

Aspirations of Rural Schooled Youth. Peasant Habitus and Conditions of Educability

Álvaro Andrés Rivera Sepúlveda¹, Omar Cabrales Salazar², Laura Fernanda Ramírez Sánchez³

Abstract

The aspirations of rural schooled young people are investigated from the perspective of the habitus of origin and the conditions of educability. A descriptive study with a mixed approach was designed with the participation of students, teachers, directors and parents of rural educational institutions in a Colombian province. The results show that the habitus of origin hastens many young people to establish aspirations that are not in accordance with the academic project established by the school, but also reveals a process of reordering of the habitus due to school discourses. The school's interest in having more and more young people pursue higher education is truncated by the force of attraction of cultural and socio-familial capitals. Likewise, the aspirations of young people, in terms of rooting/ uprooting, are strongly based on an objective impossibility: hopelessness in the face of the life opportunities offered by the countryside for small and medium producers. It is concluded that the rural school cannot strengthen the peasant habitus and achieve its educational purposes if, in the first place, the structural bases of exclusion and social injustice that the Colombian agricultural sector is going through are not modified.

Keywords: *Habitus of Origin, Peasant Class, Rural Education, Rural Youth, Youth Aspirations.*

Introduction

Evidence from recent decades in Latin America shows that, despite the improvement in school conditions for the least favored population, learning outcomes and academic trajectories continue to be unequal (ECLAC, 2022; Gentili, 2011). While this is largely due to the existence of an inequitable educational system, it is also significantly influenced by the socio-familial and cultural predispositions from which many students come, which do not seem to harmonize with the archetypes on which formal schooling is based (Saforcada, 2020).

One of the aspects that is strongly permeated by social and educational injustice is precisely the way in which schooled young people, those who are closer to finishing high school, form aspirations about their academic and life projection in the medium and short term (Martín and Gómez, 2017). Young people whose capitals of origin and habitus harmonize with the project established by the school build aspirations in line with school discourses. In contrast, young people who experience serious discontinuities between their predispositions and what the school demands of them, tend to experience certain dilemmas between their longings, those discourses and the objective possibilities.

Indeed, Gale and Parker (2015) point out that schooled youth from disadvantaged backgrounds project historical and spatial aspirations in terms of the desired future being limited to the possibilities/impossibilities offered by access to resources and geographic location. For their part, Zipin et al. (2015) argue that young people from low socioeconomic regions form their aspirations from the habitus of origin, but also from populist mediations of an ideological type, however, some also do so from a fictional horizon of their future.

Similar to the previous approaches, Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2002) confirm that socio-familial and school-community capital strongly influence the way in which rural youth define their post-school

¹ Research teacher Faculty of Education and Humanities, New Granada Military University, Bogotá, Colombia, Email: alvaro.rivera@unimilitar.edu.co

² Research teacher Faculty of Education and Humanities, New Granada Military University, Bogotá, Colombia, Email: omar.cabrales@unimilitar.edu.co

³ Research assistant Faculty of Engineering, New Granada Military University, Bogotá, Colombia, Email: est.lauraf.ramirez@unimilitar.edu.co

itineraries. In the same direction, Baillergeau and Duyvendak (2022) situate aspiration capacity as the reserve of resources that young people have to orient their commitments and prepare for the future, which can be learned, but also wither away. In this sense, Bok (2010) problematizes the deficit conception of young people of low socioeconomic status as lacking aspirations; instead, he proposes to understand that these young people, who have substantial aspirations, only lack sufficient dispositions to develop them.

That said, this paper investigates the aspirations of rural schooled youths according to their habitus of origin, as well as the conditions of educability with which they experience their passage through school. The objective of this study is to analyze the process of shaping aspirations by examining their constitutive aspects and the way they are intertwined in the case of rural youth.

Theoretical Framework

Educability Conditions

The concept of educability conditions emerges as an alternative to explain why, although access to the educational system has increased in recent decades, it has not contributed to leveling learning outcomes nor has it prevented the social reproduction of poverty (Piketti, 2014; Schmelkes, 2020). According to Tedesco (2012) "insisting on the conditions of educability makes it possible to overcome naive visions that assume that it is possible to achieve good educational results without intervening in the structural bases that generate poverty and exclusion" (Tedesco 2012:124). From this point of view, the failure of the educational system with respect to the disadvantaged classes is not due to the system *per se*, but to the social conditions of injustice in the midst of which the system operates.

The answers to why a student from a disadvantaged family experiences serious learning difficulties and why they do not project higher educational aspirations are not to be found in pedagogical theories, but require looking at the structural conditions that generate injustice and exclusion. Indeed, Bonal and Tarabini (2010) ask "what are the conditions of social equity necessary for there to be educational equity?" (Tarabini, 2010, p. 29), indicating that it is necessary to analyze pedagogical action within the framework of a societal project, since only if greater social justice is guaranteed will it be possible for educational success to reach a majority population (Tedesco, 2012).

From this perspective, it is recognized that in order to have a successful educational experience, it is not enough to attend school. It is not even enough for the school to be good: it requires a set of resources, attitudes and predispositions, some of which must be acquired a priori, and which the school does not provide. "Educational achievement implies minimum material, affective and cultural conditions that bring the student closer to the minimum required by the school institution" (Bonal and Tarabini, 2010, p. 28). It is obvious that those who do not enjoy this set of resources will experience significant difficulties in achieving the objectives proposed by the educational system.

The formal education system seems to be built on the premise that the entire population should enjoy the conditions of educability necessary for school achievement. In this sense, the core of this conceptual proposal consists of demonstrating, on the one hand, that in societies with high levels of injustice and inequity, children and young people from less favored classes suffer from these conditions (Saforcada, 2020). On the other, that the learning and training difficulties evidenced in many educational systems are not due to pedagogical aspects, but precisely to the conditions of social inequity with which many children and young people attend school (De Alencar and Morais, 2021; Do Carmo, 2017).

The conditions of educability include all the variables surrounding a person's life that are favorable or unfavorable for educational achievement, such as family composition and environment, parental education, and cultural environment, among others. In contexts with high levels of ineducability, some of these conditions are mitigated from the system; school feeding programs or free education policies are not fortuitous (Acosta, 2019). However, many of these aspects transcend the scope of the school, and that is why, within the framework of a broader social project, pedagogical action must be reviewed.

Understanding that they imply a cultural-symbolic dimension, and not only a material one, the conditions of educability and ineducability also cause people to experience and perceive the world in multiple ways, thus forming habitus of origin according to which they organize priorities, make decisions and project themselves into the future. Bonal and Tarabini (2010) argue that "living in poverty is a unique life experience for many young people". In one way or another, "they discover that their daily life does not correspond to the kind of presence that the school institution expects" (Bonal and Tarabini, 2010, p. 177). In other words, school success requires not only minimum conditions of educability, but also a way of seeing, understanding and being in the world that is compatible with the school project.

Capitals and Habitus of Origin

According to Pierre Bourdieu, social origin, inherited cultural capital and primary habitus (and not only objective possibilities) determine the way in which people project their future, thus, "the presence of the past of a false anticipation of the future manifests itself when the gap between objective possibilities and practices constrains to invoke the momentum of a past trajectory and the hysteresis of old dispositions" (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 114). The continuity between objective possibilities and subjective expectations leads, for example, to the fact that many disadvantaged families do not even consider starting university studies; according to Bourdieu and Passeron (2009) "the subjective expectation of access to higher education tends to be even weaker than their objective possibilities for the most disadvantaged sectors" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2009, p. 19).

Among young people from disadvantaged families, the limitation of aspirations is a more influential aspect than the lack of material resources. In a complementary sense, young people who, even with few objective possibilities, manage to gain access to higher education, see the limitation of their aspirations materialized by the type of studies they choose, thus "the less favored and middle classes opt for the faculties of letters while the privileged classes for those of science" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2009, p. 19). In this sense, the author suggests that the choice of higher status degrees becomes more frequent as social origin rises.

Inherited cultural capital has three dimensions: a. incorporation (cultural inheritance through home experiences); b. objectification (cultural artifacts of high symbolic and material value); c. institutionalization (academic degrees). In this sense, "the most favored students owe to their environment of origin habits, training and attitudes that serve them directly in their academic tasks, but also knowledge, know-how, tastes and a good taste whose academic profitability is indirect but evident" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2009, p. 32). The author attempts to demonstrate two hypotheses: the first, that regardless of the field in which they are valued, young people demonstrate a much richer cultural background when their social origin is higher; the second, that there is a greater affinity between the cultural habits of the upper classes and the demands of the educational system (Martinez 2017).

Social capital, on the other hand, corresponds to "the extent of the network of links that can be effectively mobilized and the volume of capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) that each of those with whom it is linked possesses" (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 221). Thus, those who belong to the developed classes enjoy abundant economic resources, as well as a network of relationships that contributes to increase the other capitals in mutual synergy and reciprocity.

That said, Bourdieu considers that each class group experiences its relationship with culture differently within the educational system. "For the children of peasants, workers, employees or small merchants, the acquisition of educational culture is equivalent to acculturation" (Bourdieu and Passeron 2009, p. 39); the middle class in its ideal of social ascent and in function of the discipline and effort that characterizes it is oriented towards the acquisition of such culture (Henríquez 2014); for its part, elite culture simply undergoes a process of assimilation.

In *The Reproduction*, Bourdieu defends the idea that it is due to the continuity that exists between the cultural capital of the privileged sectors and the cultural capital inculcated by the school that the educational system reproduces social inequalities. The school perpetuates these inequalities to the extent that what it offers is articulated with the cultural heritage of the privileged classes. This phenomenon ends up exciting

feelings of legitimate exclusion vis-à-vis the educational system among young people from the disadvantaged and middle classes, which, as the author warns, "may never be as strong as when it takes on the appearance of genuine self-exclusion" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2018, p. 75). And it is also due to this phenomenon that formal equalization of opportunities does not in any sense mitigate inequalities in education, on the contrary, it deepens them (Sá, 2022).

Inherited social origin and cultural capital shape class habitus according to which each social group configures its own system of perception and valuation: that is, its ways of being, feeling, thinking and acting in the world. They are forged in primary pedagogical work (PT) carried out at home and are progressively consolidated as lasting dispositions (Martínez, 2017). Thus, while some are entrenched in their idea of inherited culture (elite), others are entrenched in their idea of no culture, of impossible class (underprivileged). Sectors of the middle class, moved by social ascent, and product of their austerity and effort, live it as a slope (Bourdieu, 2011). What is certain is that for the disadvantaged and middle classes there is a huge "distance between the primary habitus inculcated by the primary PT and the habitus inculcated by the dominant PT" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2018, p. 79).

Methodology

This research was carried out in the Province of Sabana Centro of the Department of Cundinamarca (Colombia), which borders the city of Bogotá to the south and has an area of 1,024 km², of which approximately 90% is rural land and 10% is urban land; it also has a population of 700,000 inhabitants: 42% of the population is rural and 52% urban. Specifically, three rural educational institutions in this region were defined as the setting for the study, taking into account that they were more than 30 years old, offered all grades up to high school and had a deep or intermediate degree of rurality.

A study was designed with a mixed approach and descriptive type (Núñez 2017; Pereira 2011), in the framework of which 13 field visits were conducted between June 2022 and November 2023 and the following research techniques were applied: first, 18 individual in-depth interviews with three school principals, twelve teachers and three parents, who were selected based on their seniority in the institution and their link with students in the upper grades (10th and 11th). Second, three focus groups: one with teachers and two with parents (each with five participants), considering the same selection criteria. Third, a social questionnaire addressed to the 160 students in the upper grades (10th and 11th) of the three institutions, aged between 15 and 17 years, which was finally answered by 127 students, that is, 79% of the participants, thus complying with a representative sample and a distrust level of 95%.

All the research techniques were applied on the premises of the educational institutions, except for some interviews and a focus group with parents, which were carried out at home. The questionnaire was designed in LimeSurvey and was sent to the students by e-mail and cell phone; however, to ensure greater participation it was necessary to provide direct support in the classroom. It is worth mentioning that this research was approved by the Research Ethics, Bioethics and Scientific Integrity Committee of the Nueva Granada Military University, after reviewing the letters of authorization from the institutions involved, the informed consent/withdrawal of the participants, and the personal data protection guidelines.

In the first phase, through twelve individual interviews with teachers and three with parents, the research focused on exploring the actors' perception of students' aspirations in a broad sense and without limitation to a specific topic. In the second phase, through three focus groups (one with teachers and two with parents) and three individual interviews with school principals, the focus was on the two most important dimensions of students' aspirations: academic and territorial. In the third phase, through the application of a questionnaire to 127 students, the analysis of the two aforementioned dimensions was deepened, carrying out a triangulation process with the data obtained previously and in dialogue with the categories of the theoretical framework.

The analysis and interpretation of the data was developed in parallel to its collection in a multicyclic process that allowed the saturation of the data until a deep understanding of the object of study was reached (Gibbs, 2012). The qualitative information was duly transcribed and subsequently analyzed through an inductive

process of coding, categorization and identification of central categories (Coffey and Atkinson, 2003; Gibbs, 2012). As for the information obtained through the questionnaire, the responses were tabulated and graphed for subsequent descriptive analysis (López-Roldán and Fachelli, 2015). Both types of information were integrated in the elaboration of the central categories that articulate the results section.

Results and Discussion

The two central aspirations of rural schooled youth in the case studied are academic and territorial: the former refer to the continuity of studies at the higher level and the latter to the prospect of rooting or uprooting from the countryside. In this sense, the results are developed around three categories: a. The peasant habitus and the formation of aspirations; b. Peasant socio-familial capital and school discourses on higher education; c. The idyll of rootedness in the face of the crisis in the countryside.

The Peasant Habitus and the Formation of Aspirations

In the light of Bourdieu, the peasant habitus would refer to the ways of being, feeling, thinking and acting in the world of the peasant population which, in the case studied, is constituted by three aspects: a. the early relationship with paid work; b. the ideal of forming a home and a family; and c. the link with agricultural work. In fact, rural youth are particularly interested in entering the labor market from an early age, as one teacher relates: *"I used to tell them: you have to study, those who study are successful in life. One of them answered me: teacher, that's not true, up there Mr. Tiberio has a lot of land, and he hasn't studied, he has a lot of money"*. This way of perceiving the world is deeply influenced by significant characters who, like Mr. Tiberio, have become a reference for many young people. The most representative case is that of a potato entrepreneur who accumulated a large capital and developed important projects in favor of the community.

Another teacher put it in the following terms: *"I have children who are in eighth grade and go out and get a job carrying potatoes, see a penny and with that they think they have earned heaven, so they drop out of school"*. The notion of 'work' tends to be associated with a physical activity that contributes to the household's livelihood, so school attendance is often not highly valued. Precisely in this sense, Bonal and Tarabini (2010) point out that educational achievement implies minimum cultural conditions that bring the student closer to what is required by the school; if these conditions are not met, young people will tend to experience serious difficulties in adapting to what the educational institution demands of them.

Another aspect of strong significance in the perception and evaluation system of young people is the family experience and what it represents in their projection towards the future: physical proximity and the extension of kinship relationships favor the consolidation of affective ties in the extended and nuclear family. It is not a minor fact that many children, even after forming their own home, continue to reside in their parents' house. A teacher analyzes this fact: *"the projects that one has as a teacher differ from the reality of the context, because for young people the goal is to have a family, due to the same context in which families are formed here; forming a family is very important for them"*.

This testimony highlights the discontinuity that often exists between the primary habitus inculcated by primary pedagogical work and the habitus inculcated by dominant pedagogical work. In young people, the school cultivates the values of a paradigm based on social ascent through education, in which it is essential to refrain from forming a household at an early age. However, the aspirations of many young people seem to be more driven by their cultural and socio-familial capital, so they do not fully identify with the educational project (Acosta, 2019; Sá, 2022).

Precisely another aspect associated with this capital and that shapes the peasant habitus is the link that still exists with work in the fields. The fact that children and young people are linked to the countryside and learn to work the land continues to be of utmost importance for many families in the sector. In one of the focus groups, parents were asked about the single school day, to which they responded *"For the farm, I see that the single school day was not so "improvable" because here the children used to leave school to join the farm work. It is not so much because they work, but because this knowledge was useful for the children, now the children arrive very tired, they only have time to finish their homework and they are not involved in the fields"*.

This testimony shows how important it is for families that young people continue to be linked to the territory through the practices of the domestic-peasant environment. The single school day is considered by the rural population as a strategy created to solve the absence of parents in urban contexts, but imported to rural areas it has no relevance; they also consider that extending the time spent in school may undermine the belonging and affectivity of young people with the territory. From the point of view of Bonal and Tarabini (2010), one might ask: how do you manage to interest a rural child in school when work in the countryside is more attractive to them? In this sense, the school seems to be called upon to identify itself with the values of the community towards the creation of a territorialized school project.

There are reasons to understand why, although access to the educational system has increased in recent decades, there is still a significant number of rural youth who do not see formal education as something meaningful or even necessary. As a teacher says: *"There is a good percentage of young people who do not study or drop out, because they do not see study as something that could be a plus for their life, out of 300 kids who start high school, only 10% graduate and very few enter university"*. There are also frequent cases of academically outstanding young people who suddenly drop out of school and do not continue their studies. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they considered it possible to be happy and feel fulfilled in life without having studied.

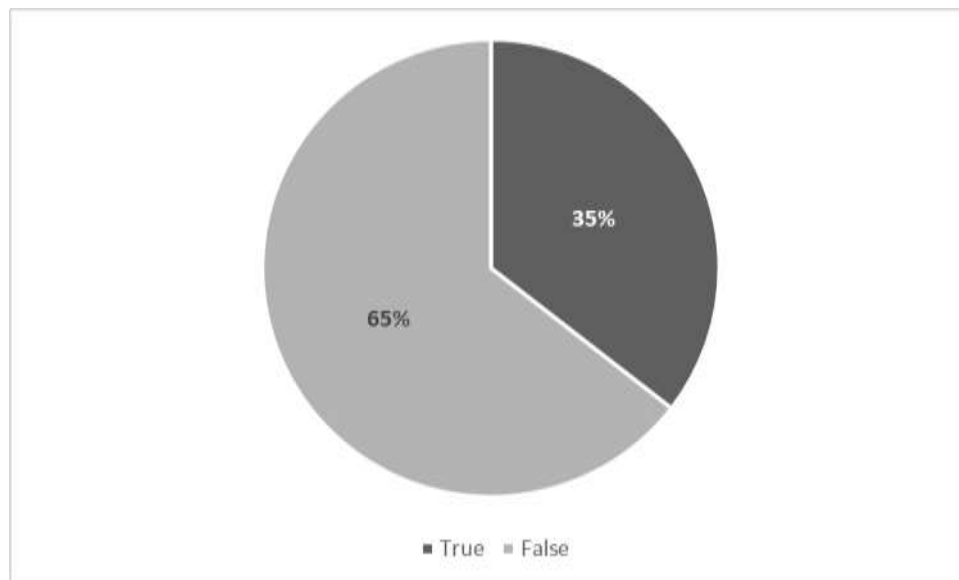


Figure 1. Responses on a Total of 127 Rural Youth in School.

Although there have been important advances in the recognition of schooling, the worldview persists that it is not necessary to enter and remain in the educational system to give meaning to one's existence. It can be interpreted then that if this same question were asked in an urban context, where the primary habitus was fully compatible with the dominant habitus, there would surely be an index close to 100% in favor of education. For Bourdieu (2011), the acquisition of educational culture by the children of peasants may be equivalent to acculturation, since the school system is based on the logic of the cultivated classes.

The three aspects that define the peasant habitus decisively determine the aspirations of young people in the short and medium term. The testimony of a teacher represents it *"The life project of the boys is to leave school, work, go to live with a woman and get a little piece of land, about an acre or so, to start producing something"*. It is not for nothing that Bourdieu (2011) suggests that subjective aspirations, based on marks of origin, tend to define more decisively the life project of the agents than the objective possibilities themselves. The same is

suggested by Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2002) when they state that socio-familial and school-community capital determine the way in which rural youth define their post-school itineraries, although in the case studied they are not only post-school, but even prior to the end of the school stage.

Peasant Socio-Family Capital and School Discourses on Higher Education

The transition to higher education is one of the aspirations of young people around which there is a particular tension between what is promoted by the educational institution and the force exerted by the socio-familial capital of the peasant family. For the school it is fundamental that young people successfully complete high school and then go on to higher education. This ideal is based on the argument of the backwardness that it would represent for young people not to complete their educational trajectory. In this regard, one student comments: *"the teachers focused a lot on us not only to look for a husband to support us, not to continue with the same traditions of our families, to break that legacy, but to continue studying, to have our professions"*. The project of life in the countryside, lacking higher education, is presented as synonymous with poverty; in contrast, the academic project established by the school is equated with opportunities for development and progress.

Access to higher education is understood as a mechanism of social mobility, being the teachers themselves a clear example of promotion and improvement: *"I always show them the trips I have made because I have studied; I have been to Europe, I have been to Turkey, because I have had to sweat it out and all that study has allowed me to move up, so if you do not set goals you are not going to achieve it, I always tell you to read, to study"*. The teachers who exercise their profession in official educational institutions, in their great majority, belong to middle classes that, as Bourdieu (2011) argues, are moved by the ideal of social ascent, in whose terms being austere, making an effort or "sweating it out" means experiencing their class habitus in the form of a slope. It is not strange then that they foster in young people the values of a worldview that has as its basis social mobility through education (Henríquez, 2014).

This contrasts with the imaginary of the rural population for whom higher education is a kind of "non-basic need" that is within the reach of wealthy, mainly urban, families. Thus, instilling these aspirations among young people is for many teachers a paradigm shift, as one of them says: *"Then you have to take them from a very young age, brainwash them and tell them that they can go to a university, that they have to find a way"*. Not without reason Gale and Parker (2015) posit that the aspirations of young people from disadvantaged classes are strongly based on the possibilities offered by access to resources and geographic location. The high financial cost of university tuition, as well as the mostly urban location of provision, skew the aspirations of many rural youth in this regard.

The fact that today, promoting access to higher education represents a "brainwashing" for teachers speaks volumes about the degree of consolidation of the education system in rural areas. Likewise, the fact that the university is still perceived as a utopia questions the rigid model of academic, elitist and urban university, which does not harmonize with the nature of the rural population (UNESCO, 2018). Finally, that the rural population experiences that the university is not made for them requires a profound revision of the social and political model that sustains it (Tedesco, 2005).

Thus, the efforts deployed by the school to promote continuity in higher education seem to encounter a major stumbling block in the inequalities experienced by the rural population in the face of education, as well as in the composition of socio-familial capital and the habitus of origin. This does not mean, as Baillergeau and Duyvendak (2022) argue, that aspiration is a capacity that can be learned, but also wither away. Aspiration is always present, is inherent in the culture, and refers to the way young people visualize and move toward the future; it is the content of aspiration that can be inculcated or trained, not aspiration itself. The young people in the case study have a projection into the future, whether it is the formation of a household, early entry into the world of work, or admission to an institution of higher education, i.e., the aspiration is always present and never withers, but it is different if it can be modified.

The socio-family capital of the farmers is defined by the low level of schooling of their parents, most of whom have only primary or incomplete primary education; very few have a high school diploma and there are still cases of illiteracy. This fact has an important impact, not only on the support young people have at home, but also on the way they perceive and experience their passage through school. The principal of a school states: *"People in our community have in their minds that support means giving food and a roof; parents try to give that, but when they try to accompany their children on a pedagogical, emotional and psychological level, things get a little distracted due to the lack of education they have"*. It is clear that socio-familial capital determines how rural youth define their post-school itineraries (Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman, 2002).

In many cases, academic demands overwhelm the academic capital of the household, which ends up triggering a cycle of low results, demotivation and disaffection with the system. The imaginary found reveals that even after several decades of school operation in the sector, there are still parents who do not recognize the full meaning of education, but also accounts for the limited technical support that young people can receive at home not only to respond to the academic demands of the present, but also to project themselves academically into the future (Martín and Gómez, 2017).

Of all the possible aspects, socio-family capital has the greatest influence on how people experience and value the educational world; when the level of schooling of household members is low and education is understood as trivial, school per se cannot be expected to bring young people to high levels. Bonal and Tarabini (2010) argue that all people are potentially educable, but that the social and family context plays a key role in developing or hindering this potential.

Parents make constant reference to education as a vehicle to become "someone in life", thus denoting a self-image of social invisibility closely related to the self-image of subalternity of the peasantry vis-à-vis urban society; they also express the importance that young people, through education, expand their fields of action and in this sense surpass what their parents have done, as expressed by one of them: *"one as a dad always expects them to do more than what one did, and that is the purpose of sending them to school, that they take advantage of the time, that they learn more than what one has learned, that they have more options and opportunities"*.

However, the "empty nest" syndrome that still survives in the peasant socio-family capital poses serious limitations to these ideals, as a mother testifies: *"Well, the idea is that they stay here in the sector, that they do not have to study far away, but that they have the opportunity to study here so that they do not go far away, because they will leave us and then they will not come back, so the idea is that they do not leave"*. The sense of loss generated by the thought of the eventual departure of the son or daughter who pursues his or her academic aspirations shortens the scope of what it means "to be someone in life"; the strength of the affective paternal-filial bond that, on the one hand, favors family structuring, on the other hand, undermines academic aspirations.

It is for all of the reasons previously mentioned that for the families in the sector, high school is the highest academic aspiration, something plausible if one takes into account the level of schooling of previous generations, but still little when analyzed in a broader social spectrum. In some cases, and in the best of scenarios, families manage to organize themselves so that once they finish high school, young people can access non-formal complementary training, as one mother expressed: *"In my case, I would like my children to finish high school and hopefully God will give me the chance to give them a short course, because one cannot go to university, but at least a short course so they can start with their short course to practice and continue studying"*.

It is not gratuitous that Bourdieu (2011) argues that lower status degrees become the refuge of the lower classes; in fact, several cases were presented of young people who upon finishing high school took non-formal courses in education for work, which helped them find a job and thus begin to earn a salary, but which ultimately ended up separating them from the university ideal. In the perception instrument administered to the young people, the following inquiry was posed: "Please indicate the level of importance of your personal short-term goals":

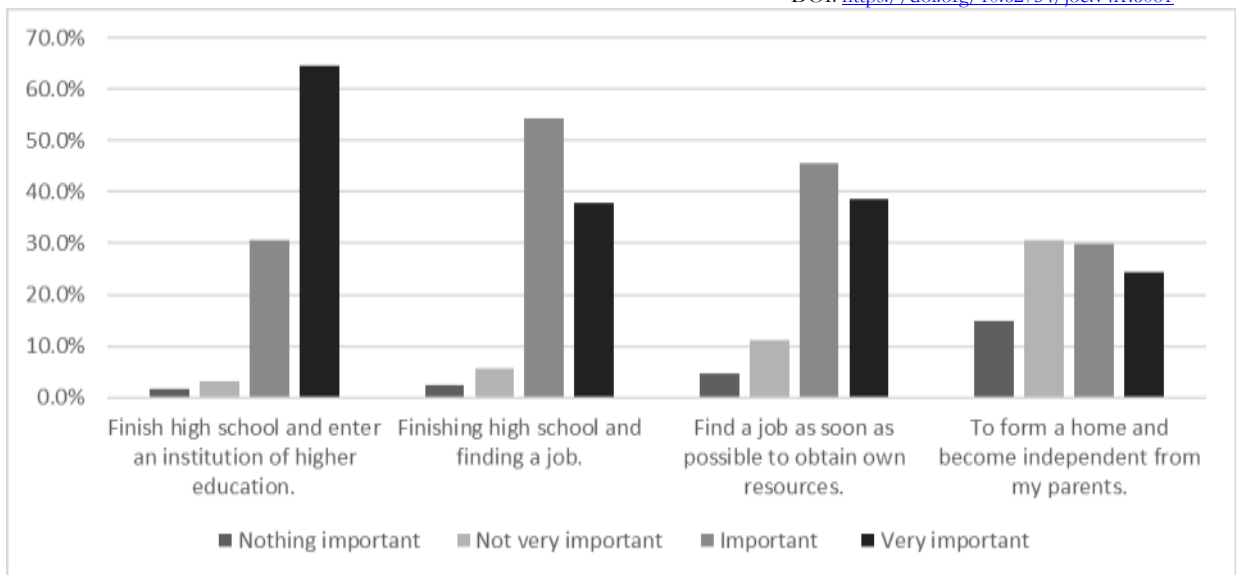


Figure 2. Responses on a Total of 127 Rural Youth in School

The above data reveal a process of readjustment of the peasant habitus with respect to education, because although the imaginary of forming a household and joining the labor market persists among young people, there is also an important tendency to finish high school and continue with higher education. In terms of Henríquez (2014) this is a symbolic mobilization (adoption of dominant positions) and network (incorporation into new social circles). For Bourdieu (2011) the classroom habitus takes shape from the primary pedagogical work within the home and is progressively consolidated as lasting and enduring dispositions that are at the basis of any subsequent habitus; what the present study adds to this discussion is the contribution of the school to the reconfiguration of the habitus, mainly in contexts where there are discontinuities with the primary habitus of young people.

The Idyll of Rootedness in the Face of the Crisis in the Countryside

In a first approach, it can be seen that for the school agents it is fundamental to encourage young people to become rooted in their territory; regardless of their condition, they all share the desire for young people to remain linked to the countryside. One of them expresses it in the following terms: *"One of our tasks is to offer students all the necessary tools so that they fall in love with the countryside, work in the countryside and see the countryside as an opportunity; so that they do not finish high school and go to the cities"*. The emphasis of this testimony suggests that there is a certain disenchantment with the countryside and that, therefore, the work of the school is to re-signify cultural values that are evaporating. Bourdieu and Passeron (2009) argue that for individuals from the most disadvantaged sectors, education remains the only way to access culture. The authors refer to the culture of the educated classes; but if culture is understood as the territorial knowledge and values of the peasant community, it turns out that school is not the only means of access, but also mainly the family and the community.

There are two types of arguments used by teachers to justify the ideal of rootedness among young people: one of denial of the city and the other of affirmation of the countryside. Regarding the first, one teacher explains: *"Going to the city means going to neighborhoods of stratum one or two if much, the children will go to widen the circles of misery of poor neighborhoods"*. In fact, the experience of most young people who migrate to the city is that of coming face to face with an antagonistic culture: the cost of living, insecurity and the feeling of confinement end up disenchanting many of them from the city dream. In this regard, Bourdieu (2011) argues that agents are endowed with enduring dispositions in the form of habitus, which are at the origin of both adaptation and maladaptation, both revolt and resignation. In fact, the study revealed several cases of young people who had left for large cities or intermediate cities, but who had returned after some time to rebuild their life projects in the territory of origin. This does not mean that the capacity for aspiration

itself has withered (Baillergeau and Duyvendak, 2022), only that its content in terms of successfully migrating to the city is now modified by deploying the projection of life in the countryside.

On their part, the arguments that defend the positivity of rootedness place special emphasis on the opportunities for personal growth through entrepreneurship in the countryside, as one teacher expressed it in the following way: *"We tell them that they can have a very cool vegetable garden, also some cows that produce and in the ecotourism part invite people to visit us and learn how we work, in short, that they see the countryside as a space where they can develop their life project, carry out a productive project and have their own business"*. The ideal scenario consists of motivating young people to stay in the territory to develop productive projects and, in this sense, to offer them the technical tools to achieve this. This is a common discourse, especially in educational institutions that offer technical-agricultural training.

Another argument in this direction points precisely to show the benefits that the countryside has in terms of well-being and quality of life; the teachers, most of whom have experienced the contrast between living in the city and living in the countryside, are emphatic in making young people aware of the vital benefits of rural life. As one of them states: *"The countryside gives more freedom than the cities, the countryside gives a good quality of life. It is a blessing. It is very nice"*. In this sense, remaining linked to the territory is an invitation to recognize the value of aspects that the frenzy of the paradigm of urban productivism has trivialized, such as the absence of pollution, the connection with nature, the feeling of freedom and security and, of course, the friendliness of the people.

There are, however, arguments that promote rootedness as a clear ethical positioning before society, in the sense that choosing to remain in the countryside is a decision that not only concerns the individual project, but also entails a social benefit or impact. This is reflected in some testimonies: *"Rural people should not be induced to go to the cities, because the countryside is being abandoned, and needs people to work it... the idea is that they stay in the countryside producing food, because we cannot live without food... all this framed in a philosophy of social service, of service to humanity, because the countryside is a social service"*. Despite the stigmatization and social exclusion that peasant communities often suffer, along with the increasingly adverse conditions for continuing to engage in agriculture, there is a spirit of greater social and political awareness of the role they play in a broader spectrum of society and humanity.

Although there are important arguments in favor of encouraging young people to put down roots, it is no less true that the objective impossibilities facing the countryside in this case study exert an inevitable counterweight; everything comes together in the increasingly unfavorable conditions that small and medium farmers face in order to make the countryside a viable and sustainable life project. A teacher analyzes it in the following way: *"Here many families are not owners, they take care and work on the farms, but they are not owners, they belong to the boss. Of the parents of the children we have, the vast majority are tenant farmers or farm caretakers, so this sense of territoriality is not so deeply rooted in many of the young people"*. The aspirations of rootedness among young people clash head-on with economic and social conditions that do not favor their capitalization, in terms of Bok (2010): young people have genuine aspirations, they are not lacking in them, but they often do not have the objective provisions for their realization.

One of the most profound contradictions of rural educational institutions, especially those offering technical-agricultural training, is that the children and young people who attend them do not come from families whose parents work the land or are engaged in livestock raising. As the testimony shared above reveals, in the case studied, many students are the children of farm caretakers or of parents who subsist on other activities. In this sense, it is understandable that for this population, not only the technical training they receive is foreign to them, but even more so the discourses that seek to promote the rooting of the population by appealing to the argument of the creation of productive projects and entrepreneurship in the countryside.

Among students who come from landowning families with an agricultural tradition, the problem is that agriculture is no longer profitable for them. An obvious fact is that the young people who are educated in rural educational institutions are not the children of large landowners, much less large agricultural and livestock producers; they are the children of small and medium farmers who work the land for domestic

subsistence or, in the best of cases, who aspire to small-scale production and commercialization. However, the high cost of supplies, unfair competition and little or no profitability has led many to change their field of activity, as a peasant mother said: *"Before there were more small producers, but now with the very expensive inputs all the small producers are leaving, only the large producers are left and those who had the opportunity to have a small plot cannot do it because the supplies are really very expensive"*.

The mother's account harmonizes with the testimony of a school principal who refers to the supplies necessary for livestock practices in the following terms: *"Buying Purine for chickens, pigs or hens is very expensive, all the medicines for livestock, fertilizers, chemicals, and agrochemicals have gone up, so today it is not productive to raise broiler chickens, for example"*. If we add to this the fact that employment opportunities as day laborers have also been reduced due to the concentration of land for cattle raising, it is understandable that for many young people, even the most enterprising, the project of remaining in the countryside is hopeless. Tedesco (2005) rightly asks "how do children who suffer from social deterioration, with enormous difficulties in defining future projects and transmitting basic notions of confidence and self-esteem, get to school? Precisely, a necessary condition of educability for educational achievement is the continuity between potentialities of origin, schooling and future expectations".

Against this backdrop, it is considered that the poor performance of the school with respect to the aspirations of young people is symptomatic of the broader crisis that the Colombian countryside is going through. This reinforces the idea that rural youth have genuine aspirations, they just sometimes do not have the dispositions to develop them (Bok, 2010). The arguments in favor of rootedness fall short of the various obstacles faced by small and medium farmers in making the countryside a sustainable project. Moreover, referring to the possibilities of financing and subsidies promoted by the government, a teacher of Agricultural Sciences analyzes that these are made for producers who have all the documentation in order, legalized land and complete accounting. The words of a school principal capture very well the dilemma faced by educational institutions when faced with the idyll of rootedness: *"As principal, in my speeches and in my conversations with students I try to get them excited about the love of the countryside, but it remains an idyll because when I put it into figures, things change because it is very difficult to justify: stay in the countryside enjoying the beautiful view, the birds and the meadows, but you will not see the green of the hills and it is frustrating. In the long term there is no change in the political landscape"*.

The conditions of exclusion and social injustice in the Colombian countryside are a decisive threat to the educational objectives of the school. An intervention in terms of public policies is required. Not only educational intervention, but also social and, above all, agrarian intervention, so that what the school projects as a plausible future for young people find reception in the broader social and political project. It is not without reason that Tedesco (2012) argues that in order to achieve educational success at the macro level and not only at the individual level, it is also necessary to accompany educational strategies with social justice policies. Indeed, the cases of young people who manage to consolidate productive projects and make professional careers in the field are isolated, in the face of which Bourdieu and Passeron (2018) remind us that "the existence of a few cases of social ascent never overturns the overall structure of class inequalities and the legitimacy of the dominant culture" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2018, p. 13). Adhering to the previously established line of argumentation, the subsequent finding was derived from the perception instrument administered to rural schooled youth, who were queried with the subsequent inquiry: "Please indicate your level of enjoyment of life in the rural field according to the following aspects":

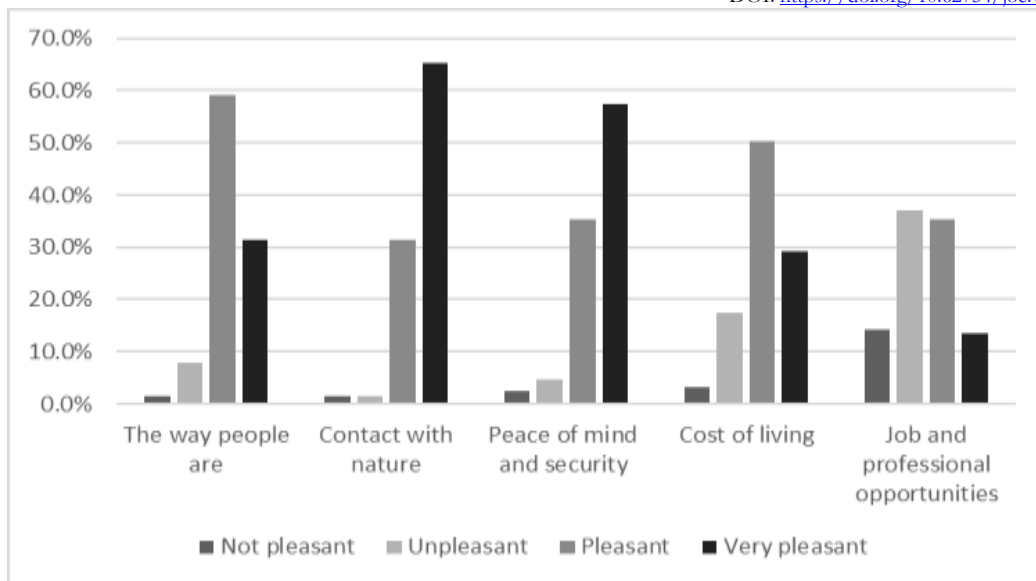


Figure 3. Responses on a Total of 127 Rural Youth in School.

The instrument employed to assess the perception of rural youth includes a section designed to elicit their awareness regarding the inquiry, "Please indicate your level of satisfaction with life in the city according to the following aspects." The subsequent panorama was obtained:

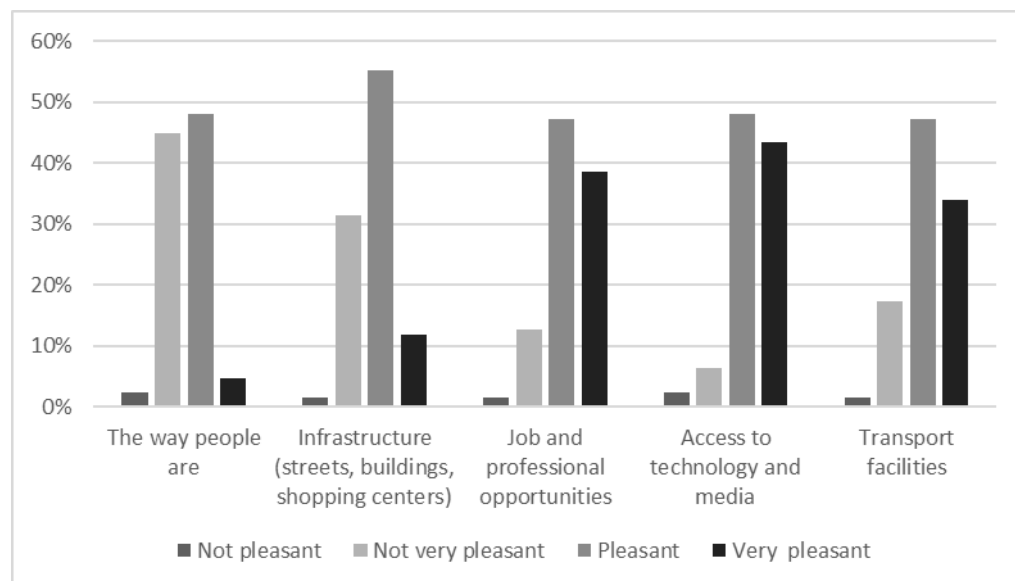


Figure 4. Responses on A Total of 127 Rural Youth in School.

Although for young people linked to rural educational institutions, life in the countryside is more attractive because of the contact with nature, the tranquility, the security and the way of being of the people, the work and professional opportunities are not very attractive. On the contrary, while they somewhat dislike city life mainly because of the way people live and the infrastructures, they are mostly attracted by job and professional opportunities, as well as access to technology and media. Zipin et al. (2015) argue that young people from low socioeconomic regions also form their aspirations based on populist mediations of ideological type, in fact, for many rural young people in the studied case the longing for city lifestyles has occurred thanks to the spread of mass media and the closing of physical gaps with the urban world.

Previous generations grew up without this type of aspirational configuration and, therefore, did not experience feelings of backwardness for remaining in the countryside or for not seeing a promising horizon in the labor and professional spheres. This change in worldview has much to do with school discourses, which may suggest, on the one hand, that the school has contributed to a process of reconfiguration of the peasant habitus, but on the other hand, and in line with Bourdieu and Passeron (2009), that for the children of peasants the acquisition of educational culture is equivalent to acculturation, in whose terms it is not strange to experience a reversal in the scale of values. The instrument used to evaluate the perceptions of rural youth also aimed to identify the prevailing trends in their future aspirations. This objective was pursued by asking the question "How do you see yourself in the future?":

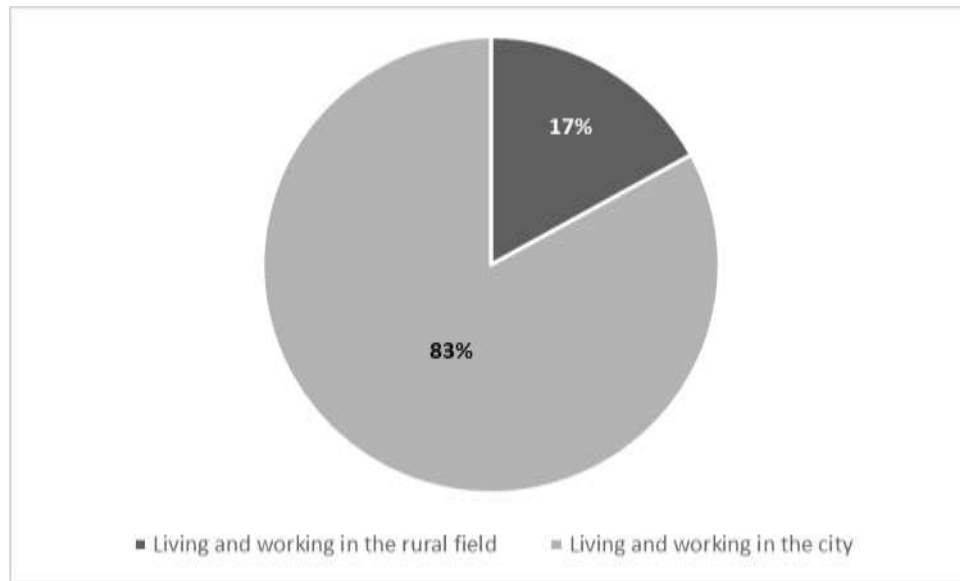


Figure 5. Responses on a Total of 127 Rural Youth in School.

In the weighting made by young people, labor and professional projection, as well as access to technology and the media, are much more important variables in their personal life project than the environmental and relational advantages offered by the countryside. This demonstrates the enormous weight that objective impossibilities acquire in the way young people shape their aspirations. Bourdieu and Passeron (2009) argue that subjective aspirations, crossed by the primary habitus, are more decisive in the future of the agents than the objective conditions themselves. However, what the study shows is that although the peasant habitus exerts an important force in favor of the rootedness of young people, the weight of the crisis of the countryside, as an objective condition, is more decisive in the projection towards the future that they make. Martínez (2017) argues that habitus can lead to mere reproduction when there are no major changes in social life, but when habitus is exposed to historical changes, as in this case the crisis of the countryside, innovations can occur.

Conclusions

The aspirations of rural schooled youth are permeated by the socio-familial capital and especially by the peasant habitus, which is why for some of them education is not a fundamental aspect in their projection towards the future. It also explains why for many families affiliation with the territory continues to be a priority over academic achievement. In this sense, a certain level of discontinuity is perceived between the habitus of origin and the habitus inculcated by the school; the peasant population does not seem to have the conditions of educability required for successful educational achievement.

For school officials, it is imperative that young people successfully complete high school and access higher education, for the same reason that underpins the academic project on which the education system is based. However, and in spite of the incisive work that the school deploys in this sense, it is the peasant socio-family capital that counteracts it with the greatest impetus. This capital is mainly characterized by the low level of schooling of the parents and the low academic level of the members of the community in general, which constitutes a mark of origin that is not compatible with the paradigm of social ascent through education promoted by the school. In this sense, the cases of rural youth who have had a successful experience of access to and permanence in higher education are isolated and not in the majority.

It is also a priority for the school to promote the rooting of young people in the territory, thus highlighting the potential of the countryside in terms of productivity, well-being and quality of life. Although these are aspects that harmonize with the peasant habitus in terms of ideals and desires, it is the objective impossibilities of the countryside that, on this occasion, end up pushing the aspirations of young people in another direction. The fact that a significant number of students attending school do not come from families that own land, or that, even if they do, agricultural work is no longer sustainable or profitable for them, ends up undermining any aspirations of rootedness among rural youth.

Indeed, the conditions of educability invite us to think about the structural bases on which certain sectors of the population experience injustice and exclusion from education. It is highly significant that for today's youth, job opportunities and economic growth have more weight in their projection towards the future than belongings and affectivities with the territory. This, on the one hand, shows that school has indeed contributed to a process of reconfiguration of the habitus, and on the other hand, that for rural youth, school may be representing an acculturative experience.

The recognition of the habitus of origin and of the peasant cultural and socio-familial capitals is an imperative task of the educational system in the understanding of not incurring in practices of symbolic violence, but, on the contrary, to contribute to enhance the existing possibilities. The former so that young peasants experience school as a natural process of cultural assimilation. In addition, it is also essential to understand that the education system per se cannot achieve purposes such as promoting access to higher education or fostering roots in the territory if the structural bases of exclusion and social injustice that affect the Colombian countryside and that mainly affect families whose children are educated in rural schools are not changed.

Acknowledgement

This is a product derived from the INV-HUM-3782 project funded by the Universidad Militar Nueva Granada - period 2022.

References

- Acosta, F. (2019). Policies for secondary school: comparative analysis in Latin America. UNESCO. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). (2022). Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean. The transformation of education as a basis for sustainable development. United Nations. Author
- Baillergeau, E., & Duyvendak, J. (2022). Futures without dreams: a microsociological framework for studying how aspirations develop and wither. *Critical studies in education*, 63(2), 196-211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2019.1707250>
- Bok, J. (2010). The ability to aspire to higher education: 'It's like forcing them to do an unscripted play'. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(2), 163-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508481003731042>
- Bonal, X., & Tarabini, A. (2010). Being poor at school. Habitus of poverty and conditions of educability. Miño y Dávila.
- Bourdieu, P. (2011). Strategies of social reproduction. Siglo XXI.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (2009). The heirs. Students and culture. Siglo XXI.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (2018). Reproduction. Elements for a theory of the educational system. Siglo XXI.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (2003). Making sense of qualitative data. Complementary research strategies. Universidad de Antioquia.
- De Alencar, M., & Morais, V. (2021). Poverty, university students' permanence and student assistance: a psychosocial analysis. *Psychologies USP* (32):11-21. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0103-6564e200067>
- Do Carmo, M. (2017). "Democratization and inequalities in higher education: the case of Brazil". *Universidades* (74):51-61. <https://doi.org/10.36888/udual.universidades.2017.74.486>

- Gale, T., Parker, S. (2015). Calculating student aspiration: Bourdieu, spatiality and the politics of recognition. Cambridge Journal of Education, 45(1): 81-96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2014.988685>.
- Gentili, P. (2011). Pedagogy of equality. Essays against exclusionary education. Siglo XXI.
- Gibbs, G. (2012). The analysis of qualitative data in qualitative research. Morata.
- Henríquez, A. (2014). Habitus and social mobility: from the modification of the dispositional system to the transformation of the class structure. Journal of Sociology (29): 59-75. <https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-529X.2014.36178>.
- Kilpatrick, S., & Abbott-Chapman, J. (2002). Work and study priorities and aspirations of rural youth: the influence of family social capital. The Australian educational researcher, 29) 43-67 <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03219769>
- López-Roldán, P., & Fachelli, S. (2015). Methodology of quantitative social research. UAB.
- Martín, E., Gómez, C. (2017). Parental expectations do not explain school performance. Spanish Journal of Sociology 26(1): 33-52. <https://doi.org/10.22325/fes/res.2016.2>.
- Martínez, J. (2017). The habitus. An analytical review. International Journal of Sociology 75(3): 1-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3989/ris.2017.75.3.15.115>.
- Núñez, J. (2017). Mixed methods in educational research: towards a reflexive use. Cuadernos de pesquisa 47(164):632-649. <https://doi.org/10.1590/198053143763>.
- Pereira, Z. (2011). Mixed method designs in education research: A concrete experience. Educare electronic journal 15(1):15-29. <https://doi.org/10.15359/ree.15-1.2>.
- Piketty, T. (2014). Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century. Harvard University Press.
- Saforcada, F. (2020). Out of order. Consideraciones sobre el derecho a la educación en tiempos adversos. In Acosta, Felicitas. Derecho a la educación y escolarización en América Latina. UNGS
- Sá, T. (2022). Higher education democratization policies and the reproduction of social inequalities: a case study. Educação e Pesquisa (48):1-31. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634202248248527por>
- Schmelkes, S. (2020). Recognizing and Overcoming Inequity in Education. Unite Nations
- Tedesco, J-C. (2005). Opinions on education policy. Granica.
- Tedesco, J-C. (2012). Education and social justice in Latin America. FCE.
- UNESCO. (2018). Regional conference on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Author.
- Zipin, L., Sellar, S., Brennan, M., & Gale, T. (2015). Educating for the future in marginalized regions: a sociological framework for rethinking and researching aspirations. Philosophy and theory of education, 47(3), 227-246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2013.839376>