programs were shown to increase parent involvement in decision-making, positively affecting student outcomes in rural Mexican schools. While Santibañez et al. (2014) found evidence of increased parental engagement in certain aspects of their children’s education, they also state that parents and school staff, by themselves, are not necessarily able to build the capacity required to engage effectively. SBM programs in Mexico have had a positive impact on student achievement, but there is a need for increased support and capacity building in order to create and sustain home-school partnerships (Santibañez et al., 2014).

**Method**

The qualitative approach of this study was designed to support “the expression of the participants’ knowledge about life and conditions” (Chambers, as cited in van der Riet, 2008, p. 554), contributing elements of parents’ own expertise and experience to the literature on their participation at school. As stated by van der Riet (2008), “any investigation of a phenomenon builds on what people know, accessing their local knowledge” (p. 551). Participants were first interviewed individually, using a semi-structured format to allow for emerging comments and ideas. As Galletta (2012) writes, this type of interview “creates openings for a narrative to unfold, while also including questions informed by theory” (p. 2). Participants were then invited to a group discussion to encourage an additional layer of reflection and analysis. This study draws on feminist theory, framing personal experience and empathy as key aspects of ethical
research (de Laine, 2000; Dyrness, 2011). The objective is not to verify to what extent participant accounts are correct or factual but rather to examine the meaning of these accounts and the interpretations of participants themselves.

**Participants**

Participants were recruited in person, using convenience sampling (Schwandt, 2007), at two locations: a non-profit school and community centre, and a private early learning centre. At both locations, a personal connection with the director was leveraged to establish trust and gain access to the parent and staff community. At the first location, the project was introduced to members of the teaching staff and to parents, during a meeting at the beginning of the school year. At the second location, the project was introduced only to members of the teaching staff, several of whom are mothers with children currently in primary school. A total of 10 parents volunteered to participate: eight mothers were interviewed individually; one couple, mother and father, were interviewed together.

Participants represented a wide range of educational levels, detailed in Table 1, from elementary school \((n = 1)\) to some form of post-secondary education \((n = 4)\). All participants live in the delegación or borough of Coyoacán, and nine out of 10 participants live in colonias or neighbourhoods classified as low or medium on the social development index of the Sistema de Información del Desarrollo Social or Social Development Information System (SIDESO, 2010). Participants ranged in age from 31 to 41 (mean age = 35.8). They were neither recruited nor excluded on the basis of age, gender, educational level or other factors. The sole criterion was that they currently have one or more children enrolled in public primary school. As shown in Table 1, participants vary in the proximity of their home and school neighbourhoods.
Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Home versus School Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Undergraduate degree, no diploma; additional certificates</td>
<td>Same borough, different neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Different borough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Technical school</td>
<td>Same borough, different neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Did not report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Secretarial program</td>
<td>Nearby or adjacent neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Commercial degree</td>
<td>Nearby or adjacent neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>Nearby or adjacent neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Incomplete undergraduate degree</td>
<td>Same neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Nearby or adjacent neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Incomplete undergraduate degree</td>
<td>Nearby or adjacent neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Mexico City is currently divided into 16 delegaciones or boroughs, which are further divided into colonias or neighbourhoods.

Procedure

A proposal for this study was approved by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board, to ensure it met the requirements of free and informed consent, participants’ right to cease participation at any time, privacy and confidentiality, minimal risk, conflict of interest and research involving vulnerable individuals. During the study, participants were asked to speak freely and critically about their children’s schools; therefore it was important to ensure confidentiality to avoid additional risk due to their participation in the study. All participants were asked to read and sign a consent form for their interview (see Appendix A). Those who participated in the group discussion were asked to read and sign an additional consent form (see Appendix B).

A series of nine semi-structured interviews was conducted, ranging in duration from approximately 18 to 47 minutes, excluding the introduction. Questions focused on how participants view and define their participation in the context of their children’s education (see Appendix C). Eight of the nine interviews were recorded; one participant declined to have the
Interview findings were coded, highlighting key concepts to begin to work toward themes. Preliminary notes and codes were recorded in Microsoft Word. The data set was then transferred to the software program MAXQDA and first cycle codes were added using Initial Coding, including Descriptive Coding, In Vivo Coding, and Attribute Coding (Saldaña, 2013). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, analytic memos were recorded, including notes on possible codes (Saldaña, 2013). The purpose of this form of documentation was to create a preliminary set of themes to be presented back to participants for collective reflection and feedback.

Participants were invited to the group discussion via phone call or text message. Two participants could not be reached; three declined to attend; and five confirmed that they would attend. The day of the group discussion, only two participants attended. As they arrived, participants were greeted and offered refreshments. One participant brought her daughter. Shortly after the second participant arrived, approximately 30 minutes late due to confusion about the location, the discussion began with a restatement of the purpose and clarification of the research process up to that point. Four themes and related sub-themes (see Appendix D) were presented one by one on sticky notes, and introduced as preliminary given the time constraints of the project. Participants were informed that the analysis would continue after the group discussion, incorporating the added layer of their comments and reflections. In spite of low attendance, the group discussion was a rich source of data and participants expressed that it was
a positive experience. Participant comments were recorded using audio recording and note taking. Data collection in the field and preliminary analysis lasted a total of five months, from September of 2015 to January of 2016.

Following the transcription and translation of the group discussion audio recording, the document was added to MAXQDA and coded in parallel to a second coding cycle of interview data. Interview data were compared and contrasted with the output of the group reflection session. Codes were then grouped into categories, and analyzed for themes. According to Saldaña (2013), “unlike most approaches to content analysis, which often begin with predefined categories, thematic analysis allows categories to emerge from the data” (p. 177). Following second cycle coding of interview and group discussion data, “emerging themes were examined against the body of other research reported in the literature” (Fletcher et al., 2010, p. 440).

**Results**

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of school participation for parents at the micro level. As participants communicated their beliefs and perspectives through the interview process, certain contradictions began to surface. Three key themes emerged from the data collected during the interviews and group discussion, framed as core tensions or “illuminative dualities” (Barab, Barnett, & Squire, 2002, p. 502): parenting responsibilities AND life challenges; compliance AND vigilance; and finally self-image AND image of the other (see Figure 1). The three core tensions are not “polar opposites; rather, tensions are paired needs (dualities) that are dialectically co-constitutive” (Barab et al., 2002, p. 528). These tensions are also interconnected and overlapping. While each will be examined separately in the following section, participants’ lived experience is unlikely to be divided so neatly.
Participan\textsuperscript{ts} expressed a tension between the sense of responsibility and dedication as parents – including the desire to participate as fully and effectively as possible at school – and the challenges of their lives, often financial or work-related. Their comments imply a need to make careful choices between work, school requirements, recreational activities and other aspects of their lives. These choices were perhaps heightened for mothers, especially single mothers participating in the study, given the cultural pattern in Mexico of assigning the primary responsibility for child-rearing to women (Valdés Cuervo, Martín, & Sánchez-Escobedo, 2009).

One participant, whose husband lives in the United States, explained:

\textquote{P2: I mean, the role as mom, the thing is I decided to have Sara\textsuperscript{1} and I had to face everything that would come with Sara, so that’s why I bring her here, I mean, we have to get up earlier, because it takes us 45 minutes [to get here], but all that is doing her hair, getting her ready, knowing the treatment there is with the teacher, I mean, I have all of it.}

\textsuperscript{1} Pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of participants and their families.
Her daughter attends school near her workplace, in a different borough from their home neighbourhood. During the group discussion, another single mother stated: “I mean, you say okay, I wanted to have children so they’re also not guilty for your economic issues” (P1), further highlighting the notion of parental responsibility.

Participants are committed to providing their children with a strong foundation at home to support their success at school. Helping with homework is viewed as an important form of participation. Though participants have a clear vision of what they would like to provide for their children, they face challenges in doing so. The demands of work and family life can be difficult to balance, participants agreed in the group discussion:

P1: So it is like that life of a roadrunner, as [the other participant] says, I work all day. So the double work is even worse. If you run and you have to give yourself like those times that, you can’t give more, if sometimes you say, “I don’t give my child much time but I can’t give it to the school either,” right?

Further, regarding the issue of responsibility and life challenges during the group discussion, one participant stated: “In my case that it’s just work, work, work, and it was always, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I had to change that strategy, you know?” (P3). There is a tension between financial obligations and the responsibility participants feel to support their children with time, attention and support. This tension was mitigated to a certain extent for P9 and P10, whose children attend a school operated by their union. Unlike traditional public schools in Mexico, the school offers a full-day primary program, and provides union members with a note to justify time away from work when they must attend meetings at school. According to P10, this often allows both parents to attend, which would otherwise be difficult.
Participants also feel their participation at school is necessary to set an example for their children. They state that children notice whose parents are present at school functions and whose parents are not, and that this can have ramifications in the future: “I mean if there are a lot of parents who do the I can’t, I can’t, my son when he’s an adult, will do the same thing, he won’t be able to” (P3). Participants convey a strong desire to be good parents (Vincent, 1996) and anxiety or guilt may arise when they cannot attain this ideal. The good parent is available for school activities and responds to school requests, and participants struggle with the reality that this is not always possible for them:

P1: I speak for myself, there are things that you say, how great, that I would like to do…for example, at my daughter's school, there is a basketball team, and there is a team of moms who cheer. My daughter says, "I want to go to basketball and I want you to cheer with the moms," but I need to work, because my needs are different, so there we lose a little of this being together because of my needs, to meet their needs.

Participants experience a sense of responsibility to participate at school and support their children at home, and the difficulty of balancing these responsibilities with the rest of their lives.

**Compliance AND Vigilance**

The second core tension is between parental compliance with school rules, expectations and requests, and the perceived need for vigilance or monitoring of the school and staff. Parents define their participation at school, in part, as compliance:

P1: That is, the responsibility that you have as a parent to comply with the school, with materials, with assignments, with certain support. And just the same for the school, to meet the guidelines that apply to them, so that you as a parent can continue to be supportive.
Participation, according to this view, is being supportive of your child and of the school, by being aware of the rules and following them. It is implied that the school defines what is expected of parents and parents have an obligation to fulfill these expectations. Several participants mention disciplinary practices (Anderson, 1998) such as requiring parental signatures of children’s homework notebooks and report cards, or charging a fee to parents who are late to pick up their children a certain number of times. Access to the school is also highly structured according to specific rules. Schools use a citation system to control parent access:

P6: Last school year a new teacher arrived and he was the one who put things in order. He no longer allowed that us parents go in at any hour, without a citation. If you don't have the citation you can’t go in.

At times, parents participate, either individually or through the Parent Association, in creating these disciplinary practices. Participants seem to appreciate the sense of order and structure, viewing it as necessary to maintain an organized system of interaction between themselves and the school. As one participant noted, “what’s more frequent…right now, are just the meetings for signing report cards, because now one can’t just go into the school any time or for any reason. And that’s good” (P7). Parents who do not respect the rules may be criticized, as reflected in this participant’s comment: “a lot of us parents…really just go in to take up the teachers’ time” (P7). The idea of taking up teachers’ time illustrates an inappropriate or unwelcome form of participation at school.

Other participants, however, did express a sense of exclusion or distance:

P2: Here in Mexico…you’re a parent, but if you’re not part of the cooperative, of the school, or you’re a representative…you can’t have much access to the school without a
citation, if it’s not because your child is bad and they need to speak with you. But, I mean if you go and say, “I want to speak to the teacher,” you can’t do that.

As this participant states, parents may be granted access to the school if there is a problem to be addressed. School to home communication also tends to center around problems or issues that arise, as opposed to positive events such as a child’s progress.

Participants state that they adhere to school norms and rules, responding when asked for support, for example “painting the classroom, or anything the school needs” (P6). To the best of their ability, they comply with requests to attend special celebrations, meetings, or be present for any “activities where the parents have to participate” (P8) or contribute. There is a sense of urgency to parental compliance. Should they fail to meet expectations, there is a risk of having to change schools, possibly moving to a poorer quality school or resorting to a costly private school, an option that is financially impossible for many families:

P9: [I do] try to get involved and I really make an effort because…if he wasn’t in this school, well he might be in a more deficient one, or one that simply wouldn’t allow me to afford other things.

Parents may also perceive other advantages at a child’s current school, such as trusting relationships (e.g. P8 commented that she knows and trusts her daughter’s bus driver, which allows her to drop off and pick up her younger child while her daughter uses school transportation), or convenience (e.g. for P2, the location of her child’s school is close to where she works, which allows them to spend time together en route).

A tension arises, however, between parental compliance and the perceived need to monitor the school and staff. Parents are required to follow the rules, but they appear to feel disappointed or betrayed by the public school system, and experience a lack of trust as a result:
P1: There are a lot of parents who don’t want to go to the schools anymore, I think that’s…the most important [thing] schools have to do is make [us] believe in them, right? Because, a lot of us don’t believe or do believe in the schools, but because of the same situation. I mean, as with everything, there are good teachers, good principals who…do care about their institution, and there truly are principals who don’t. So I think…that’s why the majority of parents stop contributing to the school.

Several participants frame the sense of distrust in terms of experiences with individual teachers:

P6: [My daughter] got a teacher who should have already retired…[so] she’s not teaching them or not working the way she should. Because right now, it’s been a semester and for example, I don’t see any progress.

P9 described taking remedial action at home to supplement what she felt was insufficient progress at her son’s preschool. She was concerned that he may not pass the entrance exam to the primary school operated by her union, which while publicly funded and registered with the SEP, accepts only a limited number of students each year:

P9: Last year I had the bad experience that in his daycare, the preschool where he was, the teacher did not get involved at all, I mean, really, I didn’t even finish my studies and I had to take action because…I didn’t see that they were moving forward.

Other participants demonstrate resignation and a sense of helplessness at school. For example, one participant was told his son would have English and computer classes, which influenced the family’s choice of school, but was later informed that this would not be the case:

P4: Well here, supposedly, at the school where we have [our son] enrolled they said that, well, because of the level it had, that they have English supposedly, computer class…and
then they tell me no, that…since last school year they don’t have computers, well, so maybe there’s no point.

Parents communicate the importance of being compliant in order to maintain access to certain schools while at the same time, needing to remain attentive in case problems arise that could jeopardize their child’s status. This tension, and the precarious situation in which parents find themselves, is at times masked by language relating to teamwork, partnership, or shared responsibility between parents and teachers. As one parent stated, “the teacher should also be aware that we are a team, and that you are aware but so am I. And I’m also aware of your work, and you’re aware of mine, right?” (P1).

**Self-Image AND Image of the Other**

The third core tension is between participants’ self-image (Fein & Spencer, 1997) as parents and the images they hold of other parents. The sense of exclusion seems to be bidirectional, conveyed by one participant as, “move over…you’re not from around here” (P4). Navigating the tension between responsibility to their children and the challenges in their lives, participants state that they do the best they can. However, some participants do not necessarily believe other parents make the same effort. On several occasions, particularly during the group discussion, they expressed disappointment:

P1: The day it’s your turn…you have to wash the classroom a bit, because in the end that’s where my child will be, I mean, of the 42 children there are, or 30 children, only three, four parents go, you know? Or sometimes just one.

Participants in the group discussion felt frustrated in particular by low attendance on days when the school had solicited help from parents, leaving them to do a greater share:

P3: It’s a lot of work. Whereas if 33 parents went…

RD: In five minutes…
P3: Each one washes a chair, a table, and between all of us, some scrub, others wash the walls, windows, and in an hour the classroom is ready. But they don’t go.

At times participant comments about other parents echoed views expressed by teachers and school leaders (DeMoss & Vaughan, 2000; Vincent, 1996), for example, that certain parents do not engage with the school because “they’re simply not interested” (P1). One participant defined the role of parents at school as follows:

P7: It would have to be being there 100 percent, because a lot of parents just go, we drop them off, a lot of us don’t even go to sign the report cards, not to anything. A lot of us simply just get to know each other at the end of the year. I’d say more than anything it’s that one participates, 100 percent, because we don’t all do it.

However, too much participation or participating in a way that is considered inappropriate can also draw criticism. Parents who are too involved may risk being labeled “problematic moms” (P6), for example by making unwelcome comments, asking too many questions, or in other ways “kicking up a fuss” (Hirschman, 1970, p. 30). Another participant expressed that because she was very involved, she felt other parents saw her as “that mom with nothing to do” (P1), in spite of her busy schedule as a working single mother with three children. It is unclear exactly what qualifies a parent as overly involved, but they seem to be easily identified by the rest of the parent community: “There are parents who participate a lot, who are very much inside the school, and it’s almost always them who go” (P10). One participant contrasted her own situation to that of more involved parents, implying that they may be more present at school because they have fewer commitments:

P8: Yes, of course, there are moms that…since they don’t have anything…except, from home to school, I guess, right? It’s not the same when you have a job, you work part-
time, or you do things other than always being there or participating…being there all
morning, participating in everything, well how nice that would be. My daughter would
love that, I just don't have the time.

Other participants commented on the informal social networks and relationships they had
built, primarily among mothers. P8 and P9 stated they use mobile technologies such as What’s
App to stay connected with other mothers and share information. These informal channels are
often necessary for parents to stay informed:

P7: Well I’m always there, gossiping…because I really find out about everything,
because if I didn’t see it, then another child’s mom saw it, and she lets me know. We’re
always on top of every notice they post. Any new sheet that’s there, like we go and see
what it’s about, because…if you don’t go up to the door, you don’t find out about
anything.

However, those participants who stated they had informal relationships with other parents
expressed that the main benefit of those networks is access to information, which helps
participants to ensure their children do well at school. One participant commented that while she
enjoys regular contact with other mothers, the end goal is an individualistic one: “I prefer to deal
with it individually because in the end…the one I’m really interested in is my son, right? Not,
not the rest” (P9).

**Discussion**

The approach of this study was intended to surface and interpret parent experiences,
framing the local knowledge of community members (Dyrness, 2008) as the central focal point.
As stated by Dyrness (2008), “the focus on everyday life is key” (p. 27) when conducting critical
research, informed by feminist theory. At the micro level, parents experience intersecting
tensions while negotiating their relationship with a school. Participation can take many forms, at home and in school, tangible and intangible; it can mean helping children with their homework, dropping children off and picking them up, attending special events and parent-teacher meetings, responding to the school’s requests for help, making suggestions and asking questions. Regardless of the form it takes, participation in their children’s education requires continual attempts by parents to reconcile responsibility AND life challenges, compliance AND vigilance, self-image AND image of other. The difficulties of balancing work and family life in pursuit of the ideal of the good parent (Vincent, 1996) are exacerbated by a lack of sense of community among parents and low degree of trust in the school system. Participants communicate a sense of broken promises: parents do not feel they can consistently count on each other or on the school, and yet they continue to strive for the best possible outcomes for their children. While some participants have created informal networks with other parents, these may represent a strategy to compensate for poor school to home communication.

Parents are expected to comply with certain school norms and rules, yet participants state that schools do not consistently provide them with the information or the tools to do so. Further, as Vincent (1996) points out, the concept of the good parent is linked to social class and largely depends on the resources available to parents. Parents with greater access to resources are able to meet the often unspoken criteria of this ideal with less difficulty. In Mexico, schools are legally required to communicate students’ academic results and related comments to parents (SEP, 1993; García Medina, Aguilera García, Pérez Martínez, & Muñoz Abundez, 2011) regardless of whether parents assume a formal support role at school, such as serving breakfast or volunteering at a special event. However, providing basic information on children’s academic performance may not be sufficient to fully support families and encourage their active participation.
Participants’ sense of needing to monitor the goings-on at school, especially of their children’s teachers, contrasts with the literature on home-school partnerships. Trust is fundamental to effective partnership between families and schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Epstein et al., 2009; Johnson, Rochkind, Remaley, & Hess, 2011). The controlling mechanisms participants describe at school, such as citations, required signatures, and punitive fees, imply a climate of compliance rather than partnership, sanction rather than support. Acceptable or required forms of participation are encouraged using these mechanisms while undesirable forms of participation are discouraged, either implicitly or explicitly.

Participants frequently used the term moms or mothers as opposed to parents, which is perhaps appropriate since mothers assume the majority of child-rearing and school-related responsibilities in Mexico (Valdés Cuervo et al., 2009). As stated by Vincent (1996), to use gender-neutral language such as parents or families would simply mask this fact. In Spanish, however, the term for parents is papás or padres, both masculine terms. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) write that “since most of the rhetoric and research ignores the issue of the gendered nature of [parent participation], it also fails to consider and evaluate its impact on practice” (p. 42). Further research could examine the extent of the participation imbalance and its effects on children’s outcomes, family life, and the functioning of schools.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. The sample population was not randomly selected and cannot be considered representative of broader parent populations. The study focuses on one small group of parents living in the same borough, limiting the capacity for generalization. In addition, it is possible that because most participants were recruited at a non-profit school and community centre, and either currently have or at one time had children
enrolled in the half-day program or other activities offered at the centre \((n = 9)\), the sample may be further distanced from those families whose children do not attend this type of supplementary program.

In the future, at a larger scale, it may be possible to compare parent views to those of teachers and school leaders or to examine parent voice and participation cross-culturally or between different social classes in Mexico; however, these levels of inquiry are beyond the scope of the current study. A participatory action research approach may support the goal of creating change through the research process, in favour of democratic, inclusive practice in public education (MacDonald, 2012) and “the capacity of ordinary citizens to confront relations of power and domination in their own lives” (Dyrness, 2008, p. 26). This study was intended to examine parent perspectives on participation at a local level. It did not provide training or capacity building of any kind to parents. The focus was on gathering, analyzing and making visible the experiences and perspectives of participants through qualitative interviews and group dialogue. The accuracy of their claims was not evaluated.

**Conclusion**

McMahon (2007) states, “schools have the potential to become sites for democratic transformation where leaders facilitate the creation of space and means for dialogue and action through which democratic processes are enacted” (p. 686). This latent potential is not reflected in the everyday reality of participants in this study. The forms of acceptable parent participation mentioned by participants are confined almost exclusively to school-defined support and helper roles, as identified by Martin and Vincent (1999): “the passive consumer, the volunteer, and the recipient of tutelage” (p. 151). As DeMoss and Vaughan (2000) write, “the literature restricts its definition of parent involvement (acknowledged key to the success of a child) to school and
school-sponsored activities” (p. 46). If parents do not conform to school norms and expectations, there voices may be dismissed as disruptive and unconstructive (Dyrness, 2011).

While schools do not have the capacity to singlehandedly address the serious issues such as crime, violence, unemployment and poverty facing many communities, they can tailor and adapt internal processes to be as supportive as possible to families (Santizo, 2011). Teachers and school leaders can seek to understand parents’ realities and perspectives in order to partner with them and invite authentic and effective participation. In schools, as small communities, moral pressure from community members can be a “means to maintain collaboration” (Santizo, 2011, p. 763). According to Santizo (2011), school leaders should focus on those elements that encourage collaboration and trust, to create a climate of genuine support and inclusion rather than control through punitive measures.

In a report by the OECD (2010), the authors assert that “to be successful, social participation must be authentic participation” (p. 159); however, it is not always clear what constitutes authentic participation in practice, or how and when different stakeholders should participate in decision-making processes. In educational change, “talking to people after [a] decision has been made is too late. School leaders and reformers need to reach out to parents, teachers, students, and others in the community early and often to hear their concerns and ideas” (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 23). From a governance perspective, social participation is a means of coordinating collective action, rather than the subordination of actors to governmental decisions (Hernández, 2013). Facilitating authentic social participation is an educational leadership challenge in Mexico, where historically this has not occurred (Hernández, 2013). Santizo Rodall (2010) called for shared, distributed leadership, oriented toward change, stating that this requires the creation of certain conditions in schools.
None of the participants in this study mentioned a CEPS at any time, nor did they frame their participation at school as explicitly political. In Mexico, participation is not achieved by decree (Hernández, 2013). Further research is needed on the qualitative contributions of formal mechanisms such as the CEPS (Hernández, 2013) and on the long-term impact of SBM programs designed to strengthen parent participation. As stated by Mansuri and Rao (2013), individuals’ involvement in government programs aimed at social participation “tends to be driven by project-related incentives; people get together to derive benefits from project funds” (p. 10). Further research is needed on de facto social participation in education in Mexico, and on the lived experience and local expertise of parents and families in the many diverse contexts that exist in this country, in support of improved mechanisms for parent participation and democratic practice in public education.
References


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Appendix A: Interview Consent Form

**Interview Consent Form in Spanish**

Investigadora: Reilly Dow  
Royal Roads University  
[número telefónico]  
[correo electrónico]

Supervisor: Dr. Edgar Schmidt  
Concordia University of Edmonton  
[número telefónico]  
[correo electrónico]

Título del proyecto: La creación de sentido de los padres de familia acerca de la participación

Mi nombre es Reilly Dow y soy estudiante de maestría en el programa de estudios interdisciplinarios en la Universidad Royal Roads de Canadá. Esta invitación es para participar en un estudio sobre su papel y participación en la vida escolar de su/s niño/s. El propósito de este estudio es entender cómo usted y otros padres ven su papel y cómo participan en la escuela o en el municipio. Voy a llevar a cabo un total de 8 a 10 entrevistas con los padres, individualmente o en pareja.

Si usted acepta participar, la entrevista será presencial y durará aproximadamente 45 minutos. Se le planteará una serie de preguntas sobre usted mismo y sus opiniones personales con respecto a la participación de los padres en la escuela de su/s niño/s, como también posibles preguntas de seguimiento. No existen respuestas correctas o incorrectas. Después de completar la entrevista, se le invitará a una discusión grupal para dar seguimiento a los temas que surjan durante las entrevistas, incluyendo la suya. Estos temas no estarán relacionados con sus datos personales (por ejemplo, su nombre, edad o función/posición en la escuela de su/s niño/s) durante la discusión o en el informe final de este estudio. No compartiré su apellido, información de contacto ni su información personal durante la discusión grupal. La conversación durará aproximadamente 2 horas. Solamente mi supervisor, el Dr. Edgar Schmidt, y yo tendremos acceso a la información original de las entrevistas y grupos de discusión, incluyendo mis notas y grabaciones de audio.

Si usted da su consentimiento para participar en este estudio, se respetará su privacidad. Todas sus respuestas permanecerán anónimas para asegurar la confidencialidad. Tome en cuenta que si la entrevista se lleva a cabo dentro de una escuela, centro comunitario o su lugar de empleo, es posible que otras personas puedan enterarse que está participando usted en el estudio. Voy a registrar las entrevistas usando un grabador de audio. Este archivo de audio nunca se compartirá en forma pública. Puede ser compartido exclusivamente con mi supervisor de la facultad de la Universidad Royal Roads. Si usted no desea ser grabado en audio, puede indicar su
preferencia marcando la casilla correspondiente en la parte inferior de este formulario. Mis notas y grabaciones de audio se guardarán en mi computadora y en una disco duro, protegidas por una contraseña, durante el estudio y por un periodo de dos años después del estudio. Serán destruidas antes del 1 de junio de 2018. En esa fecha borraré permanentemente todas las grabaciones de audio y destruiré las notas en papel.

Su participación en este estudio requiere un compromiso de tiempo para la entrevista y grupo de discusión. Espero que el proceso de este estudio y sus resultados serán beneficiosos para usted y su/s niño/s como forma de expresar su inquietudes, preguntas e ideas sobre la escuela de su/s niño/s. Usted podrá hacer nuevas conexiones sociales o fortalecer conexiones existentes a través del estudio, y puede aprender a través del proceso de reflexión y diálogo. Los riesgos potenciales incluyen posibles desacuerdos con otros padres en las discusiones grupales.

Usted es libre de retirarse en cualquier momento del estudio, sin consecuencias. Si decide retirarse durante la entrevista, la grabación de audio y mis notas sobre sus respuestas serán destruidas inmediatamente. Sin embargo, si usted decide retirarse en un momento posterior, por favor tenga en cuenta que una vez que hemos completado la entrevista y sus respuestas han sido recaudadas e incluidas con las de otros participantes para su análisis, no se pueden extraer del estudio.

Se documentarán los resultados de este estudio para mi proyecto de maestría en estudios interdisciplinarios en Royal Roads. Me pondré en contacto con usted cuando el estudio se haya completado para entregarle una copia de este informe en inglés si gusta y un resumen más breve de los resultados en español. Estaré disponible para reunirme personalmente si le interesa discutirlo más o tiene alguna pregunta. También puede ponerse en contacto conmigo directamente en el número de teléfono o dirección de correo electrónico que figuran arriba para solicitar una copia del informe o del resumen.

Estoy a su disposición para responder cualquier pregunta que tenga antes de continuar. Este proyecto ha recibido autorización de la Junta de Ética de Investigación de la Universidad Royal Roads. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante de la investigación, por favor póngase en contacto con la oficina de ética al [número telefónico]. También puede ponerse en contacto con mi supervisor, el Dr. Edgar Schmidt, por teléfono al [número telefónico] o por correo electrónico a [correlo electrónico].

Por favor marque la casilla correspondiente y firme a continuación para dar su consentimiento para participar en este estudio.

☐ Estoy de acuerdo con que mis respuestas se registren utilizando una grabadora de audio y notas durante esta entrevista.

☐ Prefiero que mis respuestas se registren solamente con notas durante esta entrevista.
Interview Consent Form in English

Researcher: Reilly Dow
Royal Roads University
[phone number]
[email address]

Supervisor: Dr. Edgar Schmidt
Concordia University of Edmonton
[phone number]
[email address]

Project Title: Exploring Parent Meaning-Making of School Participation

My name is Reilly Dow and I am a master’s student in the Interdisciplinary Studies program at Royal Roads University. This invitation is to be part of a study about your role and participation in the education of your child/ren. The purpose of this study is to get an understanding of how you and other parents see your role and how you participate at the school or in the municipality. I will conduct 8 to 10 interviews in total with individual parents or couples.

Should you agree to participate, the interview will occur face-to-face and last approximately 45 minutes. You will be asked a series of questions about yourself and your personal opinions regarding parental participation at your child/ren’s school, as well as possible follow-up questions. There are no right or wrong answers. After completing the interview, you will be invited to a group discussion to follow up on the topics that emerge during the interviews, including yours. These topics will not be linked to your personal information (e.g. your name, age, or role/position at your child/ren’s school) during the discussion or in the final report of this study. I will not share your last name, contact information or any personal information during the group discussion. The group discussion will last approximately 2 hours. Only my supervisor Dr. Edgar Schmidt and I will have access to the original information from the interviews and group discussion, including notes and audio recordings.

Your privacy will be respected should you consent to participate in this study. All of your responses will remain anonymous to ensure confidentiality. I will record interviews using an audio recording device. This audio file will never be shared publicly. It may be shared exclusively with my faculty supervisor at Royal Roads University. If you do not wish to be recorded using audio, you may indicate your preference by checking the appropriate box at the bottom of this form. My notes and audio recordings will be stored on my computer and a backup drive, protected by a password, during the study and for a period of two years following the
study. They will be destroyed on or before June 1st, 2018. I will permanently delete all audio recordings and shred paper notes by this date.

Your involvement in this study requires a time commitment for the interview and group discussion. I hope the process of this study and its results will be beneficial to you and your child/ren as a way of voicing your concerns, questions, and ideas about your child/ren’s school. You may make new social connections or strengthen existing connections through the study, and you may learn through the process of reflection and dialogue. Potential risks include possible disagreement with other parents during the group discussion.

You are free to withdraw at any time without consequence during the study. If you choose to withdraw during the interview, the audio recording and my notes on your responses will be destroyed immediately. However, if you choose to withdraw at a later time, please keep in mind that once we have completed your interview and your responses have been collected and included with those of other participants for analysis, they cannot be removed from the study.

The results of this study will be documented for my major project in the MA in Interdisciplinary Studies degree at Royal Roads. I will contact you when the study is complete to offer a copy of this report in English and a shorter summary of the results in Spanish. I will be available to meet face to face if you are interested to discuss this further or have any questions. You can also contact me directly at the phone number or email address above to request a copy of the report or summary.

Please feel free to ask me any questions before proceeding. This project has received clearance from the RRU Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the ethics office at [phone number]. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Edgar Schmidt, by phone at [phone number] or by email at [email address].

Please check the appropriate box and sign below to give your consent to participate in this study.

☐ I agree that my responses will be recorded using an audio recorder and notes during this interview.

☐ I prefer that my responses be recorded only with notes during this interview.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature   Print Name   Date
Investigadora: Reilly Dow  
Royal Roads University  
[número telefónico]  
[correo electrónico]  

Supervisor: Dr. Edgar Schmidt  
Concordia University of Edmonton  
[número telefónico]  
[correo electrónico]  

Título del proyecto: La creación de sentido de los padres de familia acerca de la participación  

Mi nombre es Reilly Dow y soy estudiante de maestría en el programa de estudios interdisciplinarios en la Universidad Royal Roads de Canadá. Esta invitación es para participar en un estudio sobre su papel y participación en la vida escolar de su/s niño/s. El propósito de este estudio es entender cómo usted y otros padres ven su papel y cómo participan en la escuela o en el municipio. Ahora que todas las entrevistas con los padres de familia, individualmente o en pareja, se han completado, le invito a reunirse para una conversación en grupo.  

Si usted acepta participar, la conversación será presencial y durará aproximadamente dos horas. Les presentaré mis conclusiones y los temas principales de las entrevistas y pediré sus comentarios y reflexiones. Estos temas no estarán relacionados con sus datos personales (por ejemplo, su nombre, edad o función/posición en la escuela) durante la discusión o en el informe final de este estudio. Solamente mi supervisor, el Dr. Edgar Schmidt, y yo tendremos acceso a la información original de las entrevistas y grupos de discusión, incluyendo notas y grabaciones de audio. Por favor tenga en cuenta que esta es una discusión confidencial y es importante respetar la privacidad de los otros participantes, no compartiendo ni hablando sobre comentarios hechos por los demás públicamente, fuera de esta conversación.  

Si usted da su consentimiento para participar en este estudio, se respetará su privacidad. No compartiré su apellido, información de contacto ni su información personal durante la discusión grupal. Todos sus comentarios seguirán siendo anónimos para asegurar la confidencialidad. Voy a registrar la discusión grupal usando un grabador de audio. Los archivos de audio nunca se compartirán públicamente. Pueden ser compartidos exclusivamente con mi supervisor de la facultad de la Universidad Royal Roads. Mis notas y grabaciones de audio se guardarán en mi computadora y en un disco duro, protegidas por una contraseña, durante el estudio y por un período de dos años después del estudio. Serán destruidas antes del 1 de junio de 2018. En esa fecha borrará permanentemente todas las grabaciones audio y destruiré las notas en papel.
Su participación en este estudio requiere un compromiso de tiempo para la entrevista y grupo de discusión. Espero que el proceso de este estudio y sus resultados serán beneficiosos para usted y su/s niño/s como forma de expresar sus inquietudes, preguntas e ideas sobre la escuela. Usted podrá hacer nuevas conexiones sociales o fortalecer conexiones existentes a través del estudio, y puede aprender a través del proceso de reflexión y diálogo. Los riesgos potenciales incluyen posibles desacuerdos con otros padres durante la conversación grupal.

Usted es libre de retirarse en cualquier momento durante el estudio, sin consecuencias. Sin embargo, por favor tenga en cuenta que las respuestas de su entrevista ya han sido recaudadas e incluidas anónimamente con otras respuestas de los participantes, y serán compartidas durante la conversación grupal. No pueden extraerse del estudio, pero usted puede retirarse en cualquier momento de la conversación grupal en sí.

Se documentarán los resultados de este estudio para mi proyecto de maestría en estudios interdisciplinarios en Royal Roads. Me pondré en contacto con usted cuando el estudio se haya completado para entregarle una copia de este informe en inglés si gusta y un resumen más breve de los resultados en español. Estaré disponible para reunirme personalmente si le interesa discutirlo más o tiene alguna pregunta. También puede ponerse en contacto conmigo directamente en el número de teléfono o dirección de correo electrónico que figuran arriba para solicitar una copia del informe o del resumen.

Estoy a su disposición para responder cualquier pregunta que tenga antes de continuar. Este proyecto ha recibido autorización de la Junta de Ética de Investigación de la RRU. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante de la investigación, por favor póngase en contacto con la oficina de ética al [número telefónico]. También puede ponerse en contacto con mi supervisor, el Dr. Edgar Schmidt, por teléfono al [número telefónico] o por correo electrónico a [correo electrónico].

Por favor marque la casilla correspondiente y firme a continuación para dar su consentimiento para participar en este estudio.

☐ Estoy de acuerdo en que mis respuestas se registren utilizando una grabadora de audio y notas durante la conversación grupal.

________________________________________________________________________
Nombre                      Firma                      Fecha
Group Discussion Consent Form in English

Researcher: Reilly Dow
Royal Roads University
[phone number]
[email address]

Supervisor: Dr. Edgar Schmidt
Concordia University of Edmonton
[phone number]
[email address]

Project Title: Exploring Parent Meaning-Making of School Participation

My name is Reilly Dow and I am a master’s student in the Interdisciplinary Studies program at Royal Roads University. This invitation is to be part of a study about your role and participation in the education of your child/ren. The purpose of this study is to get an understanding of how you and other parents see your role and how you participate at the school or in the municipality. Now that all interviews conducted with individual parents or couples have been completed, the invitation is to come together for a group discussion.

Should you agree to participate, the group discussion will occur face-to-face and last approximately two hours. I will present my findings and the main themes from the interviews and ask for your feedback and reflections. These topics will not be linked to your personal information (e.g. your name, age, or role/position at the school) during the discussion or in the final report of this study. Only my supervisor Dr. Edgar Schmidt and I will have access to the original information from the interviews and group discussion, including notes and audio recordings. Please keep in mind this is a confidential discussion and it is important to respect other participants’ privacy by not sharing or discussing comments made by others publicly, outside of this conversation.

Your privacy will be respected should you consent to participate in this study. I will not share your last name, contact information or any personal information during the group discussion. All of your comments will remain anonymous to ensure confidentiality. I will record the group discussion using an audio recording device. Audio files will never be shared publicly. It may be shared exclusively with my faculty supervisor at Royal Roads University. If you do not wish to be recorded using audio, you may indicate your preference by checking the appropriate box at the bottom of this form. My notes and audio recordings will be stored on my computer and a backup drive, protected by a password, during the study and for a period of two years following the study. They will be destroyed on or before June 1st, 2018. I will permanently delete all audio recordings and shred paper notes by this date.

Your involvement in this study requires a time commitment for the interview and group discussion. I hope the process of this study and its results will be beneficial to you and your child/ren as a way of voicing your concerns, questions, and ideas about your child/ren’s school. You may make new social connections or strengthen existing connections through the study, and you may learn through the process of reflection and dialogue. Potential risks include possible disagreement with other parents during the group discussion.
You are free to withdraw at any time without consequence during the study, however please keep in mind that your interview responses have already been collected and included anonymously with other participants responses and will be shared during the group discussion. They cannot be removed from the study but you may withdraw at any time from the discussion itself.

The results of this study will be documented for my major project in the MA in Interdisciplinary Studies degree at Royal Roads. I will contact you when the study is complete to offer a copy of this report in English and a shorter summary of the results in Spanish. I will be available to meet face to face if you are interested to discuss this further or have any questions. You can also contact me directly at the phone number or email address above to request a copy of the report or summary.

Please feel free to ask me any questions before proceeding. This project has received clearance from the RRU Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the ethics office at [phone number]. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Edgar Schmidt, by phone at [phone number] or by email at [email address].

Please check the appropriate box and sign below to give your consent to participate in this study.

☐ I agree that my responses will be recorded using an audio recorder and notes during this interview.
☐ I prefer that my responses be recorded only with notes during this interview.

__________________________________________  __________________________  _______________________
Signature                  Print Name                  Date
Appendix C: Interview Guide

Interview Guide in Spanish

Hola, gracias por aceptar hablar conmigo. Mi nombre es Reilly, soy estudiante de maestría en el programa de estudios interdisciplinarios en la Universidad Royal Roads de Canadá. Vivo en México. El propósito de esta entrevista es comprender cómo usted, como madre, padre o persona responsable por uno o más niños, ve su papel, y cómo participa en la escuela de su/s niño/s o en el municipio. Le haré una serie de preguntas sobre usted y sus opiniones personales con respecto a la participación de los padres en la escuela de su/s hijo/s, como también posibles preguntas de seguimiento.

Cuando se hayan completado todas las entrevistas, voy a compartir un resumen de los principales temas con usted y otros participantes en grupo, sin identificar a los individuos que hicieron comentarios específicos o hablaron sobre un tema en particular. El propósito de compartir el aprendizaje en grupo es ser transparente sobre los resultados de este proyecto de investigación y escuchar sus reflexiones.

Tome en cuenta que si la entrevista se lleva a cabo dentro de una escuela, centro comunitario o su lugar de empleo, es posible que otras personas pueden enterarse que está participando usted en el estudio. Si en cualquier momento durante la entrevista desea detenerse, por favor digáme lo. No hay ninguna consecuencia por hacerlo y sus respuestas serán destruidas inmediatamente. Sin embargo, si decide retirarse en un momento posterior, por favor tenga en cuenta que una vez que hemos completado la entrevista y sus respuestas han sido recogidas e incluidas con las de otros participantes para su análisis, no pueden extraerse del estudio.

Sus respuestas se utilizarán únicamente para el propósito de este estudio, que forma parte de los requisitos para mi maestría en la Universidad Royal Roads. Me pondré en contacto con usted cuando el estudio se haya completado para entregarle una copia de este informe en inglés si gusta y un resumen más breve de los resultados en español.

Voy a tomar notas y grabaré la entrevista con este grabador de audio, pero sus respuestas nunca serán identificadas con información personal como su nombre, género o edad. La entrevista durará aproximadamente 45 minutos. ¿Tiene alguna duda o pregunta antes de empezar?

Preguntas de información demográfica y antecedentes

1. ¿Cuál es su papel o posición en la escuela de su/s niño/s? Si tiene más de uno, por favor identifiquelos todos.
   a. ¿Cuánto tiempo ha estado en el papel, o en cada uno de los papeles que identificó?
2. Por favor identifique la edad y el género de su/s hijo/s sin decir sus nombres.
3. ¿Cuál es la colonia dónde su/s hijo/s asiste/n a la escuela? Si existe más que una, por favor identifique todas las colonias.
4. ¿Cuál es la colonia donde vive usted y su familia?
5. ¿Cuál es su edad y género?
6. ¿Cuál es su nivel de educación formal? Por favor incluya estudios incompletos y estudios en curso, además del nivel más alto de educación que ha completado.

**Preguntas para la entrevista**

1. ¿Usted participa en la escuela de su(s) hijo(s)? Si es así, ¿de qué manera?
2. ¿Cuál es el papel de los padres en la educación de sus hijos?
3. ¿Qué significa para usted la participación, en un entorno escolar?
4. ¿Qué oportunidades existen para que los padres participen en la escuela de sus hijos?
5. ¿Qué oportunidades existen para que los padres participen en este municipio?
   a. ¿Existen retos o barreras a la participación? Si es así, ¿cuáles son?
6. ¿Qué oportunidades existen para la comunicación entre la escuela y la comunidad en general?
7. ¿Hay algún cambio que considere importante de hacer en la escuela de su hijo? Si es así, ¿cuáles son y por qué son importantes?
8. ¿Hay algún tema que desea agregar que no hemos conversado hasta ahora en la entrevista? Si es así, ¿cuál es?

**Interview Guide in English**

**Introduction Script**

Hi, thank you for agreeing to talk with me. My name is Reilly and I am a master’s student in the Interdisciplinary Studies program at Royal Roads University. The purpose of this interview is to get an understanding of how you, as a parent, see your role and how you participate at your child/ren’s school or in the municipality. You will be asked a series of questions about yourself and your personal opinions regarding parental participation at your child/ren’s school, as well as possible follow-up questions.

When all the interviews are finished, I will share a summary of the main themes with you and other participants as a group, without identifying the individuals who made particular comments or talked about particular themes, in order to ask for your feedback. The purpose of sharing the learning in a group is to be transparent about the outcomes of this research project and to hear your reflections.

Please keep in mind that if the interview is carried out in a school, community centre or your workplace, it is possible other people may become aware that you are participating in the study. If at any time during the interview you wish to stop, please let me know. There are no consequences for doing so and your responses will be destroyed immediately. However, if you choose to withdraw at a later time, please keep in mind that once we have completed your interview and your responses have been collected and included with those of other participants for analysis, they cannot be removed from the study.
Your responses will be used solely for the purpose of this study, which is part of the requirements for my master’s degree at Royal Roads University in Canada. I will contact you when the study is complete to offer a copy of this report in English and a shorter summary of the results in Spanish.

I will take notes and the interview will be recorded using this audio recorder but your responses will never be identified with personal information such as your name, gender or age. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Demographic and Background Questions
1. What is your role or position at your child/ren’s school? If you have more than one, please list all of them.
   a. How long have you been in the role or each of the roles you listed?
2. Please state your child/ren’s age and gender, for those in elementary school.
3. What is the neighbourhood where your child/ren attend/s school?
4. What is the neighbourhood where you live?
5. Please state your age and gender.
6. What is your level of formal education? Please include incomplete studies and studies in progress, in addition to the highest level of education you have completed.

Interview Questions
1. Do you participate at your child’s school? If so, in what ways?
2. What is the role of a parent in his or her child’s education?
3. What does participation mean to you, in a school setting?
4. What opportunities exist for parents to participate at your child’s school?
   a. Are there challenges or barriers to your participation at school? If so, what are they?
5. What opportunities exist for parents to participate in this municipality?
6. What opportunities currently exist for communication between the school and the broader community?
7. Are there any changes you consider important to make at your child’s school? If so, what are they and why are they important?
8. Are there topics you wish to discuss or add that have not been included so far in this interview? If so, what are they?
Group Discussion Guide in Spanish

Hola, gracias por haber aceptado participar en esta conversación grupal. El propósito es reflexionar sobre los temas de las entrevistas en que cada uno participó, sin identificar ningún comentario con una persona por su nombre, edad, papel o género. No voy a compartir su apellido, información de contacto ni información personal durante la conversación grupal y les pido que no compartan tampoco esta información. Por favor tengan en cuenta que esta es una conversación confidencial y es importante respetar la privacidad de los demás participantes no compartiendo ni mencionando comentarios hechos por otros públicamente, fuera de esta conversación.

Yo voy a compartir un resumen de los temas principales al principio y luego pediré sus ideas y comentarios. El propósito de compartir el aprendizaje con ustedes es ser transparente sobre los resultados de este proyecto de investigación hasta ahora y escuchar sus reflexiones. Si en cualquier momento durante la conversación desean retirarse, por favor dígamelo. No hay ninguna consecuencia por hacerlo. Sus respuestas se utilizarán únicamente para el propósito de este estudio, que forma parte de los requisitos para mi maestría en la Universidad Royal Roads en Canadá.

Me comunicaré con cada uno de ustedes cuando el estudio se haya completado, para entregar una copia de este informe en inglés y un resumen más breve de los resultados en español. Voy a tomar notas y la conversación se grabará con este grabador de audio, pero sus respuestas nunca serán identificadas con información personal como su nombre, género o edad. La conversación durará aproximadamente 2 horas. ¿Alguien tiene alguna duda o pregunta antes de empezar?

Temas

1. Estar al pendiente
   a. Información sobre hijo(s) y maestros
   b. Cumplir
   c. Tarea y apoyo en casa
   d. Resolver problemas

2. Otros padres de familia
   a. Amistad/comunicación
   b. Bajo nivel de participación
   c. Falta de comunidad
   d. Enfoque en niño individual

3. Cómo las escuelas invitan la participación
   a. Eventos/días especiales
   b. Padres como ayudantes
Hi, thank you for agreeing to participate in this group discussion. The purpose is to reflect on the topics from the interviews you each participated in, without identifying any comments with individuals by name, age, role or gender. I will not share your last name, contact information or any personal information during the group discussion and ask that you do not share this information either. Please keep in mind this is a confidential discussion and it is important to respect other participants’ privacy by not sharing or discussing comments made by others publicly, outside of this conversation.

I will share a summary of the main themes with you at the beginning and then ask for your thoughts and feedback. The purpose of sharing the learning in a group is to be transparent about the outcomes of this research project so far and to hear your reflections. If at any time during the group discussion you wish to withdraw, please let me know. There are no consequences for doing so. Your responses will be used solely for the purpose of this study, which is part of the requirements for my master’s degree at Royal Roads University in Canada.

I will contact each of you when the study is complete to offer a copy of this report in English and a shorter summary of the results in Spanish. I will take notes and the discussion will be recorded using this audio recorder but your responses will never be identified with personal information such as your name, gender or age. The discussion will last approximately 2 hours. Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

Preliminary themes
1. Being aware
   a. Information about child/ren and teachers
   b. Compliance
   c. Homework and support at home
   d. Solving problems
2. Other parents
   a. Friendship/communication
   b. Low level of participation
   c. Lack of community
   d. Focus on the individual child
3. How schools invite participation
   a. Events/special days
   b. Parents as helpers
   c. Formal roles
d. Parent education
4. Challenges and barriers
   a. Work/times