


Child Voices and Pedagogical Gestures in Rural Schools*

Vozes infantis e gestos pedagógicos na escola rural
Voces infantiles y gestos pedagógicos en la escuela rural

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Abstract

The article presents a reflection derived from an investigation on the importance of the visibility of the voices of children within the framework of the processes of participation and agency in 24 rural schools, all this concerning the notion of pedagogical gesture, understood as the articulation in the teacher's work, within relationships among pedagogical practices, pedagogical knowledge, discursive and non-discursive practices, attitudes and technical teaching procedures. At the same time, it is proposed that the pedagogical gesture of rural school teachers may or may not allow rural children to give different meanings to their childhood, to the social particularity of them as agents in the social and cultural school context, as subjects who constitute themselves and who construct their reality with others and their environment.

Keywords

pedagogical gestures; participation; agency; voices; rural school; children

Resumo

O artigo apresenta uma reflexão resultado de uma pesquisa sobre a necessidade de visibilizar as vozes das crianças no marco das escolas rurais; acudindo à noção teórica e prática do gesto pedagógico. Na prática propõe-se seu uso como um condensador para atingir e transformar as práticas pedagógicas. No teórico define-se como a articulação, no ofício do maestro, das relações entre o saber pedagógico, as práticas discursivas e não discursivas, as atitudes afetivas (amor pedagógico), e uns procedimentos técnicos de ensinamento. Assim, propõe-se que o gesto pedagógico dos professores das escolas rurais tem o poder de compreender às crianças nas suas culturas locais, e ao mesmo tempo permitir ou impedir que as crianças rurais dêem distintos sentidos à sua infância, à particularidade social como agentes no contexto escolar, social e cultural e como sujeitos que se constituem a si mesmos e à sua realidade em relação com os outros e seu entorno.

Palavras-chave

gestos pedagógicos; participação; agência; vozes; escola rural; meninos e meninas

Resumen

En este artículo se presenta una reflexión derivada de una investigación sobre la importancia de visibilizar las voces de los niños en el marco de las escuelas rurales, a través de la noción teórica y práctica de gesto pedagógico. En lo práctico, se propone utilizarlo como un condensador para captar y transformar prácticas pedagógicas. En lo teórico, se define como la articulación, en el oficio de maestro, de unas relaciones entre el saber pedagógico, las prácticas discursivas y no discursivas, las actitudes afectivas (amor pedagógico) y unos procedimientos técnicos de enseñanza. De este modo, se propone que el gesto pedagógico de los maestros de escuelas rurales tiene el poder de leer a los chicos en sus culturas locales, y a la vez permitir o impedir que los niños rurales den distintos sentidos a su infancia, a la particularidad social de ellos y ellas como agentes en el contexto escolar, social y cultural y como sujetos que se constituyen a sí mismos y a su realidad en relación con los otros y su entorno.

Palabras clave

gestos pedagógicos; participación; agencia; vozes; escuela rural; niños y niñas

Introduction

Giving more importance to the voices of children is a way to ensure that their advocacy is well-founded and that decision-making is guided by a more comprehensive understanding of all relevant issues. [...], the defense of children should not focus solely on protecting or helping them but should also seek to understand their points of view.

Smith and Taylor (2010, p. 25).

There is currently an interest in exploring the voices of children, as well as how they, in the cultural, social, educational, and historical context, experience childhood daily and how they construct their reality and become subjects. Similarly, there is a current trend in questioning «how they participate in decision-making in their family, school, and neighborhood, in taking care of themselves, in work, leisure time, or in relationships with their peers and adults» (Smith, Taylor, and Gollop, 2010, p. 30). It is also evident that in many cases, «marked as pure and passive by essence, children are granted the right to protection, but at the same time, their ability to act and autonomy are denied» (Giroux, 2003, p. 14), meaning their capacity for agency and participation is overlooked.

Likewise,

In academic literature and societies in general, children have been subject to phenomena of invisibility; that is, their voices and perspectives have been hidden or overshadowed by other people, usually adults who are considered to have more power or capabilities. (Duque-Paramo, 2011, cited by Duque-Paramo, 2013, p. 100)

For this reason, researching from and about the voices of children in rural schools can allow an understanding of the significant processes through which they reproduce the social and appropriate culture. Similarly, it helps understand the implication of rural teachers in these matters through an analysis of what is called, in this case, the pedagogical gesture. This involves the teacher-student pedagogical relationship within various school practices and discourses through which teachers and children experience school and give it meaning. It also relates to how the teacher challenges the student through various pedagogical gestures (Butler, 1997), recognizes them in a certain way, makes their voices visible or not, judges them, accepts or rejects them, and enables them to act in specific ways.

Thus, it is necessary to understand pedagogical gestures not only in the sense of describing them as part of communicative processes but also from the effects they have on school life, the practices they generate, the characteristics they have, the forms of expression, and the meanings they acquire in the relationships between teachers and children, in the context of rural schools. Therefore, although pedagogical gestures may be linked to non-verbal communication, we can go beyond understanding them in the school context in the sense that they «can be unveiled and interpreted in light of feelings and attitudes» (Ospina, 2008). That is, what the teacher expresses in their teaching, how they do it, and their attitude towards this exercise. Similarly, as shown in Figure 1, these pedagogical gestures are related to the training of teachers, epistemological and theoretical positions, teaching practices, life experiences, and discourse and attitude to carry out their pedagogical work. In other words, in each teacher, one or more pedagogical gestures are ultimately configured due to the relationship of all these components, which emerges in the school context when they exercise their pedagogical activities.



Figure 1. Configuration of Pedagogical Gesture in Teachers

Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, the pedagogical gesture plays an essential role in better guiding the educational act to understand the experiences of children in schools. It helps make sense for them, turning these spaces into areas of everyday life, reflecting their interests, realities, and constitution as individuals. It is necessary for the pedagogical gesture of the teacher to make their voices visible, enable their participation and agency, and open avenues to interpret their conceptions of school and daily life, teachers, and their learning.

The Voices of Rural Children as Participation and Agency

Ultimately, it is children who recreate their world.

Díaz (2010, p. 1154).

To understand issues of participation and agency in rural children, it is pertinent to position oneself epistemologically from the anthropology and sociology of childhood. With the former, to take into account the perspective of the children, what they say (Calderón, 2015); understanding that children are subjects with their views, criteria, experiences, and meanings about life and the culture they navigate (Chacón, 2015). Thus, in childhood research, it is essential to include the perspectives of children to understand them through their voices and not through judgments and prejudices constructed by adults (Chacón, 2015). This is the emic point of view. An exciting work in this perspective is that of Ruiz Castiblanco (2013), who poses an intriguing question: At what age does one stop being a child and become a young person in the countryside? She answers that in the region she studies (near Ibagué), a child starts doing adult tasks at the age of 10 (p. 6). But it remains to be seen if this is generalizable to other regions. From the second perspective, children are understood as active social actors; and rights holders who construct their realities and constitute themselves based on them. Therefore, research should focus on their living conditions, activities, relationships, knowledge, and experiences (Calderón 2015). This is the etic point of view.

In this way, sociology theorizes about childhood, presenting children as social beings with agency. In anthropology, the aim is to interact with children through methodologies that make their voices visible and help them understand their perspectives on life, accounting for that.

In that sense, it is evident that the voices of children are still, in many cases, absent or invisible, especially in the educational context, particularly in rural areas. Even though they are essential participants in educational processes in schools, in the end, adults (teachers and administrators) make decisions and control what they can do and say, how and when. The voices (participation and agency) of children in schools end up being the prerogative of teachers, and depending on their pedagogical gesture, they enable or empower (or not) children to express and exercise them.

Children in rural contexts today have diverse ways of experiencing their childhoods. In any case, they are actors and agents influencing the social

organization of their families, small villages, and schools. At the same time, they are influenced by their other family members, neighbors, and, in the case of school, by their peers and teachers. In that sense, children contribute to helping us understand the nature of childhood and solve the problems that affect their lives (Smith, Taylor, and Gallop, 2010). This is also related to the fact that in each context, they deploy various ways of experiencing their childhoods (Pavez, 2012). However, rural children have not had real social, political, and cultural guarantees that ensure a good quality of life. The rural child has generally been narrated and told by others, seen through others, and represented through traits others interpret. In the rural school context, their voices have generally had no opportunity to express themselves; therefore, their ways of seeing the world, their cultures, their conceptions, and their ways of becoming subjects, participating, and building their realities have been ignored.

The task is to understand the relationships between teachers and children, mediated by the pedagogical gesture. We know this, hypothetically, as the bodily, symbolic forms, attitudes, and discourses with which the teacher exercises their educational practice. It gives space to rural children as subjects, agents, and actors who are often relegated to the place of immature, incapable, and even irrelevant subjects.

Therefore, it is essential to know if teachers, in this case, rural teachers, recognize children as agents and actors who can reconfigure and resignify their social and cultural realities in their context. In the same sense, their pedagogical gesture guarantees and stimulates the freedom of expression of children, their creativity, and their ability to judge the world around them. It is vital to «make children visible through words, demonstrate that they are social subjects and that their voices are a way of interpreting reality and reading the world» (Cuervo and Rincón, 2009, p. 68). Mainly because the pedagogical gesture involves cultural issues, a high percentage of rural schools are served by teachers from urban areas or have worked in urban school settings. In this sense, the teacher will have a pedagogical gesture (and it is natural) linked to their own culture and not that of the rural child. «This openness to understanding childhood in rural areas, setting aside the urban-centric and hegemonic view, presents great difficulties and challenges» (Ávila and Vargas, 2017, p. 228). Therefore, it will be necessary for the pedagogical gesture to respect these cultural dynamics specific to each rural context, considering that children build their reality based on their school experience. Hence,

the importance of listening to them about how they perceive school to recognize their voices as a possibility to improve educational processes and make educational institutions spaces where joy, creativity, and a passion for knowledge are part of everyday life (Cifuentes Garzón, 2015).

On the other hand, San Fabián-Morato (2008) reflects on student participation in schools and the question, «Are there students in the centers, or only academic records and disciplined bodies?» In response, she asserts that students are victims of a reduced status and are even treated as social handicaps, which could affect the practice of their rights in schools. In that sense, it is expected to consider what they say and think since this can «help us improve teaching, weave coexistence, and give meaning to their stay in school. We need to review our conception and way of relating to minors, treating them as active subjects, entering into dialogue with them» (p. 27).

On the other hand, Duque-Páramo (2013) points out that generally, education policies and programs directed at children «assume that they are underage, dependent beings, predominantly vulnerable, passive recipients of assistance and protection actions defined by others, who are generally adults with normative and naturalized ideas about childhood» (p. 81). It must, therefore, be assumed that «girls and boys are at the same time open subjects, social agents and actors» (p. 81).

In that sense, making the voices of children in rural schools visible to teachers is a fundamental task in education. The idea is that they need formative spaces that help them shape themselves as individuals with the ability for agency, reflection, and transformation.

Between Voices and Gestures

Each voice is shaped by its owner's particular cultural history and previous experience. The voice, therefore, suggests the means that students have at their disposal to make themselves «heard» and define themselves as active participants in the world. Exhibiting an individual voice means, quoting Bakhtin, «re-saying a text in one's own words» (McLaren, 2005, p. 325).

Education is ethical; it is a responsive relationship with others, and the educator is passionate about words, the transmission of words, welcoming and hospitality, and giving. The educator is, first and foremost, the one who transmits the spoken word, the word of the past, of tradition, to a newcomer, not for them to repeat it but

to renew it, to say it differently, to turn it into «living words.» However, the educator is also the one who picks up the word of the other, the new word, the word of the newcomer. The educator listens to the word of the other and, through it, transforms and renews themselves (Mèlich, 2012, p. 50).

Like any field of research, that of school and childhood is composed of approaches, analyses, studies, and concepts; of practices that include a set of actions, programs, and policies; and finally, of a wide range of intervening actors (Bustelo, 2005, p. 254). In this case, the issue of the visibility/invisibility of the voices of children in rural schools is at stake. Acknowledging that children, in general, need opportunities to enhance their participation and build the social in their territories, they, in their discourses and actions, in their sayings and doings, construct their reality (Berger and Luckmann, 2003) and constitute themselves as subjects with agency (Pavez, 2012), as active participants in the construction of their daily lives (Smith and Taylor, 2010). They are «social actors participating in the construction and determination of their own lives, of those around them, and of the societies they live in» (Pavez, 2012, p. 94). In school, this is important because, among other things, it generates «new ways of relating, on which we could expand our knowledge and decisions» (Díaz, 2010). In this sense, teachers in rural areas must know that children «are not passive objects in social structures and economic or political processes but active subjects in the construction and determination of their own lives» (Prout and James, 1990, cited by Sosenski, 2016, p. 44).

Similarly, it is necessary to understand, from their voices, their conceptions about school, teachers, territory, and culture. This allows for better management of the educational act, shaping a pedagogical gesture in teachers that helps recognize them as capable of doing and saying. «Through action and discourse, individuals show who they are, actively reveal their unique and personal identity, and make their appearance in the human world» (Arendt, 2005, p. 208).

Giving voice to children allows their capabilities to rise and express their conceptions of life, understanding how they shape and redefine their social and cultural realities. Especially, knowing that in school, as well as in

[...] official discourses, mass media targeted at children, and even graphic and visual arts have been manufactured by a world of adults (and I add, urban) who, for the most part, have sought to determine the experiences of children. (Sosenski y Albarrán, 2012, p. 11)

Generally, «adults have privileged what they consider important for the protection of the child and have neglected, willingly or unwillingly, to guarantee and stimulate their freedom of expression» (Gómez-Mendoza and Alzate-Piedrahita, 2013, p. 84).

Amid this, a pedagogical gesture in rural teachers that makes their voices visible can help understand the new rural childhoods that are emerging today. «When investigating children, conceptions and reflections on childhood are revealed that unveil their representation of the social» (García and Gallego, 2011, p. 19). This is necessary for the improvement of rural educational practices so that «the school as a social and democratic institution can effectively contribute to the formation of new citizens who contribute to the political, economic, and social development of the country, a task in which teachers have a transcendental function» (Cifuentes, 2015, p. 165). Similarly, to recognize and value their points of view, thoughts, dreams, problems, needs, and interests in the face of various situations that arise in the educational space and rural daily life. Also, to «analyze their own experiences, as well as to illuminate the processes by which those experiences were produced, legitimized, or denied» (McLaren, 2005, p. 321).

Regarding the term «voice of the students,» Susinos (2012) states that they are «all those initiatives undertaken by schools aimed at increasing the protagonism of students in decision-making about the design, management, and evaluation of any aspect of school life» (p. 16).

On the other hand, McLaren (2005), referring to the voice of students, states:

Students cannot learn «profitably» unless teachers understand the different ways in which their perceptions and identities are constituted. Teachers need to know how experiences produced in different domains of everyday life produce, in turn, the different voices that students use to give meaning to their worlds and, consequently, to their existence in society (p. 322).

Again, McLaren (2005), building on the ideas of Giroux about voice, states that this:

Refers to the multifaceted and articulated meanings with which students and teachers actively confront each other in dialogue. Voice is an essential pedagogical concept because it alerts teachers that every discourse is historically situated and culturally mediated and derives part of its meaning from interaction with others. Although the term voice may refer to an internalized, private discourse, such discourse cannot be understood without situating it in a universe of shared meanings, that

is, in the symbols, narratives, and social practices of the cultural community where the dialogue takes place. Voice refers to the cultural grammar and knowledge that individuals use to interpret and articulate experience. The individual voice must be understood within its cultural and historical specificity. How students, teachers, and others define themselves and name their experiences is central to pedagogical concern because it helps educators understand how meaning is produced, legitimized, and delegitimized in the classroom (p. 325).

In this sense, the visibility of the voices of children in rural schools is also an opportunity to understand which educational practices are privileged in these contexts and their impact on the reality of everyday life. Understanding that this «is continually reaffirmed in the interaction of individuals with others» (Berger and Luckmann, 2003) and their rural culture, in the sense that «being able to speak about oneself, about the everyday experience and family structure, about situations and conflicts in different areas of belonging, is an invaluable aid for collective creation and learning» (Arfuch, 2016, p. 240).

Similarly, it helps to:

Make subjects visible to communities, as in relational exercise, a series of abilities are deployed for listening, reflecting, communicating respectfully, valuing what others say, taking turns, expressing thoughts, promoting the meeting of many voices that would favor interaction with the world from a critical stance that would contribute, in turn, to the democratization of society (Cuervo and Rincón, 2009, p. 71).

Make visible the voices of children in rural schools, respecting the same language as «the intrinsic capacity for vocal expressiveness possessed by the human organism» (Berger and Luckmann, 2003). Above all, it is the possibility of knowing the reality of their daily lives, as this «is life with the language that I share with my peers and through it. Therefore, understanding language is essential for any understanding of the reality of daily life» (p. 53). Each voice of a child is permeated by their culture; therefore, voices represent «the means that students have at their disposal to make themselves «heard» and define themselves as active participants in the world» (McLaren, 2005).

Now, gestures play a fundamental role in classroom interaction and the relationship that, according to non-verbal communication, teachers and their students establish (Ospina, 2008). According to her:

The gesture as text, [...], tells us what is behind a look, a smile, an approach. It allows us to read and unveil what underlies interaction in the non-verbal

communication of the teacher with their students. Therefore, the gesture as text links the teacher [...] in interaction with their students. Gestures that come to life and take on meaning in interaction. The teacher reads and interprets that gesture, that text; in turn, the student reads and interprets that text, those gestures of their teacher, in pedagogical interaction (p. 56).

In this way:

[...] proposing a gestural corpus containing meaningful gestures for pedagogical interaction becomes essential. Gestures that can be revealed, transcribed, and analyzed to find the underlying meanings. Accounting for a gestural corpus reveals the interaction between the teacher and their students through gestures and shows how communicative interaction is structured, organized, and developed in the class» (pp. 202-203).

Similarly, the author argues that:

[...] gestures invite students to participate in class. Through gestures, attractive spaces are created for students, encouraging them to intervene in class. They immerse them in the topic being discussed. The teacher creates interest through their face, gaze, and smile, encouraging their students' participation. In this way, gestures narrate with body movements, the stories, explanations, and contents of the subjects analyzed. For students, the gesture of their teacher is fundamental since through it, through the gesture of the teacher, the student has access to knowledge (p. 214).

Gestures significantly influence teaching and learning processes in the sense that rural teachers can generate an «environment of participation and pleasure for students who read and reveal meanings in the non-verbal communication of their teachers» (p. 216).

In a second look, the pedagogical gesture can be understood as a minimal gesture (Ribetto, 2014); that is,

an event that breaks in and provokes experience. The gesture, its presence, comes before... before any reform in-laws, any didactic proposal, any adaptation of the curriculum, any pedagogical, political project. The gesture precedes these movements: it is a composition and a passage between all of them (p. 8).

The author proposes the concept of minimal gesturality, taking up an idea from Carlos Skliar (2011), who proposes reading it as an agency that allows us to think about education as a possible relationship of alterity. Something like:

Understanding the effects of this tension: practices, experiences, curricula, spaces, times... Gestures embodied in the relationships between the subjects who experience possible schools... Minimal gesturality that interrogates «about the language in which we formulate the educational [...] about how the educational is produced [...] opening the possibility of thinking about «what happens,» «what happens to us» in education every day (Skliar, 2011, p. 260, cited by Ribetto, 2014, p. 3).

Manghi-Haquin (2016) presents the pedagogical link category as a fundamental element for developing curricular learning and student training, emphasizing the need for teachers to connect with their students and build a pedagogical relationship. «This relationship takes place not only through the words that are said (linguistic resources) but also through other communicative resources such as looks, body postures, and gestures typical of face-to-face interaction» (p. 11). This face-to-face between teachers and students brings us closer to the notion of pedagogical gesture. On the other hand, Prieto (2006, cited by Manghi-Haquin, 2016) points out that «teachers are beings of communication, we have the permanent need to interact with others, to relate to our learners, to expose ourselves reciprocally to our looks, voices, and gestures, which goes beyond curricular content» (p. 12).

Castillo (2015) presents the categories of corporeality and educational gesture, referring to a territory where the body and meanings allow new possibilities for education. «A type of corporeality understood as a sensitive sense and the educational gesture as an organic statement that presents body-thought in all its novelty» (p. 121). According to this author, «the importance of bodily gesture is presented as a symbolic gesture that underlies the construction of a cultural and educational space full of meanings» (p. 126), as it proposes that «from an anthropological and symbolic perspective, we can find bases to build an integrating view of the body and gesture in favor of education» (p. 128). The pedagogical gesture in this sense could also influence the feelings that children feel or construct about the territory of the rural school, that is, a type of topophilia —a sense of belonging to a territory— (Tuan, 2007), generated from the pedagogical gestures of teachers in these contexts.

On the other hand, pedagogical gestures arise in school practices and discursive practices that occur in the school context, related to recognizing, directing, teaching, presenting, demanding, evaluating, recognizing, punishing, etc. It could be said that these are related, on the one hand, to pedagogical display

(Prange, 2002, cited by Runge 2019), which refers to what is shown when something is taught; that is, always in every educational act, in every school practice, something is shown as an initial condition of every teaching and learning process, because «without showing, there is no education; everywhere education is practiced, something is shown» (Prange, 2002, cited by Runge, 2019). Likewise, the attitude or attitudes with which the teacher exercises pedagogical and discursive practices; in this way, pedagogical gestures are educational action but also attitudes or ways of teaching or expressing educational action. In short, it is what is taught (shown) and how it is taught (attitude).

According to Runge (2019), just as in pedagogical display, in pedagogical gestures, there are three dynamics that constitute them: a) directionality (the gesture is saying something to someone or a group): as communicative acts, they constantly address students, reinforcing specific labels about them that teachers are assigning in school practices; ways in which they refer to students to congratulate them, admonish them, take attendance, check assignments, etc.; b) recognition (gestures see in specific ways, they have forms of expression that recognize the other as a subject): the ways in which teachers/students are perceived in their difference and in their role, pedagogical gestures visualize or not the other, make it possible or not for them to act in specific ways, submit them; c) subjectivation (gestures configure specific types of subjects and subjectivities): how someone becomes a subject, how they see themselves and are seen by others in the framework of the pedagogical gestures that embody school and discursive practices of teachers. Figure 2 presents the scheme of pedagogical gestures built from the theoretical and empirical understandings discussed in the preceding pages.



Figure 2. Scheme of pedagogical gestures of teachers

Source: Own elaboration.

In a third perspective, we must consider the warnings given by authors regarding the illusion of describing pedagogical gestures as a transparent and neutral extension of good pedagogical intentions. On the one hand, as researchers, we are cautioned about the epistemological and ethical risks of treating subjects/children as objects: the article «Giving a Voice to Children, Reflections from History» (Sosenski, 2016) presents a robust discussion about the use of voices of children in research, stating that we mainly use their voices to create academic texts, reports, projects, or strategies to try to build solutions to their specific issues. However, in the quest to rescue the voices of children from the marginalization in which they are located, as writers of the texts, we end up appropriating their words, thus controlling, editing, and even censoring them. In that sense, the relationships between pedagogical gesture and pedagogical discourse can also be contradictory and ambivalent.

In the article «Gestures: Visible Interaction in Higher Education Classrooms» (Ospina and González, 2009), the authors argue about the importance of gestures in the pedagogical interaction of teachers with their students in higher education and how the use of articulated words in the transmission of academic content separates gazes, faces, smiles, and proximities that manifest in pedagogical interactions and are essential for the communication of knowledge. This is a powerful observation as it alerts us to the duplicity of codes that can coexist between the gesture and the word of teachers, and it is a crucial phenomenon to consider in research.

Finally, these tensions in pedagogical gesture are proposed as constitutive tensions of pedagogical gesture. According to Saldarriaga (2019), a gesture

[...] is not a mere gesture thrown into the air or a mechanical repetition of movements, but a movement or a series of physical, technical acts that simultaneously mobilize or emit language, communicate with symbols, express emotions, and articulate social relationships. A gesture or a chain of directed gestures that is identified by transmitting either a technical purpose, a meaning or concept, or an affective vibration in a play of relational planes. But there is a crucial point to note: if we conceive «the gesture» as something much more complex than the physical execution of an idea, we must approach it more as a compound of techniques (functional actions) and languages (symbolism, emotion, or knowledge) that link social relationships, relationships between subjects situated socially and culturally. The gestural poses the problem of the tensional and even contradictory coexistence

of heterogeneity of functions and meanings; the convergence of plurivalent codes among subjects located in roles or «positions of the subject» (p. 7).

These warnings should be a vital part of the analysis of the games of visibility and invisibility of the voices of children, especially rural children.

The Rural School (New School) as a Setting for Children's Participation and Agency

Rural childhood, like other childhoods, does not adhere to unequivocal definitions since they are «subject to a process of constant struggle and negotiation both in the public sphere (media, social policy, academic field) and in the private sphere» (Sánchez, 2004, p. 150). Rural children, therefore, need opportunities to enhance their participation and construct the social fabric in their territories. Through their discourses and actions, they construct their reality, becoming subjects with the capacity for agency. However, discussions about rural childhood, similar to urban and indigenous childhoods, often stem from an adult-centric perspective. This viewpoint determines what it means to be a child and what a child should do, often resulting in «interpretations of rural childhood that limit its real understanding as subjects configured within a fabric of the symbolic, cultural, economic, mediated by the biophysical setting» (Ávila and Vargas, 2017, p. 267). Flor Edilma Osorio, a prominent scholar of rurality and rural youth, supports these assertions.

The arrogance and power of knowledge usually concentrated in cities, have shaped various imaginaries and representations regarding rural areas and their inhabitants. These must be reworked to establish horizontal and equitable relationships between rural and urban societies. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize rural residents' agency, with all their tensions, dilemmas, and interests, similar to any society (Osorio, 2014, p. 18).

Osorio provides a typology to detect possible identity situations in these rural children. This typology is suggestive:

Rural identities must be understood as plural, multidimensional, and dynamic identities. For instance, we identify some forms of rural identity under construction that highlight their diversity. We encounter the everyday lived rural identity, enjoyed and endured as part of a permanent belonging to that place, even across generations. There is also the yearned rural identity, experienced through

migrations, where the rural is lived as a spatial dimension of identity, even when not residing there. The sought rural identity involves neorurals and those seeking the rural for functional reasons of comfort and well-being, living there as a primary or secondary residence but not feeling like a true part of it, sometimes avoiding and even disparaging rural society. The assigned rural identity is imposed based on behaviors and attitudes identified as rural (usually with disdain) compared to urban customs, ways of expression, or dressing, among others, as highlighted by Di Méo and Buleón (2005), which are indicative of stigmatization. Lastly, there is a shameful rural identity where stigmas take a toll, which Wacquant has pointed out as territorial stigmatization, applicable in urban contexts but also highly relevant in rural cases. This stigmatization can be easily escaped or disguised by changing location and migrating, as has historically happened (Osorio, 2014, p. 6).

Therefore, the challenge is to identify how these children position themselves within these identities through generational power relations where the thoughts and statements of adults dominate, particularly in the rural school setting and through the pedagogical gesture.

In the context of the «Escuela Nueva» (New School), following Villar (1995), it can be observed how, in this model, the teacher is seen as a continuous recreator prepared for constant adaptation of strategies and an active agent in program development. However, due to the expansion of the program to all rural schools in the country, there has been a cooling off of a model that sought mechanical replication, turning the teacher into an adopter of strategies rather than an adapter. This remains a challenge for teachers in this model: on the one hand, they have to teach all subjects to all grades based on guides and texts, reduced to the mere instrumental and mechanical application of the model, influenced by behaviorism and educational technology (Gómez, 1995). On the other hand, they must achieve alignment between their pedagogical gestures and the culture of these contexts, not conforming to the logic of urban schools. This requires teachers to construct their pedagogical practice in harmony with the dynamics of rural contexts in their cultural, social, and economic diversity.

However, Colbert (1999) presents the «Escuela Nueva» as an excellent example of a local innovation that became a Colombian national policy, inspiring many other countries worldwide. According to the author, this system primarily provides active learning, a closer relationship between the school and the community, and a flexible promotion mechanism adapted

to the lifestyle of the peasant child. Thus, it becomes an ideal model for ensuring the participation of children and agency in rural contexts, allowing students to progress at their own learning pace. Moreover, children can temporarily leave school to help their parents in agricultural activities (harvesting), in case of illness, or any other valid situation, without the risk of being unable to return and continue their studies. It represents a commitment to

deformalize the school, making it flexible, relevant, useful, creative, enjoyable, sensitive to intelligence and thought, respectful of diversity, attentive to the needs of children, receptive to the needs of teachers, open to the participation of parents and the community, responsible for its results in society» (Torres, 1992, p. 11).

The above indicates that this model, from its structure, provides the possibility for the participation of children; its guarantee will then depend on the pedagogical gestures of the teachers. In any case, «it is pedagogically how the formative relationship between the teacher, the guides, the learning corners, the library, the school government, and the interaction with the community can be best illuminated» (Flórez, 1995, p. 218), as well as the effective participation of boys and girls.

However, in a more recent analysis, Forero (2013) asserts that

The rural school shares with the school, in general, the fact of being established to socialize knowledge, but in terms of management, there are profound differences whose implications lead to pointing out that the educational quality generated there is not sufficient to optimize the living conditions of rural communities, which means that the objective for which they were designed is not achieved, as long as substantial changes are not proposed in terms of management and role of the rural multigrade classroom teacher. (p. 7)

The author also emphasizes that teacher intervention in rural schools has a fundamental influence on the quality of education provided, with specific responsibilities to guide, plan, and organize pedagogical activities (Forero, 2013), and, of course, for the participation of the children. Consequently, the flexible educational model «Escuela Nueva» demands diverse, innovative, and dynamic teacher practices, emphasizing the preservation of specific elements of communities (Pineda de Cuadros, 2014). Besides that, the ongoing discussion about «Escuela Nueva» revolves around the need for teachers to improve their pedagogical practices, update their teaching methods, prepare better lessons, and be more dynamic

and affectionate with children (Jiménez, 2016). It also emphasizes the need for teachers to reflect proactively and critically on the pedagogical gestures of rural teachers, the visibility or invisibility of the voices of rural children, and the relationship between teacher/student/rural culture.

Conclusions

The preceding overview presents significant challenges for research in education for children in rural contexts who currently experience diverse forms of childhood. In any case, these children are actors and agents influencing the social organization of their families, communities, and schools. Simultaneously, they are influenced by other family members, neighbors, peers, and teachers who form part of a cultural environment. Likewise, «Escuela Nueva» has characteristics that can configure it as a conducive setting for their participation. In this sense, children can contribute substantially to understanding the nature of childhood and addressing issues affecting their lives (Smith and Taylor, 2010). This is also related to the fact that in each context, they unfold diverse ways of experiencing their childhoods (Pavez, 2012). Therefore, there is an essential task in rural education that largely relies on teachers' commitment and pedagogical gestures.

Studying the pedagogical gesture about the school, teaching, and teacher training is relatively new in our context. Here, an attempt will be made to construct a complex, tensional concept that helps understand how it shapes teachers through pedagogical, discursive practices and attitudes concerning the visibility or invisibility of the voices of rural children, their agency, and participation. How do we construct new pedagogical forms that enable schools to read, listen, and see rural cultures and specific childhoods within them?

Studying the pedagogical gesture and their relation to the participation of children and agencies in rural education is crucial. Firstly, it involves a dialogical and symbolic or non-verbal attitude of both the teacher and the child. Pedagogical gestures are not just expressed in non-verbal language; they also convey the sense of what is said and done with gestures. Secondly, it can account for the practice of the teacher, participation of children, recognition, and inclusion in the educational, social, political, and cultural aspects of their territory. It addresses their visibility or invisibility as participants who negotiate, intervene, teach, and learn. Finally, it must be recognized that pedagogical gestures cannot be understood through a theory of gestures, as there is «no theory of the

interpretation of gestures» (Flusser, 1994). Instead, understanding comes from observation and analysis, largely ethnographic, of the act of teaching in specific school practices (classes, school activities, etc.), with concrete actors (teachers) who, by performing and showcasing these in the school setting, demonstrate and activate the versatility of pedagogical gestures.

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