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**Title/Título:** Who is a parent? Teachers' experiences with non-traditional families in urban schools in South Africa

¿Quién es un padre? Experiencias del profesorado con familia no-tradicionales en centros docentes urbanos de Sudáfrica

**Topic:** Parents as educators, their challenging role and current status in school, family and community relationships

Los padres y madres como educadores, los retos de su rol y su situación actual en las relaciones que se establecen entre las familias, los centros docentes y las entidades y servicios sociales comunitarios

**Presentation time/ Día de presentación:** Session in English. Thursday 15, 12:15-1:45 p.m. Room 3, Third Floor

Sesión en Inglés. Jueves 15, 12:15-1:45 p.m. Sala 3, Tercer Piso

### **Abstract**

According to key post-apartheid legislation, the South African Schools Act (no 84 of 1996), a parent is defined as the biological parent, legal guardian or anyone who provides the child with basic care and support. This wide definition of who a parent is has implications for a school-family partnership in South Africa, where what constitutes a family has undergone transformations reflecting global trends and unique contextual conditions. However, schools are often reluctant to come to grips with the changing family. Healthy school and home connections require teachers to understand a family's living circumstances and the unique ways a non-traditional family might support the education of their children. Preschool teachers' experiences of their interaction with non-traditional families in urban schools in South Africa were explored by a qualitative investigation. During a workshop with 25 principals and teachers from six independent preschools, data was gathered using sketches of families drawn by teachers as visual stimuli for focus group interviews. The teachers identified diverse parent groups and household structures and commented on increased communication with caregivers who act as surrogate parents. The latter attend school meetings and parent-teacher interviews and are largely responsible for learning at home. The diverse combinations of individuals that represent the modern family has required a radical change and restructuring of the ways these schools and families work together.