

Rural schools: Between production and craft

The relationship between education and production in rural areas seeks for the welfare of the individual and puts in discussion of the market values, profitability, surplus generation and new goods, and a production model from rural Andean and Amazonian communities based on conceptions of communal well-being from community crafts.

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There may be many poor and many perceptions of poverty as human beings.

MAJID RAHNEMA (1996)

The rural school is often a mirror image of the model of educational excellence we are building from our imagination, underpinning a truism that makes absence the cornerstone of a structure that reproduces the failure and frustration among students.

This condition, naturalized through a long process of induction affirmed in stereotypes about the rural areas, has further expanded the gaps separating rural schools of their peers in the city, which has shown very clearly how images constructed on the rural - a priori - involve concepts such as deprivation, need and poverty as a condition sine qua non. That is, two problems whose common aspect is geographic space

are packaged in the same package, while deserving different responses.

These views make it difficult to think of the rural school from its potential and build appropriate responses to its needs and demands. And this may involve imagining scenarios in which pedagogy is displaced from its centrality. On the other hand, it is these same images that direct discussions about the need for closer links between education and production especially in rural areas, develop entrepreneurial skills that enable students to have more tools to generate wealth and consequently, leave poverty, thereby strengthening the axiom that well-being linked to production and economic development as the only way forward. As Rahnema (1996) says: «The production of economic goods and services is a major component of all programs of poverty eradication - economic growth remains the general talisman.»

In this context, it is necessary to make visible the discussion and reflection on key concepts about the perception of rural schools, such as poverty, production and work, generally made from a common sense that

favors the economic side over any other perspective or understanding of reality, since many of the responses from educational programs have a homogenous view on the situation in Peru as a starting point and a total faith in the massification of technology as the antidote key to conjure the demons of poverty and low education quality in rural schools.

RURALETY, POVERTY AND PRODUCTION

One of the stereotypes rooted in our work is one that links rural and poverty. While statistics presents information that seems to corroborate this claim, so is the fact that we have not thought enough about the dimensions of poverty from the perspective of people living on the other side of modernity.

Unilaterally assuming a single conception of poverty takes us almost immediately to consider all non-modern forms of production as undeveloped, subsistence economies or economies that are not productive so that, for example, small plots scattered throughout the Andes that ensure survival, regeneration of life and biodiversity conservation are seen as archaic forms of production. José María Sbert (1996) describes this from watching the *milpa*¹:

“Most economists define the milpa for its shortcomings. It is surviving: work hard with inefficient tools to generate only a few goods, and few or even zero surplus. Subsistence is for economy, something like the poor relative of modern production” (Sbert 1996).

By this logic, the solution to remedy this serious shortcoming is to introduce modern ways of production in rural areas. This action implies in many cases obviating the cycles and rhythms of nature by the efficiency and effectiveness to ensure increased production to meet the market.

To promote the spirit of production entails, in the logic of modernity, accepting only values such as profitability, generating surpluses and, in turn, generating new goods, so that this roadmap increasingly blurs links with the community and redefine the ultimate purpose of the work not as an act of dignity, but rather of profit.

This is important to consider because education is no stranger to this reasoning. So one wonders, what do we understand by a productive school? What logic do we use to promote entrepreneurial skills? And what are the business skills we strive to promote?

The modern view of production and work draws a line with life and knowledge. From other insights, such as the rural Andean, work is part of life itself. Taking these differences into account in the design of production and work will help us set up a productive rural school based on the potential and not on the gaps, and culturally relevant to geographical context.

EDUCATION AND PRODUCTION IN RURAL SCHOOLS

Perhaps one of the major setbacks rural school face is the demarcation between so-called life skills and entrepreneurial skills. While the first do not yet clearly embody the Andean and the Amazonian conceptions of welfare in a context of cultural diversity, they do create the climate necessary to travel to the understanding of “spend the life”, i.e., the acquisition of those skills necessary for good living in different geographical and cultural settings. “Spend the life” in Rengifo’s (2008) words means:

“[...] being in a continuous learning attitude, because while playing a skill like knitting or making farm tools, one is learning new arts of the craft in question. Life is a continuous learning provided under the shadow of a diversity of influences that trigger new learning.”

On the other hand, the notion behind the entrepreneurial skills links us with eyes that automatically see rural poverty and production as the only way that will lead us out of that hole. From this position, what matters is to recognize the production method as one of the highest values of development and, of course, that students internalize the logic of the production process in their lives.

From this point of view, students are instructed in activities detached from the threads that weave the fabric of culture, the worldview, the learning relationship between disciple and master, to favor the acquisition of technical skills needed to be inserted more efficiently in the market, creating a distorted image of the school transformed into a miniature factory where

1 non-irrigated corn cultivation, using only the seasonal rains

they reproduce the two basic conditions of production: industrial specialization and work planning prior to the execution itself.

Work itself is not outside this view. Conceived from the perspective of production, the ultimate goal of work should be profit, so that this, in itself, also comes into the dynamics of buying and selling and alienates progressively until losing its humanity. Likewise, the student, a worker's predecessor, increasingly detached from the qualitative understanding of time and space, endorses the logic of efficiency and effectiveness in the final result, little wondering the very meaning of what it produces.

Among the peoples of the Amazon, production of an object is closely related to the value of the environment and the value of people, so that, for example, when women produce some kind of pottery they think about their husbands or some other loved ones. The affection for people is expressed through the object produced. Among the *Awajún* people the word *nimat* expresses this idea, although it also covers other qualitative dimensions hardly expressed through writing.


Among the peoples of the Andes, the job is the outward expression of the innate qualities of the person. The statement "has a hand" expresses this idea; this means that each activity meets according to its nature, a fact which in turn supports an order. Similarly, the production of an object is held bearing in mind a particular person (spouse, family, children, etc.) and a specific function (shelter, cooking, dance), so that production is not intended to anonymous beings, but have specific names and faces.

Two important features in this "other" logic of production are that there is an age and a time to learn, so everything has a time and place. That is: learning finds a strong link with the rhythms of nature. They must spin when it's time knitting, same logic applies to other activities.

The great paradox of the rural school is its reluctance to hear the voice of Andean and Amazon communities. In its early days, the rural school placed great emphasis on the academic, and therefore confined students to the classroom. This educational approach has meant that students disengage from the activities of the community

more and more. From the view of the parents and the community, this is a huge failure because their children have lost the ability to do community jobs and in turn have not reached a high academic quality, which means they are in a liminal state between school and community.

To remedy this situation, a model of productive school that gives students the opportunity to have tools to face life from one extreme to another in an attempt to remedy the disorders that school itself helped create is now proposing.

A productive rural school model should be based on conceptions of the welfare of Andean and Amazonian communities. From this perspective, the communal jobs should be located as protagonists of the learning process and be defined by agreement between children, teachers and community. Thus, the school may grant itself the possibility of being raised by the Andean and the Amazonian. 

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