Three Standpoints to Analyse Home-School-Community Links: Policies, Schools and Families in the Mexican Context

Marta C. Azaola

University of Southampton
Southampton, United Kingdom

This paper analyses home-school-community links from three different standpoints: education policies, schools and families. The paper provides empirical evidence on how education policies, schools and families operate in the Mexican context. Evidence from this study suggests that the interrelationship between these three standpoints is not equal and constant. Although it could be argued that ideally these should have a balanced relation, evidence from this study reveals that a bottom-up intervention is, in practice, more difficult to achieve considering that it is difficult for families to influence education policies and change school practices. The paper claims that studies on home-school-community links should critically explore the interrelation between education policies, schools and families in order to unveil inequalities within home-school-community links.

Keywords: Home-school-community links, Education policy, Social class, Disadvantaged families.

Introduction.

As an approach to improve the quality of education some western industrialized governments have adopted participatory schemes with the aim to involve the wider society into education systems. In this respect, home-school-community links have been promoted as a beneficial strategy that enhances positive school environments and strengthens effective leadership within schools. Through a strong social participation in education governments expect to increase children's school achievement and raise the quality of education in schools.

It can be argued that an approach to home-school-community links in developed and developing economies can help to tackle education deficiencies more efficiently and facilitate growth opportunities to financially disadvantaged people. The values underpinning participatory policies and the aims expected from these can differ from one country to another. Yet, an approach to home-

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Marta C. Azaola, e-mail: mca1v09@soton.ac.uk

school-community links aiming to genuinely welcome families' sources of knowledge and their social experiences can boost parents' confidence in negotiating the education they want for their children with teachers which can impact the quality of education within schools. However, this approach is difficult to be achieved if schools do not value the different resources possessed by disadvantaged families.

This paper reports ethnographic work undertaken with families and school staff aimed to investigate their social participation in education. Fieldwork was undertaken in rural Mexico and work of this kind has been rather scarce. Consequently, studying home-school-community links in an under-researched context makes this research challenging as it aims to contribute to an existing gap in the literature. The paper is organized as follows: the first section explores three different standpoints from which home-school-community links could be analysed: education policies, students and their families and schools and teachers. After a discussion on methodology in the second section, the paper empirically analyses the operation of these three

different standpoints in the Mexican context. The paper therefore asserts that studies on home-school-community links should give the same attention to the efforts of teachers to involve parents, families' difficulties in getting involved whilst, at the same time, analyse the education policies underpinning such initiatives. The paper will conclude by arguing that in order for disadvantaged families to successfully negotiate the education they want for their children it is important that they act as a group with their own right of participation.

Three standpoints to analyse home-school-community links.

Studies on parental involvement can be divided in two main lines of research. The first line stresses the importance of teachers and schools in encouraging parents to effectively get involved regardless of their socio-economic background. The second line argues that parents' involvement in their children's education is heavily constrained by families' social class. Epstein (1990), who promotes the first line of research, states that research on family environments has largely shown what she calls a typical pattern of parental involvement which links high parental involvement with privileged family socioeconomic status. In turn, Epstein proposes an overlapping model that considers the responsibilities of families, schools, community and peer groups and the overlapping influences and practices of these four domains which are responsible for the education and socialization of children. According to her, students' achievements would increase if they get consistent messages about the importance of education from both sides. For this to happen, it is necessary to increase schools and homes interaction and a combination rather than a division of labor between teachers and parents. Epstein clearly considers teachers' practices and their training in home-school links as proxies for the success of her model. When teachers are aware of the importance of their partnership with parents in their children's education, they are more attentive to the child's home life and can direct parents' attention to their pupils' schooling. Therefore, she focuses on the direct influence of teachers and schools on family practices and students' learning and development. Based on her findings (Epstein, 1990), she concludes that, for the better understanding of parental involvement, school policies and practices are more important than family social class.

Other studies consider the impact of family background on home-school links very important. This is the second line of research that focuses on social class as a key element of parental involvement. There is a considerable amount of public debate with respect to the degree of involvement that financially disadvantaged families have in relation to their children's education. However, as Reay (1998) states, class differences are more intricate than a straightforward division between middle-class activity and working-class passivity.

Within the academic literature, some authors have argued that parents' education, ethnicity and social position are strong factors that determine their participation and the diverse strategies of involvement adopted (Blasco 2004; DuBois, 2001; Heymann, 2000; Martin, 1998). In this respect, Gewirtz (2001) notes that middle-class parents unlike less advantaged parents are prepared to take action if teachers at school are not performing their responsibilities properly. Similarly Phillips (2005) explains that parents who participate more effectively in their children's education come generally from a white, educated and middle-class background. She argues that it is their social position which not only makes them feel entitled to participate but also help them to present their demands as a generalized common sense while less powerful groups seem to be calling for special treatment. According to her, structural factors are determinant of participation in political and social life including education. It can be argued that this 'middle-class entitlement' helps to explain working-class parents' reliance on the teachers as professionals, and as Vincent & Martin (2005) show, their reluctance about participating in school meetings.

Apart from the two lines of research already explored (teachers' practices vs. parents' social class), this paper claims that home-school-community links should be analysed from three different standpoints: a) education policies; b) students and their families and c) schools and teachers. The interrelationship between education policies, schools and families is not equal and constant since education policies dictate the guidelines schools must follow whereas the participation from students and their families varies according to different factors such as the child's school-age and the family's financial and educational background. Although ideally education policies, schools and families should have a balanced relation, it can be argued that a bottom-up intervention is, in practice, more

difficult to achieve considering that it is difficult for disadvantaged families to influence education policies and change school practices, which leads to the disarticulation of a more equal relationship. As Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) explain, there is little connection between the political and the social elements of citizenship. They argue that most people do not have a say in decision-making processes and, specifically, in terms of the education system there are few chances for collective participation. This shows that the overlapping model proposed by Epstein (1990), although desirable, is still far from being a reality.

Education Policies.

Parental involvement is not only concerned with the private structure within families, but it has also been increasingly considered and encouraged in the public domain. Western governments, in particular, have shown special interest in encouraging a wider participation of parents in education, and consequently, it seems useful to analyse the rationales and impacts of the policies that promote wider home-school-community links. Since the 1970s parental involvement in education started to be supported as a worthwhile policy, especially in countries with developed economies. In the case of Latin America, Gershberg, (1999a) explains that governments' mechanisms to increase parental participation do not appear to have been successful. According to him (1999b) these countries have pursued a neo-liberal strategy to some extent since 1990 mainly as a result of international pressures. Therefore, the promotion of parental involvement policies has also been explained by some authors like Borg & Mayo (2001) as an attempt to lessen governmental responsibilities and as a strategy to decrease expenditure towards educational budgets in the current market ideology. These policies, as Edwards (2002) notes, are encouraged in a context where parents, mothers in particular, are positioned as materially and culturally responsible and held accountable for their children.

Students and their family.

The second standpoint to analyse home-school-community links is that of students and their families. Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) explain that there is little research focusing on how different groups of parents relate to the education system, what education means to them, and their experiences with the school. According to them, what has received less attention is the concept of parental agency, how parents make their voices heard and how they negotiate with schools. Therefore, the present research is important because it focuses on the values, dispositions, strategies and limitations of financially disadvantaged families in getting involved in their children's formal and informal education. Students and their families are worth considering because their strategies and activities seem to be central in determining the quality and extent of home-school-community links. Consequently, it is important to bear in mind the different families' compositions (single parents, blended and foster homes, guardians) and their diverse socio-economic conditions because as Vincent & Tomlinson (1997) argue, some research literature and practice continue to treat families as a homogeneous group. As some academics have argued, traditional family structures and lifestyles are changing (Edwards, 2002; Epstein, 1990; Unger & Sussman, 1990).

To date there is little research focusing on the strategies adopted and the values transmitted in disadvantaged families and on their capacities to enhance their children's education, what I call 'parents' processes of involvement', more than the 'rational and visible outcomes of involvement', i.e. children's academic achievements. This is important in order to analyse the cultural resources available in disadvantaged families which can be helpful and positive contributions to the education of the children. It can be argued that an important factor for the unequal articulation of students and their families is the different social and ethnic backgrounds they come from which impede them to act as a homogeneous group when it comes to negotiate with schools and influence policy. As Lareau and Weininger (2003) explain, better-off parents through their qualifications and networking skills are more able to influence the appraisal criteria at schools enhancing thus their children's ability to conform to institutional expectations.

It is also important to examine the differences in the strategies employed by mothers and fathers in order to uncover possible inequalities in the practices of parental involvement. Several researchers have demonstrated that it is the mothers who are most actively involved with their children's education (Borg & Mayo, 2001; Edwards & Alldred, 2000; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Vincent, 2000, and Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997). According to Reay (1998), a vast portion of research on parental involvement presupposes that all parents share an identical experience of involvement in

their children's schooling. According to her, this universalising theme of the discourse not only renders invisible inequalities between the sexes, but also those existing between mothers from different social classes. She argues that most of the texts on parental involvement are premised on the unexamined assumption that parental involvement is a shared, equal task between parents.

Schools and teachers.

The third standpoint to analyse home-school-community links is that of schools and teachers and the effects of their interrelation with families. According to Epstein (1990) parental involvement has an important influence on teaching practices. She states that an important purpose of home-school links is to help teachers to conduct more effective school programs. Her findings show that teachers are more enthusiastic about their profession when parents are involved and that teachers who are trained in home-school links tend to value all parents equally regardless of their social and educational background or family condition. Similarly, Phillips (2005) finds important reasons for increased parental participation at schools. According to her, parents support more teachers' work when they can have a say in school policy and practice. Furthermore, teachers are more able to address children's needs when home-school links are strong. However, as she states: 'the question is not whether increasing parental involvement in schools is valuable, but whether the visions that underpin this can, in practice, be achieved' (p. 90).

Despite there being many different studies and policies advocating parental involvement in education, its implementation at the school level is not an easy and guaranteed process. According to Vincent (1996), teachers often demonstrate professional defensiveness and insularity towards the idea of involving parents in the education of their children. Despite the fact that educators may be good facilitators, evidence shows that they often have a skeptical attitude and impede parents from being more participative. Teachers, in general, only focus on how often parents attend school meetings and participate in governing bodies which is difficult for disadvantaged parents to comply with. Some authors (Coleman, 1998; Edwards & Redfern, 1988; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002) have even pointed out the non-existent efforts of the school to foster parental involvement. They argue that teachers seldom make use of the cultural resources available within families at the classroom level, especially those coming from a working-class background. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the literature has demonstrated how strong home-school links can be encouraged by teachers (Epstein, 1990; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Macbeth, 1989; Moll, Amanti, Neff & González 1992). There are several suggestions about the role that schools should play in order to persuade parents rather than discourage them from being involved. On the one hand, the arguments presented by Crozier and Reay (2005) concur with those of Epstein in that it is teachers' responsibility to 'level the playing field' with respect to the home-school links and on their essential role in promoting effective parental involvement. On the other hand, Phillips' (2005) emphasis on taking into account structural factors remind us that teachers and researchers' efforts are futile without an examination of structural factors and the prevailing social inequalities. It can be argued then that all these propositions bring together the two contentious lines of research on parental involvement analysed at the beginning of the paper. Consequently, studies on home-school-community links should equally consider the three standpoints influencing home-school-community links and give the same attention to the efforts of teachers to involve parents, families' difficulties in getting involved whilst, at the same time, analyse the education policies underpinning such initiatives.

Methodology.

The findings reported in this paper are based on a study that used an ethnographic approach in order to understand the ways in which financially disadvantaged parents in rural Mexico get involved in their children's education. This included schooling experiences and informal learning outside school of girls and boys aged 3 to 16 years. The purpose was to analyse the transmission of material, social and cultural resources within the families and the way in which parents' backgrounds influenced their strategies of involvement and the educative expectations they had for their children. The study also examined the ways in which a lack of adequate financial resources may inhibit the children's educational participation and choices. Testimonies of teachers and education local officers were taken into account in order to analyse the relationship of families with the community school.

An ethnographic approach was employed given that the research questions of the study sought to analyse the social dynamics and their impact on the way parents involved in their children's education. The study took place in a rural community located in southwest Mexico in the state of Michoacán. The community had a high level of marginalization: poorly paid jobs, high unemployment rates and lack of basic services such as public electricity, paved roads and drainage. Due to difficulties of making a living from agriculture, men usually immigrate illegally to the US as cheap labor force, particularly in construction and agricultural activities. The community lacked basic services such as connection with other communities, public transport, leisure space, local health centers and ownership of larger areas of land. Most men were employed as builders because they could not earn a living from agriculture. The average level of education in the case of adults was primary education although the younger generations generally accomplished secondary and in some cases college.

The community was chosen on the basis of the reception from the rural education local authority personnel in Michoacán to the study and also because the community had children representing all years of the basic education system (3 to 16 years) which was one of the criteria for the study. Three months were spent participating in various aspects of community life, living close by, to allow regular visits. The fieldwork was divided into stages in order to build a gradual rapport with participants. Data were collected mainly through observations, 9 focus groups, 8 unstructured interviews and document policy analysis. Complementary research methods included: 5 photo-interviews, 3 household surveys and 3 open-ended questionnaires. Twenty members amongst them parents, grandparents, teenagers and children from eight different families participated in the study, in addition to four education local officers and two teachers. Recorded focus groups and interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated and transcribed in full into English. The analysis of data started in the very process of transcription when all transcripts were carefully read thoroughly and briefly analysed which helped to construct further analysis. Nvivo software for qualitative data analysis was used as a way of coding and managing the data. Several databases were created and revised a number of times in order to code data according to concepts related to different topics: rural education, social participation, parents' self-esteem, community's structural organization, etc. Apart from importing files into the software and coding data, other advantages from computer aided data analysis are that text and information can be located and retrieved quickly and charts and reports can be created in order to facilitate the process of analysis. The following section empirically examines the three standpoints to analyse home-school-community links in Mexico.

Education policies and social participation in Mexico.

In Mexico, the ideology behind home-school-community links has shifted over the years and, consequently, policies regarding social participation in education have not been clearly defined. The idea of an educative community consisting of pupils, teachers, parents, head teachers, and different representatives of the society, was first outlined in the National Agreement for the Educative Modernization (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1992) and the subsequent Education Law (Diario Oficial de la Federación, 1993) which established the creation of councils for social participation working at the state, municipal and school levels. However, as Martínez-Bordon, Bracho and Martínez (2007) argue these councils are not effective and are highly bureaucratic. The wider society is not currently active in their operation and teachers appear to demonstrate professional defensiveness. Later in 2001, the Quality School Programme was established with the aims to improve, through school accountability and social participation, students' learning experiences and teachers' practices in public primary and secondary deprived schools. Evidence shows that some schools participating in this programme have acquired higher levels of social participation (Observatorio Ciudadano de la Educación, 2008a). More recently the Alliance for Quality Education (Observatorio Ciudadano de la Educación 2008b), implemented by the current government and underpinned by an education market ideology, defines students as 'users', the ministry as 'provider' and parents as 'supervisors and representatives' of the rights and obligations of the pupils. It seeks to collect resources for the maintenance and operation of schools through donations and contributions from parents, which could be interpreted as gradually transferring to families the costs of schooling. The Alliance also intends to assess students' academic

achievements without taking into account their social background and differences between urban and rural schools (Observatorio Ciudadano de la Educación, 2008b). The programme has not yielded the expected results because the federal government so far has only established the guidelines without actually decentralizing the financial resources to implement the changes in states and municipalities. Consequently, it has been severely criticised by a vast portion of teachers and parents in many states across the country also because it was implemented without previous consultation with teachers, educationalists and the wider society.

Students and their families in rural Mexico.

This section of the paper draws on focus group and interview data from parents in a rural community in Mexico in order to explore their social participation in education. At the household level, as I have argued elsewhere (Azaola, 2007), although fathers were generally interested in their children's upbringing, parental involvement in their children's formal education was basically a mother's duty. Mothers had to deal with these responsibilities not only because they were at home more, but mainly because of the gender roles imposed in the community. This confirms what the literature argues about parental involvement as a gendered task. Because of their limited educational background, some participant mothers were more able and self-assured at providing nourishment, clothing and counsel to their children. On the other hand, the mothers despite being strict and low in self-esteem were aware of their role as transmitters of love, attention and care to their children. More than holding high expectations for their children's academic achievements, mothers preferred them to avoid problems and be close to the family. Similarly, mothers tried to transmit marital and motherhood values to their children, especially because they wanted to give them the support and counsel they did not get in order to avoid early marriages which were very common in the community:

> My son is 17 and I talk about that with him a lot. Hugo my husband disagrees but hopefully my efforts will pay off. We didn't have much advice from our family like nowadays.

Therefore, mothers' care and concern had to do with the social history of each family and, consequently, mothers' emotional involvement was a significant example of what Moll & Greenberg (1990) call household pedagogies, inasmuch as mothers' affection was part of their latent and hidden knowledge. On the other hand, mothers regularly attended school meetings and were reasonably aware of their children's teachers and what they were learning at school. They had a vigorous participation in school festivals and were keen on contributing with money when necessary. There was even an encouragement among mothers to get involved in their children's education by invitations to attend school meetings and support in organising school festivals. On the other hand, parental involvement often took the form of exerting authority over children. It was expected that parents should order and that children should obey. In terms of child-rearing practices, parents were more responsible than teachers. Nevertheless, they also expected the teachers to apply strict discipline codes as fights and rudeness in children could not be tolerated.

Although parents were fairly involved in their children's education it was also found that because of their limited educational background they tended to rely on teachers as professionals to educate their children. However, mothers were a constant link between home and school since they used to write notes to teachers every time their children needed further clarifications.

According to the parents, they were eager to contribute to their children's formal learning by sharing their own knowledge and skills at school. This initiative could be enhanced by the fact that teachers' values and background were not markedly different from those of parents and thus selection and preference over possible helpers would be less biased. Actually, it was discussed with parents the possibility of proposing to the school staff the implementation of parents' workshops. The aim would be to involve parents in their children's education and make children's schooling experiences more exciting and practical. The purpose would be taking advantage of parents' funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992) and their availability caused by unemployment. Parents showed a positive response to this proposal despite the fact it was not possible to implement it during fieldwork.

In relation to parents' expectations regarding their children's future, parents and children already abandoned the idea of studying for a professional career because of the expenses it

represented and the difficulties in finding jobs. Therefore, parents encouraged their children to earn a living either by studying a technical career (which was the exception) or by learning an occupation, usually building in the case of the boys. Regarding girls' further occupations, traditionally female teenagers commonly worked as domestic house cleaners in bigger cities. Nowadays, that was not the case anymore, although girls' situation had not improved much. If they did not get married early and become full-time housewives, they were starting to consider migration as the alternative option in order to fulfill their desire for financial independence and perhaps their wish for freedom. However, this does not mean that parents were not interested in their girls acquiring an occupation in order to earn their living:

> *Our daughter must learn something so that if her husband doesn't maintain her, she can turn around and start working on her own.*
> *I would like my daughter to be an accountant or to study a shorter career like teaching or nursing. I would have liked my daughter to study beauty because I suppose that job would never let her down, as at least she can do three haircuts per day.*

Parents' interest in their children's primary education was due to a large extent to the fact that villagers preferred that their offspring moved away from their usual tough occupations. Therefore, despite heavy housework and subsistence farming workloads, children's primary schooling came first. Parents gave them time to study, regardless of strict gender roles and low self-esteem showed by some mothers in helping them with school work. In this respect, parents had their own ways of supporting their children's schooling. According to one teacher, parents write down words in their children's notebooks in order for them to read them aloud or dictate words to them so the children can write them down. According to her, even with scarce materials parents managed to do good things and sometimes even the children taught maths to their parents. Generally children learnt through playing and working with peers, supporting each other with difficult tasks. Each teacher had different work practice and style of teaching and approach to children. The primary teacher's vision about schooling was that it should foster children's application of all their learning into their daily life

and 'awaken' their interest in discovering new things. According to her, the pupils explored what they learnt and were more expressive and creative because they conveyed what they thought. The children were very friendly and said they liked school because learning was fun for them. Each child had his own favorite subject and all liked their parents attending school meetings and festivals. All the children were generally responsible and had good marks despite the fact that mothers stated that their fathers' migration had negative consequences on their schooling. Children also encouraged their parents and enjoyed it when they got involved in their school celebrations. Nevertheless, it was found that most of the children were conscious about their parents' time and money limitations and some spoke of wishing a closer involvement of their parents in their education.

Schools and teachers in the Mexican context.

At the school level effective home-school links are still sporadic in Mexican schools. According to some scholars, issues regarding home-school-community links have been under-researched (Guevara, 1996; Schmelkes, Linares & Delgado, 1993; Velázquez, 2000). If it is difficult to find empirical research in the area of parental involvement in the Mexican urban schooling context, the situation is even harder for the rural areas. Hence, the importance of studying family resources and processes of involvement in disadvantaged areas as advocated by this paper. According to Guevara (1996), in Mexico teachers' contacts with parents emerge generally only when the pupils have, according to their professional judgment, some learning or behavioral difficulty. He explains that parents know very little about the schools their children attend and, accordingly, the teachers also know very little about their pupils' family background. According to the findings of his research, parents are not motivated and are generally uninvolved in their children's education because of the scarce information available. Similar evidence was reported by Bracho and Martínez-Bordon (2006). Bello (1996) explains that teachers are still very reluctant about parents' participation in academic issues. This shows that Mexican policy and practice at schools with respect to home-school-community links function as separate domains.

With respect to the rural school involved in this research, it was found that the vision of the

7

education local officers regarding parental involvement in education was that without the support of the villagers they could do very little. The school had five children in pre-school and eight children in primary. According to the education local officers, the school depended on parents in order to fulfill their work: from the very installation of schools to the daily teaching activities. However, a generalised lack of enthusiasm regarding parental involvement was found among staff. Despite the fact that the education local officers recognised the importance of giving workshops to adults in the communities, they claimed that these workshops were not always provided due to time pressures. It was found that, when implemented, the workshops given in the community were far from seeking real parental inclusion or foster a cultural exchange with neighboring communities. These workshops seemed to rather attempt to include villagers in the mainstream culture through the introduction of classic literature such as Don Quixote. On the other hand, the local officers believed that it was mainly the teachers' responsibility to foster parental involvement as they interacted with the families on a daily basis. In turn, the teacher of primary claimed that parents were too busy to get more involved beyond helping with homework and attending meetings. According to her:

Sometimes parents can't get involved because of their jobs; at times mothers work with their husbands. Although I would like it, very few can participate. Having toddlers is another reason.

Nevertheless, when she had something to sort out with parents regarding an underachieving pupil, she used to go to their houses to talk to the parents. At school meetings, she usually tells them that she is aware of those parents who teach and help their children at home. However, parents did not experience any direct involvement at the classroom level. It seemed that generally teachers made a clear difference between their duties at school and parents' responsibilities at home. The only exception to the rule came from the personal initiative of the pre-school teacher. This shows that real parental involvement depended on the individual judgment of teachers. According to him, teachers must show a strong disposition to their work regardless of the training they get. He claimed that he did his best during his training period and thanks to that he did not have difficulties in his work. He considered that parents

were agents of knowledge and daily life experiences:

I have already told the mothers that I will invite them to work with the children. I think we, as a team, must work together, as mothers are just aware through the homework. I want them to share an activity with us in the classroom and thus mothers can watch how we work in here. I would like to invite parents to read stories in the classroom on Mondays or Fridays, that will be an incentive for the children as well.

Interestingly, both teachers recognised that parents were keen to encourage their children's education and that the pupils were supported by their families. For instance, the pre-school teacher stated that the community was at the beginning very strict regarding his performance. He originally believed parents discriminated male teachers:

When I arrived they were very severe with me. Mrs. Justa told me they wanted to see progress in their children. At that time, there was no teacher of primary; so the mothers with children in pre-school encouraged the ones with children in primary to request a teacher. People thought that their efforts of having built the school were worthy enough to merit not closing it down. I was surprised about their organization as a community.

On the other hand, it was found that school activities were usually arranged with ease. For example, the primary teacher stated that the previous teacher did not use to give homework to the children and when she arrived this was a problem because mothers believed that it was her job to teach children at school. However, she had been gradually able to involve parents without them realising it. Now the children often ask for their parents' support in order to do their homework, and even sometimes, parents themselves tell the teachers if their children do not want to do their homework.

Conclusions.

The paper has explored two different lines of research on parental involvement in education, one that stresses the importance of teachers and schools in encouraging parents to effectively get

involved regardless of their socio-economic limitations, and another that argues that parents' involvement in their children's education is heavily constrained by families' social class. It has been demonstrated that both lines are complementary and should be equally taken into account. However, the paper has added another dimension of analysis to home-school-community links claiming that an investigation of education policies is key in order to understand the different ideological approaches underpinning participatory schemes given that these have important effects upon school practices and families. The equal consideration and empirical analysis of education policies, schools and families in relation to home-school-community links is essential because it allows us to have a broader understanding of the mechanisms behind the increasingly important phenomenon of social participation in education. It has also been demonstrated that families' resources, strategies and processes of involvement are key aspects of investigation. In relation to the Mexican context in particular, it has been shown that recent education policies aiming to implement neo-liberal schemes that have been already employed and criticised in other Western countries, have encountered significant social rejection given the structural inequalities within the country. On the basis of the findings of this study, it was found that an approach to home-school-community links aiming to genuinely welcome families' sources of knowledge and their social experiences depends mostly on the individual judgment of teachers. Evidence from this study also suggest that, in general, disadvantaged families are keen to encourage their children's education and would like to contribute to their formal learning by sharing their own knowledge and skills at school. However, in order for them to have a more active participation at school and be able to successfully negotiate the education they want it is important that they act as a group with their own right of participation. The question remains as to what extent the implementation of current education policies- underpinned by the market ideology- is modified in practice by school teachers in such a way that it can enhance more than deter the education of socially disadvantaged groups.

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