



Accepting Research: Teachers' Representations of Participation in Educational Research Projects

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Abstract: Collecting data among participants belonging to a group, community or organization is a crucial step in social research. However, generally speaking, in the social sciences, the issue of access to the research field has not been widely or systematically studied and remains under-theorized. The goal of this study is to draw the participants' perspective on the question of accepting research into their classrooms and participating in it, an object that has usually been overlooked in studies on research field access. This article presents the results of a qualitative, exploratory study aimed at documenting teachers' representations relating to whether or not they wish to participate in research projects, when requested to do so by researchers. The analysis brought out a system comprising five categories of representations relating to participation or non-participation in an educational research project. These representations are related to 1) the teacher's daily tasks; 2) the teacher's professional development; 3) the teacher's professional identity and professional ideal; 4) the institutional and collegial context; and 5) the teacher's responsibility toward students. We discuss these categories and their implications for further research.

Keywords: *Methodology, Field Access, Educational Research, Participation.*

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Introduction

From field access to research acceptance: State of knowledge on field access

Collecting data among participants belonging to a group, community or organization is a crucial step in social research. The participation of individuals and their environment is generally conceptualized as "field access," defined as the "process of gaining and maintaining entry to a setting or a social group, or of establishing working relations with individuals" (Jupp, 2006).

Forty years ago, Brown, Guillet de Monthoux, and McCullough (1976) expressed concern regarding the state of social science literature on access. On the one hand, they emphasized the importance of access in research methodology, since, broadly defined, the issue of access involves the social process of producing empirical data which, far from being limited to logistical aspects, inevitably affects the nature and validity of these data: "the content of the box, the social reality, is seen as dependent on how it is opened" (p. 17). On the other hand, they deplored the lack of explicit knowledge on the issue of access in the social sciences. They cited various possible reasons explaining why social scientists, in their publications, did not explicitly account for the processes used to gain access, including the lack of pertinence attributed to considerations relating to access; fear of exposing themselves to criticism; concern with being concise; and the implicit nature of access-related know-how, already shared by researchers and readers. Regardless of the reason, these authors argued that, since access is an important component of research practices, it should be part of the methodological knowledge explained in research reports and taught to graduate students (Brown et al., 1976).[†]

In the ensuing years, knowledge on access has developed. There are now many methodological books and chapters dealing with access and the conduct of fieldwork in the social sciences (e.g. Brown et al., 1976; Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003; Fiedler, 1978; Glazer, 1972; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, ch. 3; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, ch. 2), including some in the area of educational research (e.g. Delamont, 2016, ch. 6; West, 2017). Despite the consensual tone of the

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[†] Our analysis excludes from the outset specific reference to Action Research and Participatory Research since, by definition, they imply a particular way of dealing with participation. While we did not pursue such an enterprise, it could be interesting to look at participation with studies holding such specific perspectives.

knowledge conveyed in these publications, often intended for researchers in training, the nature and quality of their scientific basis vary. According to Harrington (2003), a wide range of literature exists on the issue of access, with common sense, anecdotes or a compilation of advice based on anecdotes appearing to be the preferred sources used in most publications, whereas more theorized treatments with more systematic empirical foundations are less common.

A few recurrent themes are addressed in the literature on access, including the process of establishing a relationship between the researcher and participants, through which the researcher constructs and negotiates an identity with the participants, a process in which trust, rapport, and credibility play a particular role (Emmel, Hughes, Greenhalgh, & Sales, 2007; Feldman et al., 2003; Harrington, 2003); the necessary use of gatekeepers to contact the participants (Burgess, 1991; Clark, 2010a; Crowhurst & Kennedy-macfoy, 2013; Wanat, 2008); and the ethical issues associated with access to a research setting, in particular linked to the use of gatekeepers (Bélangier & Richard, 2017; Heath, Charles, Crow, & Wiles, 2007; Homan, 2001; Miller & Bell, 2012). Also of note are publications in the area of evaluation – and, more particularly, participatory evaluation – examining the variables predicting participants' attitudes toward research in general (e.g., Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Cousins & Walker, 2000).

The perspective of participants and gatekeepers

Although it goes without saying that, for the community of researchers, the issue of access must be addressed from the researcher's perspective, it appears to be at least as important to consider the perspective of participants, and their setting, regarding the social phenomenon of research participation (Troman, 1996). Among the few social science studies which have focused on this issue, two articles produced by Clark are particularly relevant. Based on interviews with 13 researchers engaged in qualitative research in the social sciences, Clark (2008, 2010b) identified several factors that are likely to encourage participants' involvement in a social research project in general, for example: the participant's interest in the subject of the research; his/her curiosity regarding the research process; a potential gain or positive effect (e.g. knowledge); the fact that the interests of the group to which the participant belongs will be represented to an external audience; and, the hope that the research will inform professional practices (Clark, 2010b). However, a significant limitation of Clark's study is that the accounts came from the researchers interviewed rather than the participants themselves (Clark, 2010b).

In addition to the potential participants, in some settings, there are gatekeepers who are also likely to interact with the researcher. The gatekeeper is a person who determines the possibility for a researcher to gain access to a site, without, however, directly providing data during the collection process (Jupp, 2006). Gatekeepers can be numerous when participants belong to large organizations. Thus, there are several categories of gatekeepers, sometimes formal and high in the organizational hierarchy, sometimes informal and lower in this hierarchy (Emmel et al., 2007; Reeves, 2010). Access granted by a gatekeeper higher in the hierarchy does not necessarily translate into the effective collaboration of gatekeepers lower in the hierarchy (Burgess, 1991), since the latter can find ways not to collaborate in the project if they so desire (Wanat, 2008). Thus, the researcher's process of gaining access is not a single event; rather, it must be considered as part of a potentially repeated, or even ongoing process (Reeves, 2010). Like the participants, gatekeepers consider several factors when it comes to authorizing a researcher to access a setting. Thus, from a reciprocity perspective (Wax, 1952), a few articles, of a reflexive nature (Broadhead & Rist, 1976) or presenting the results of surveys conducted among gatekeepers (Clark & Sinclair, 2008) or researchers (Clark, 2010a; Heath et al., 2007), have identified the potential benefits for an organization of participating in a research project. These include, for example, the feeling of having contributed to the advancement of knowledge on a topic deemed important; improved practices (reflexivity, grounding in evidence-based data); and having the organization's interests represented in a wider context. These researchers also identified risks or inconveniences related to collaborating in research, likely to lead to a refusal to grant access. These include the risk of producing negative effects for the organization, regarding its interests and public image; relatedly, the unease associated with exposing quasi-private worlds to public observation; and institutional disruption, including the time and costs involved in such collaboration.

More specifically, we identified three articles discussing the factors taken into account by gatekeepers in educational settings in deciding whether or not to collaborate in research. Presenting their main results proves to be pertinent to the study presented in this article.

In a reflexive article on his experience as an ethnographic researcher in education, Troman (1996) suggested a number of reasons likely to lead school administrators to refuse access to a researcher. Most of the reasons cited referred to the work of teachers, over whom school administrators tended to play a protective role: since teachers already had a heavy workload, the administrators endeavoured not to increase it needlessly through research projects, in particular during assessment time or other busy times in the school year. Among the teachers, and even the entire school team, there was a fear of surveillance from external experts, who might pass judgment on their practices. The teachers also saw little utility in educational research in general.

Wanat's article (2008) is similar in nature, reporting her reflections on gatekeepers in school settings based on her experience in four research projects. By her account, the cooperation of gatekeepers was influenced by the perceived benefits and threats associated with participation. The image of the school was an important consideration since a project that might provide a positive image of the school was more likely to earn the cooperation of gatekeepers. Wanat

also reported the effect of power relationships. On the one hand, the intermediate gatekeepers resented having participation imposed on them by higher-level gatekeepers, and even saw this as a hint of a hidden agenda (e.g., the desire to implement changes in practice) of which they should be suspicious. On the other hand, this requirement to participate appeared to be perceived differently by the teachers, who merely considered it as an order from senior administrators that had to be carried out.

Lastly, Befort et al. (2008) conducted 10 minute semi-structured interviews with 57 school administrators to elicit the factors the latter took into account in deciding whether or not to collaborate in a research project. Like Troman (1996), these researchers reported that the investment required in terms of time and effort, as well as the time of the year, were important considerations for these gatekeepers. Expected benefits resulting from participation were also important, such as the production of information on the students or learning opportunities for teachers. Moreover, a request for participation was received more favorably if the project was linked to an area of particular interest for the school (e.g., a school subject targeted as a priority).

Research Problem and Goals

Thus, the social sciences provide a variety of resources (anecdotal, conceptual and, to a lesser extent, theoretical) for understanding the issue of access. However, in the end this knowledge is often based on anecdotal reflections and remains under-theorized (Clark, 2010a; Crowhurst, 2013; Feldman et al., 2003; Harrington, 2003). More specifically, we conclude that the current state of knowledge on field access should be developed in three respects:

1. Regarding the object of the knowledge produced, more research should focus on the perspective of individuals and their social environment when their participation is solicited for social research. Moreover, this might be related to the terminology used in considering these questions since the term "field access" shifts all the analysis toward the perspective of the researcher (the person gaining access), while providing a static image of that to which access is gained (a "field"). In this article, we use the term "setting" to highlight the fact that the actors in this setting interact with others in a structured way. We refer to research entry into the participant's social environment rather than "field access" so as not to restrict our research focus solely to the researcher's perspective. Thus, research entry into a participant's social environment is here conceptualized as "access to this setting," when described from the researcher's viewpoint, and as "accepting the research," when described from the viewpoint of the actors in the setting.
2. At a methodological level, more studies should include data obtained directly from participants or gatekeepers. Indeed, most of them only report data obtained from researchers, or, more often, present reflections derived from the experiences of the authors themselves.
3. Lastly, at a contextual level, it would be relevant to focus on research entry into participants' social environments in the specific context of educational research given the specificity and complexity of educational settings. In fact, school organizations possess a complex hierarchical structure, in addition to being connected to other institutions. They have their own specific goals and interests, and research participants are often minors and always in a vulnerable position.

Given this state of knowledge on the research entry into participants' social environments, particularly in the area of educational research, it is relevant to seek to better understand the perspective of teachers as they are key actors in educational settings. This article thus presents the results of an exploratory study aimed at documenting teachers' representations relating to whether or not they wish to participate in research projects, when requested to do so by researchers.

Methodology

This exploratory and qualitative research project (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) aims to draw up a portrait of the representations maintained by teachers regarding their participation in research projects. From our perspective, the results contribute to reflections on the broad issue of gaining entry into the educational research milieu and, more generally, into any settings subject to social research.

Recruitment and Participants

We chose to use a non-probability, volunteer sample (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The recruitment strategy involved sending out emails to invite a number of teachers identified by ourselves and by various actors to whom we had access.

We interviewed thirteen (13) participants: five elementary-school teachers, seven high-school teachers, and one part-time teacher in an elementary school who also worked as an educational adviser. The participants had between 15 and 25 years of teaching experience, except for one participant who had less than 10 years' experience. Four of the participants worked in schools in rural areas while the other nine worked in urban areas. Of the 13 participants, nine were women and four were men.

Data Collection

We conducted individual semi-structured interviews lasting from 75 to 120 minutes each. This method of collecting data, allowing participants to share their views on different aspects of the topic presented by researchers, is highly appropriate for documenting representations (Cohen et al., 2007). All the interviews took place at the participants' workplace. The interview protocol was comprised of five sections, each containing one main question and several follow-up questions. In addition to socio-demographic data on the participants, the questions dealt with the following themes: 1) their perception of the role and importance of educational research, 2) the narration and explicitation of a personal experience of participating in a research project as a teacher, 3) the description of other participation experiences (theirs or those of their colleagues), 4) the perceived demands and constraints regarding research participation, and 5) their perception of the teaching profession. The interview protocol aimed mainly to bring out a detailed description of their active participation in a research project.

Process of Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The interviews generated a body of approximately 600 pages of transcription. A "thematic analysis" (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2013) was performed to bring out, using an iterative process, the main categories of representations relating to participation in educational research.

In the first phase of analysis, the two researchers each analyzed interviews with four different participants to identify significant statements responding to the question: "What are the teacher's representations regarding his/her participation or non-participation in an educational research project?" Working from the interview transcripts, the sentence was used as the unit of meaning for this analysis. The researchers then compared their results (inter-rater comparison) to bring out the categories of representations. This first categorization served as a basis for the analysis of the interviews with the first eight participants. A second pooling of results helped to refine the categorization and re-orientate the analysis as needed. In the second phase of analysis, the interviews of the last five participants were analyzed based on this categorization in order to validate or enhance it. This last analytical stage showed saturation in the categories of representations identified in the teachers' discourse regarding their participation.

Results and Discussion

The analysis brought out a system comprising five categories of representations relating to participation or non-participation in an educational research project. These representations are related to 1) the teacher's daily tasks; 2) the teacher's professional development; 3) the teacher's professional identity and professional ideal; 4) the institutional and collegial context; and 5) the teacher's responsibility toward students.

Representations Related to Daily Tasks

The first category of representations that emerged from the discourse of the teachers interviewed was the expected impact of research participation on their workload. A research project that requires a considerable investment of time and effort immediately runs the risk of being turned down because it inevitably adds to an already busy schedule. As one participant put it:

P: So, the principal asks us: "Would anybody be available?" Well, if it doesn't require anything from me personally [then] ok, no problem, you can come into my classroom. Otherwise, well, if it's too demanding, you know, with that other project, it's just too much, so we'll decline this time. (Participant 9)

This reference to the time cost of participation is not surprising, being in line with similar findings reported in the literature (Befort et al., 2008; Heath et al., 2007; Troman, 1996).

However, time demands were not the only aspect considered by the teachers: some participation procedures appeared to be more burdensome than others. For example, filling out questionnaires or putting observations or reflections down in writing represented unattractive tasks, and could constitute concrete obstacles to participation. This sensitivity to the methods proposed by the researchers is consistent with Clark's conclusion (2008) that methods are not passively accepted by participants, but rather experienced actively, thus influencing their decision as to whether or not to participate or continue their participation.

Although the teachers tended to be generally open to the idea of investing their time and energy (or those of their students) in research projects, they emphasized that this was strictly unthinkable during the particularly important periods during the school year devoted to assessment, a finding that is consistent with previously reported observations (Befort et al., 2008; Troman, 1996).

Representations related to professional development

Once the logistical possibility of participation had been established, the issue of reciprocity, or "a return on their investment," explicitly appeared in the discourse of the teachers interviewed. In fact, they stressed that they expected a pedagogical benefit in exchange for their participation. This reciprocity, even at a symbolic level, is often mentioned in studies on gaining access for research (e.g., Clark, 2010b; Emmel et al., 2007; Wax, 1952). In particular, the theme of the

development of professional practices was cited by Clark (Clark, 2010a, 2010b; Clark & Sinclair, 2008) and Befort et al. (2008).

Our analysis led to a distinction between four types of representations among the teachers relating to their professional development.

Research participation as a means of meeting specific pedagogical needs. As professionals, the teachers maintained that they faced numerous challenges in their teaching practice. It was therefore not surprising that, during the interviews, some teachers said they were receptive to studies focusing on specific topics and were on the look out for resources to help them meet specific pedagogical needs. In the words of one participant:

P: Well, often, we'll say something like: "Help, things aren't going well in math!" We'll tell the principal that things aren't working, something needs to be done, our students aren't strong enough. What we've achieved in French, we need to work on in math. [...] So if, by chance – and I say *if* – a research project in math came up and my principal knew about it, he might suggest it to us. (Participant 9)

In fact, for a number of the teachers interviewed, seeking a solution to an identified pedagogical need was a decisive participation criterion:

P: Yeah, it has to meet a need, it shouldn't be somebody else choosing for me. It really must meet a need. (Participant 4)

Moreover, it should be noted that even when a research project dealt with a topic of interest, a teacher might consider, *a priori*, that the project in question was not likely to provide effective solutions.

P: You know, there was a study, a research project that I participated in, and then recently, we heard about it again ... and for us, here, it really wasn't worth our while being involved in it. We're already beyond that. (Participant 9)

Research participation as an opportunity to generate changes in teaching practices. Some teachers stated that their interest in participating in a study derived from the fact that they expected it to help them "take stock of" their professional practices. In other words, the teachers agreed to participate insofar as the study was likely to give rise to a reflexive stance that would be beneficial for their teaching practices (Clark & Sinclair, 2008). Thus, research participation may be an opportunity to obtain a critical outside view on a practice, facilitating changes in it:

P: So, it gives me an outside view on how the student can best learn. And if I don't see it, well, somebody from outside with this kind of knowledge will be able to guide or redirect me to other ways of doing things. (Participant 4)

Sometimes, the input of this outside view could undermine the participant's beliefs:

P: Yeah, it was interesting, of course, it was ... it wasn't easy to understand at first but they explained it clearly to us. What I really wanted to know... was about my students, my practices, and where my students stood in all that. And they told me, that's for sure! It was like a slap in the face, letting me know that...

I: Oh, yeah?

P: Yeah, because I really thought my practices were effective, and everything was going well. But actually, we weren't among the top schools, far from it! So, that made me question things. It pushed me to go and find out some things and pursue my continuous training a bit [...]. (Participant 3)

In this case, the critical outside view was the event that triggered the professional development process. This benefit of participation was recognized *a posteriori*. However, for some teachers, such an outside view could become threatening:

P: There are people who won't open their classroom doors.

I: Why, do you think?

P: Well, usually, because they think their practices are being judged, or it's going to keep them busy, it's going to take time and energy. Some teachers are uncomfortable being observed [...]. (Participant 3)

As mentioned above, the fact that teaching practices are sometimes deemed to be private in nature, alongside the feeling of being evaluated, can lead teachers to refuse to participate in research (Heath et al., 2007; Troman, 1996).

Research participation as a means of gaining access to professional training. The training aspect of research participation is a theme that we often encountered, in relation to two aspects.

First, when research helped to generate information on the students or teaching practices, the researcher's conclusions might be eagerly anticipated by the teachers. As put by one participant:

P: Well, afterwards, what I find a bit unfortunate is that we haven't heard anything about it for some time. We participated in a study, but there's no more follow up. [...] I thought it was following my cohort but in the end...

I: Ok.

P: But then, my Grade 6 [students] finished. I did a full year of Grade 4, the following year. [...] But at the time, my view at the end of the year was: "Ok, I participated, I was told that it was to compare my methods and my students' results, but at the end of the year I didn't get..., it didn't give me any feedback on my methods. Even now, I still haven't been told whether my methods are effective or not." (Participant 3)

Some participants felt that this feedback should be given "in person" rather than in the form of a written report. Such feedback would look very much like personalized training.

Second, several participants explained that gaining access to training workshops, as part of the research project, was an important reason for their participation. Thus, for some teachers, research participation represented a sort of right of access, the price to pay to receive training. The following excerpt aptly illustrates, in its own way, this implicit equation between participation and access to training:

P: The research I did this year, what I found difficult was that I couldn't really see where it would lead me. [...] what I found hard was that I said: "Ok, fine, you can come in to film, it's okay." My colleague said: "Oh no, I don't want to be filmed." [...]. Then, [the researchers] said [to my colleague]: "It doesn't matter, you can participate in the workshops next year anyway." So, I was like: "Hey, I got stuck with six [classroom intrusions], I was filmed. I have the right to go to the workshops, but does she?" (Participant 8)

Similarly, a teacher explained that he was willing to participate in a study as part of a control group, as long as he was also given access to the training workshop. Thus, participating was a means of gaining access to "ready-made" knowledge. Moreover, it should be mentioned that, even when the scientific value of a training workshop had not yet been proven (since the researcher's goal was precisely to test it), this did not appear to decrease the teachers' interest in participating in it.

The training workshops provided as part of research projects were sometimes perceived as more worthwhile than other types of more traditional training, because of their sustained pace and the transition to practice required on the part of the teacher:

P: Well, I find that research projects bring regularity. With training, let's say I attend a one-day training session, it doesn't mean that the next day, I'll put it into practice. The routine kicks in again, and then a month later, I'll realize: "Oh, yeah! It's true, I had that training, I applied that for 2 or 3 days, but then I stopped." With research projects, when you get involved, it means you have no choice but to apply it, to set things in motion to do it. (Participant 9)

However, a teacher might also refuse to participate in a research project to allow his teaching practices to stabilize after participating in one or more other research projects:

P: So, sometimes you say: "Listen, we've just come out of a research project, we've just finished one. Can we ...
hmm, just, you know ...

I: Breathe a little!

P: Yes! Well, not just breathe but, you know, you have like 3 or 4 training sessions and that leads to 3 or 4 changes in the routine. Can we just apply them for 2 or 3 years, at least, before introducing changes again?
(Participant 9)

The need to have reached a certain stage of professional development. Although participation in research was sometimes seen by the teachers as being beneficial to their teaching practice, some participants maintained that it was not realistic for them to envisage such participation during their first few years in the profession, a period during which they had to appropriate the complex reality of teaching. In this respect, the teachers mentioned that they could only afford to invest time in a study once they had sufficiently consolidated the foundations and developed some room for maneuver in their work, that is, once they had reached a certain "stage." One participant put it this way:

P: But now I find that I no longer need to worry about energy. It's that... It no longer takes as much energy to manage the class and learn to introduce the concepts. And that means I have a lot more energy in reserve, if you like, to do other things. (Participant 5)

Thus, referring to the path of professional development, the participants stated that participation in research could only be envisaged after a few years, with one teacher even asserting, in reference to his own pathway, that he was finally ready, after 20 years' experience in the profession. This representation is consistent with Huberman's model (1989) of the phases of a teaching career: following entry into the profession, characterized by the themes of "survival" and "discovery," there is a phase of stabilization of one's teaching practices, after which, in many cases, there is a phase of experimentation or diversification aimed at improving one's teaching. Similarly, Everton, Galton, and Pell (2000) observed that young teachers are less interested in participating in research than more experienced teachers. It is relevant to compare this finding with Cousins and Walker's argument (2000) that teachers with more experience appear to be less interested in getting involved in research, as a result of having reached a stage of professional disengagement (see also Huberman, 1989).

In terms of the teachers' career path, participation in research was sometimes described as a means of professional development, wherein the researcher was perceived as a model, expert or coach, capable of providing an outside view that could stimulate the development of practices and prevent a certain leveling-off:

P: [For example, my colleague], she tries to progress, to change, to transform her teaching. She needs a model. She needs support, she needs somebody to say: "Yes, that's fine." Or who will bring her along... You can't think on your own all the time. And I can't think at home, my partner doesn't understand anything! (Participant 10)

P: But if I want to go even further, I'll probably need an expert to tell me again "Yes, what you're doing is very good." And "You do this, then this, and it leads to such and such. But have you ever thought about doing this or...?" And, well, I know that that can make things go faster, help me progress faster. (Participant 5)

In brief, it was found that participation in research was viewed by several teachers as a means of gaining access to a form of continuous training centered on the practical problems they experienced. This training was provided by an "expert," the university researcher.

Intermediate discussion: research participation represented as an opportunity for professional development. What emerged at the core of our analysis was the teachers' assessment of the benefits of research participation in relation to their professional development. The effects considered by the teachers appeared to vary in nature and included solutions or, at the very least, information, specific to a practical problem encountered by a teacher; training on aspects deemed important; or feedback, and even a questioning of their professional practices. The common characteristic of all these representations was that participation in research appeared to constitute a way for teachers to connect their professional practices with the educational research community. This led us to formulate the following hypothesis: for several teachers, research participation represents an opportunity to establish a direct link between their professional development and educational research.

In our view, the representations of research identified among our participants appear to be in line with those identified in the literature, in particular in studies focusing on the issue of the appropriation of research knowledge by teachers. Teachers' representations about educational research are somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, the teachers interviewed exhibited a rather positive attitude toward research in general, which is consistent with Williams and Coles (2007). In fact, no participant expressed an openly and categorically negative attitude toward research knowledge and several stated that, in general, educational research has a positive aim, namely, to "improve the educational system" (Participant 3).

On the other hand, the majority of our participants referred to the existence of a gap between the research community and the practice community. This "gap" theme has also been identified by other researchers and can be found in numerous studies on the transfer of knowledge generated from educational research (Bérubé, 2005; Broekamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Landry et al., 2008; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). Moreover, this gap can be observed in various ways. First, the teachers appeared to consult little or no scientific studies (Bérubé, 2005; Borg, 2009; Drill, Miller, & Behrstock-Sherratt, 2013; Landry et al., 2008; Shkedi, 1998; Williams & Coles, 2007), because access to these studies is limited, or because "it takes time to make the effort to seek this type of knowledge" (Participant 11). Second, some teachers considered that researchers dwell in an "ivory tower" (Participant 14), and are mainly preoccupied with theories and the writing of scientific articles, coming up with "many ideas in their mind, without contact with the reality" of practice (Participant 8).

P: For people on the ground, researchers seem to be disconnected from practice and from students. You know, people always say: "Oh, researchers, when was the last time they saw students?" (Participant 12)

This gap could also be seen in the teachers' representations regarding knowledge generated from educational research. With regard to form, the teachers considered the specific language used in research to be an obstacle to the application of research knowledge (Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010; Williams & Coles, 2007). With regard to substance, the teachers expressed doubts concerning the relevance and validity of knowledge generated from research. Thus, one teacher asserted that study results which researchers said could be generalized to the whole population of students, in reality, could never be applied, as such, to his classroom. In other words, since study results ignore the individual characteristics of students and the unpredictable elements of the classroom reality, they were of little interest to his teaching practice.

P: Even if a researcher conducts the best study in the world on reading, something will always crop up so that for him [a student], it won't work. (Participant 8)

This epistemological assertion appears to give precedence to the particular over the general and therefore implies the impossibility of transferring knowledge to new contexts, which is consistent with other researchers' findings on teachers' representations (Drill et al., 2013; Gore & Gitlin, 2004; Joram, 2007; Shkedi, 1998). Relatedly, in the view of teachers, the value of a study lies in the links that can be made with their classroom reality (Bartels, 2003; Shkedi, 1998):

P: When [the researchers] present [the conclusions] to us, I really find it's just words. If I don't see it, if I don't test it, I find that it always stays at the cerebral level. (Participant 8)

Thus, based on our results, it is plausible that several teachers, recognizing that educational research could help them improve their practices, saw participation in a particular project as an opportunity to directly interact with the research community (information, ideas, feedback, knowledge, etc.) so as to overcome the above-mentioned obstacles, in other words, in a way which is: comprehensible, i.e. using concepts and vocabulary they can understand; efficient, i.e. demanding little time, or only time that is recognized institutionally; personalized, i.e. verbal, at least in part, and targeting the individual in question; concrete, i.e. related to information or actions they can conceive of or imagine implementing in the context of their classroom; convincing, i.e. allowing them to determine the value themselves, because of its concrete nature.

To sum up, these results suggest that research participation is perceived by some teachers as a promising way to connect their professional development with scientific knowledge, as a one-off opportunity to bridge, with support, the gap they perceive between practice and educational research in general.

Representations related to a professional ideal

The third category of representations relating to research participation was associated with a conception of professional identity held by some teachers. In these representations, the desire to participate in research was linked to the very way the teachers conceived of their professional identity. Participation in research was envisaged not for its effects on teaching practices, but rather because of its coherence with a certain professional ideal.

Thus, one teacher, as seen in the following excerpt, asserted that he was generally in favor of educational research and was ready to help, out of a sense civic and moral responsibility (see (Clark, 2010a), without expecting any particular benefit, except that the experience would be generally constructive for him and would make him feel privileged:

P: People, as I say, are willing to collaborate, ready to help. And, you know, you trust them, they're university researchers [...]. They [the researchers] come to do research, and we often even feel privileged to have them because people feel that: "they're interested in our school, they're going to give us additional information that will help us teach better." (Participant 1)

For other teachers, participating in research was explicitly mentioned as a way to fully express their professionalism. Thus, one teacher maintained that: "There are those who invest themselves fully in the job, and those who just do the job, period" (Participant 7). Yet, contrary to those who "just do the job, period," those who fully invest themselves in their profession are ready to seek solutions to the pedagogical problems they encounter. In the words of this participant:

P: I have the feeling now, after five years, that there are technicians and there are educators. It sounds dumb, but I can't find another way to put it. [...] The [technician] teacher teaches, and well, she teaches. She wonders about things but she won't go... [She'll say to herself]: "Ok, look, let's just go on, let's keep going, we have to move ahead." I think the educator teacher will say: "No-no-no, it isn't working. This process isn't working. So I'm going to read up on it, I'm going to do some research and I'm going [...] to act on it." (Participant 10)

According to this view, the professionalism of teachers is expressed by the fact that they deal with pedagogical problems while continually readjusting their understanding of the complex and ever-changing task of teaching. Thus, participation in research is one way for teachers to actualize an ideal of reflexivity. As one participant stated:

P: Yes, well, some teachers see research projects precisely as levers of change, and there are some teachers who absolutely don't like change. I think that, in teaching, it's one of the professions where things really change a lot. But people who are in teaching have very poor skills when it comes to facing change. [...] We have to play a role, we always have to be in a problem-solving mode as a teacher. And there are teachers who are, I'd say, more like technicians than professionals, unfortunately. [...] It's not a question of age, it's really a question, I think, of your attitude toward your profession. You have to see it as a profession, not as a technical vocation ... You aren't a technician with children in front of you, you're a professional. And, I'm repeating myself here, but everything that is professional is complex. And everything that is complex, well, has to be studied, it has to be reflected on and... without research, ultimately, we wouldn't have those levers, we wouldn't have the chance to question things. (Participant 3)

Paradoxically, this same participant mentioned that several teachers, including himself during his early years of teaching, saw those who join the community of educational researchers as people who do not have the abilities needed to teach.

P: ... I'm going to say it honestly, at first, when somebody did a master's, to me, it was because that person realized, in the end, that he didn't belong in the [teaching] community. (Participant 3)

Another aspect of research participation linked with a professional ideal was collegiality. Some teachers considered that participating in a research project might eventually be beneficial to a colleague.

P: It won't change anything in my way of doing things now. But perhaps eventually, we're going to find that some kind of exchange must be made, that might help me later or benefit the person who will replace me or a colleague or something like that... So, it was worth it. (Participant 9)

To sum up, it was found that teachers sometimes agreed to participate in research for considerations other than immediate interest, because they were generally open to research or because such participation naturally fit into their conception of the teaching profession, whether in terms of their own practice or in terms of collegiality.

Representations related to the institutional context

Our results indicate that several of the teachers' representations were related to the institutional context in which they worked. In fact, the teachers maintained that the school administrators played an important part in their participation in research, describing, in varying ways, the role of school administrators as gatekeepers. Thus, we grouped the representations under three closely related themes: the teacher's agency, the legitimacy of the school administrator's authority, and distrust of the school administrator.

The first theme related to the teacher's agency vis-à-vis the school administrator, i.e. his/her (institutional) capacity to decide independently whether or not to participate in a research project. In one particular case, where the teacher appeared to have a degree of autonomy, the school administrator was aware that the teacher in question was open to and interested in participating in research, and therefore specifically transmitted the researcher's invitation to him, with the decision regarding whether or not to participate resting ultimately with this teacher. However, some teachers referred to a different situation where their administrator played a significantly more authoritarian role, sometimes appearing to oblige them to participate, without considering their view or seeking their consent. One participant described this obligation to participate as follows:

P: In fact, it was really odd because the project was initially presented to us very quickly, in a general meeting. We were told: "Some researchers are going to come." [...] So, we need to adjust our schedules No matter what you have planned for that morning, if you're giving an exam, you're going to have to move it, whatever. Everybody knows it's that morning, that's how it's going to happen. (Participant 1)

P: But apart from [the year-end exam period], I'm not sure there are that many teachers who feel they can say no either. [...] Often it's more to inform us than to get our approval, know what I mean? We're informed that there's a study on something, and they're going to come to consult us, and that's that. (Participant 1)

A second theme involved the administrator's legitimacy to impose participation in research. While problematic from a research ethics point of view, the obligation to participate dictated by the administrator and the lack of recognition of the teacher's agency in the decision to participate did not appear to be a concern for the teachers involved. In their view, the school administrator had the legitimate authority to impose some activities on teachers, including participation in research. Complying with such a directive from the school administrator has been reported by Wanat (2008) and appears in the following excerpt:

P: [...] I wasn't asked, um...

I: You didn't have the reflex to say: "Well, why?"

P: Well, I don't think it was my place to ask. All the French teachers were going with their students. That's it, that's how it goes. Ha! Put that in your pipe and smoke it, that's the way it's going to be. (Participant 12)

The third and last theme identified was distrust of the school administration's intentions. Although the teachers addressing this subject immediately recognized the administrator's authority and legitimacy to impose participation in research, some nevertheless said they were somewhat suspicious of his/her real intentions. While the reasons the school administrator was imposing participation in research were not explicitly known, the teachers sometimes suspected a hidden agenda and believed that participation in research could become the "strong arm of the school administration," a tool used to "change things" (Participant 11), which is consistent with what was reported by Wanat (2008).

Moreover, we also identified representations related to other school actors. Thus, one teacher (Participant 15) acknowledged that he relied greatly on the professional judgment of an educational adviser he trusted. He saw the latter as a "filter" or "seal of excellence," validating proposals for research participation, and did not hesitate to engage in research when the adviser so suggested. Similarly, peers could also motivate participation in research: the teachers maintained that it was sometimes difficult to refuse to participate when other colleagues had agreed to do so. In one participant's words:

P: In fact, the research project was brought in by the principal. So, uh, at the end of the year, we were called up, everybody, and here is the research project [...]. And, at first, they said we're going to do it this way, um, those who want to and all that. At the same time, well, you say to yourself, there are four teachers in a cycle, and three want to participate. So, I'm going to join them, you know - you don't want to stand apart. (Participant 9)

In brief, our results suggest, in line with the literature, that the institutional context was an integral part of what influenced research participation.

Representations related to the classroom context and students

While schools represent the teacher's professional setting, the classroom is their practice site, where their various responsibilities toward the students are carried out. It is therefore normal that several of the representations relating to research participation identified among the teachers involved their classrooms and students. Our participants' comments fell under three themes.

First, the teachers' representation of the classroom could contribute to their accepting or rejecting a research project. One teacher said he had once refused a request to participate in a research project despite her interest in it, because of the characteristics of her group of students:

P: And I said no, I can't. I just can't, I have a group that's really not up to it. 9 of my 16 students had language problems. I said: "No, this year, it's not possible for me, forget it, it's no." So, as much as I would have liked to and would have appreciated it, I still said no. (Participant 8)

Second, some teachers referred to their role as a gatekeeper vis-à-vis their students when accepting research into the classroom. One teacher explained the positive role he could play by raising his students' interest and cultivating a favorable classroom climate wherein his students were used to diligently doing the work assigned, which helped ensure that they would participate seriously in the research project (Participant 11). Other teachers referred to the impact of the relationship of trust between teachers and students, putting it this way:

P: Regardless of the project proposed, if it's presented properly and we tell the students to "trust us," then from then on, they usually participate well. (Participant 13)

However, one teacher adopted a reflexive (but uncritical) stance regarding this use of the teacher-student relationship to make students participate. In her words:

P: The students fill out the survey because the teacher tells them to. And anyway, since I said: "Okay, gang, let's go, we have to do this!," they did it. [They said,] "[Teacher's name] told us to do it!" [...] My regular class is very compliant. I tell them: "Let's do this." And there's no trouble. "OK, she told us we have to do this, so let's do it." You know, they don't question it any more than I did myself with the principal. (Participant 12)

Some teachers mentioned that the students could not consent or refuse to participate given the authority of the teacher or school, or because there was no request for their consent. According to one teacher, if the students had really been able to consent or refuse to participate, "there are quite a few cool kids who would've said no!" (Participant 12), which would have led to a high number of refusals. Thus, we clearly observe here in the context of teacher-student relationship what Heath et al. (2007) reported in a more general way: the "right of gatekeepers to give or withhold access is in practice often conflated with the right to give or withhold consent". Notice that we have also met such a conflation in the context of the school administrator – teacher relationship in the previous section.

The third theme involved is "conflict." After a bad experience participating in research, one teacher ended up with a deep sense of unease, feeling that he'd been unable to fulfill his responsibilities toward his students. The context was as follows: the students in his classroom, along with all students at that grade level at his school, had to fill out a questionnaire. According to this teacher, this questionnaire addressed particularly sensitive themes, with no prior warning. His students showed verbal and non-verbal signs of discomfort while answering. The teacher reported that he wanted to intervene but was immediately told by the research team that the students had to answer all the questions and the teacher had to stand back. Faced with the authority of the research, the teacher felt unable to actualize his responsibility toward the well-being of his students. In his words:

P: I had, as I said, kind of the feeling that, you know, it's *our* students, eh? They're under our care. But then you feel they're not alright. They look at you as if to say: "Do something, I don't want to answer this, I don't want to say it." But you're there and you don't want to hinder the research because, you know, these people have taken the time to come, you don't want to influence it, you don't want to do anything. But at the same time, there's this feeling that, hey gang, I can't help you. [...] When it was happening, I was really saying to myself: "Oh dear, those poor kids." (Participant 1)

Based on these last two themes, we hypothesize that, because of its unusual and extra-institutional nature, accepting a research project into the classroom creates a context in which teachers have difficulty defining their professional responsibilities (Bélanger & Richard, 2017). In fact, it appears that some teachers simply assimilate participation in research to usual classroom activities, despite the fact that they fundamentally differ in their goals and power relationships: usual classroom activities aim academic goals and take place under the authority of the teacher, while participation to research targets a non-academic goal (a scientific goal) and should acknowledge the students' autonomy to consent to the proposed task. A comparable phenomenon of assimilation has been proposed by other researchers at students' level (Denscombe & Aubrook, 1992; Homan, 2001). This unwarranted assimilation may not

have any apparent consequence for the teachers in the vast majority of cases. However, problematic experiences such as that reported by Participant 1 are likely to intensify the adverse consequences of teachers' (and students') poor understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the context of research participation.

Conclusion

In concluding, it should be emphasized this study was exploratory and only a limited number of participants were interviewed. Its aim was to identify the major themes in teachers' representations about research participation and not to infer the frequency of these representations in the population of teachers in general. It should also be pointed out that this study did not examine the quality of participation as such and that no data was collected to this end. One significant limitation of this study is that the body of data used for analysis included only the content of the interviews conducted with the participants. It would have been useful to compare the discourse on the various research projects with information reported directly by the research teams involved. Lastly, we should mention an important bias which was difficult to avoid during the recruiting process and of which we were keenly aware throughout this project, that is, that teachers who do not participate in educational research projects generally, probably did not participate in our study either. Due to this bias, the range of representations, especially those related to a decision not to participate, was most likely not fully explored.

Teachers' representation reported in this article contribute to give us a better idea of the social and professional issues related to teachers' (and, to some extent, students') participation to educational research. We think that these issues have important methodological bearings for educational research, and consequently that researchers should strive for a better understanding of them. First, these representations give us a glimpse of the professional interests of teachers as well as of the social dynamics in which they are situated, both appearing to be significant factors in their decision - or lack thereof - to participate. Such an understanding can be of pragmatic value to researchers, especially novice researchers, helping them to present their projects in ways that better connect to teachers' needs and expectations, or even to adapt their projects to those needs and expectations. Second, our results may help researchers to gain greater sensibility to the possible presence of bias in recruitment. Indeed, we think that a better understanding of what determines teachers' participation to research can help educational researchers to identify categories of teachers more and less likely to get included in their sampling, and take proper action or consideration of it.[‡] Third, many representations reported here raised ethical issues. In our view, a conscientious ethical reflection on a research project can only be done with sufficient knowledge of potential participants' perspective, i.e. an understanding of what they think about participation and of the social constraints they experience with regard to participation. Such knowledge can help researchers to avoid unintentionally creating situations where teachers' agency regarding participation is limited.

In our view, it would be important to extend this exploratory study by examining the representations held by other educational actors, such as school administrators, educational advisers, parents and, of course, students themselves. In addition, it would be interesting to see how the different representations are associated with different research methods or specifications. Such examination would help to produce a better general understanding of the processes and mechanisms involved when social research seeks to gain entry into educational participants' social environments.

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[‡] In the field psychology, such concern was at the basis of many studies aiming to characterize the « subject volunteer » during the 1960' and 1970' (see Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2009).

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