Research Square

Preprints are preliminary reports that have not undergone peer review.
They should not be considered conclusive, used to inform clinical practice,
or referenced by the media as validated information.

Personal Identity Construction in Colombian Rural Childhoods: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study Abstract

Hector Andres Paez-Ardila

hpaez71@gmail.com

Universidad Manuela Beltrán

Valentina Ribero-Vargas

Universidad Manuela Beltrán

Diana Carolina Gomez-Duran

Universidad Manuela Beltrán

William Armando Alvarez-Anaya

Corporación Escuela Tecnológica del Oriente

Research Article

Keywords: personal identity, rural childhood, developmental psychology, cultural context, children's narratives, natural environment

Posted Date: May 4th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-9380884/v1

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Read Full License

Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Version of Record: A version of this preprint was published at Human Arenas on May 27th, 2026. See the published version at https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-026-00645-8.

Abstract

How do children living in rural contexts experience and narrate their own identity? This question, largely absent from mainstream developmental psychology, is the point of departure for the present study. Drawing on descriptive phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) and cultural psychology, we examined the lived experience of personal identity construction in six children aged 8 to 12 years residing in a rural community in Colombia. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and self-narrative accounts and analyzed using thematic content analysis in two complementary stages: a first stage using theoretical sensitizers derived from Quiroga et al.'s (2021) personal identity model, and a second stage of open thematic analysis yielding emergent categories. Three core dimensions of personal identity emerged: unity of the self, anchored in corporality, animal bonds, and territorial belonging; integration of the self over time, revealed through embodied memory, biographical loss, and aspirational tension between local rootedness and global desire; and integration with others, structured around differentiated trust, rural community belonging, and collective action. A cross-case structural synthesis identified three invariant features of rural identity: its territorial grounding, its adaptive relational intelligence, and its capacity to integrate rootedness and aspiration without contradiction. Children also demonstrated spontaneous moral agency in their critical evaluation of child labor as a violation of childhood rights. The rural context emerges not as a backdrop but as an active arena of becoming — constituting children's psyche in ways that challenge urban-centric developmental frameworks. This study contributes a counter-hegemonic, situated perspective on childhood identity from the Global South.

1. Introduction

Identity is a complex construct encompassing the characteristics that distinguish individuals and groups within a specific sociocultural context. From a developmental psychology perspective, it is conceived as a dynamic process built through lived experiences and interactions with the environment, allowing each person to form a unique perception of themselves and their place in the world (Jara Barnett et al., 2024). This process involves evolution, integration, and differentiation, facilitating the construction of a sense of self that is recognized in interaction with others and within a specific social and cultural context (Quiroga et al., 2021; Yañez Medina & Capella Sepúlveda, 2021).

In early childhood, the child's relationship with their physical and social environment is fundamental for identity construction. Studies have shown that children in rural contexts develop a significant connection with their natural and social surroundings, which influences their personal identity (Albarello et al., 2018; Green et al., 2016). Child development is a transformative process affecting affective and cognitive structures, in which the individual restructures their internal organization through interaction with the environment, generating progressive equilibrium (Akhter, 2025; Larsen et al., 2018; Maiese, 2017).

The study of identity requires approaching the subject's context and interpersonal relationships (Pulga & Díaz Linares, 2024). Although numerous studies on personal identity exist, many have focused on urban contexts, overlooking the particularities of rural areas (Castillo Henríquez & Williamson Castro, 2023).

This gap is especially concerning given that, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), approximately 45% of the world's population still lives in rural areas, and in middle-income countries like Colombia, the proportion of rural childhoods is considerably higher. Psychosocial development processes in these contexts are mediated by ecological, community, and cultural factors that differ substantially from urban environments, and that developmental psychology has insufficiently studied (Green, 2017; Lozano Meneses et al., 2022). Ignoring these particularities risks designing theoretical frameworks, evaluation tools, and psychosocial interventions that do not respond to the realities experienced by millions of children worldwide (Ortega Bravo & Solano León, 2023). From a cultural psychology standpoint, this gap is not merely empirical but epistemological: dominant models of identity development have been built from, and for, Western urban middle-class childhoods, rendering rural, campesino, and Global South childhoods as deviations from a norm rather than as distinct arenas of human becoming (Bruner, 1991; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study positions itself as a counter-hegemonic inquiry, centering the lived experience of rural children as valid and irreducible evidence of the diversity of human psychological development. Research has further shown that children in rural contexts demonstrate a greater sense of territorial belonging compared to their urban peers, alongside forms of socialization and self-construction deeply rooted in the natural and community environment (Albarello et al., 2018; Quevedo Chigne & Ortecho Rodríguez, 2022).

Descriptions of the personal identity of children in rural areas are relevant for identifying incidences and differences across domains (Quevedo Chigne & Ortecho Rodríguez, 2022). Environmental characteristics and cultural aspects can vary significantly across populations, and the experiences that children construct during their growth—through their relationship with the environment and with others—are fundamental. Limited exposure to mass media and restricted internet access also influence their identity construction.

It is important to recognize that there is no single narrative that encompasses all relevant elements in a rural context. In Colombia, cultural diversity is broad, and identity construction develops across an individual's life course, associated with the context in which they live (Fernández, 2019).

For a long time, childhood was an invisible population in identity studies, which were framed from an adult perspective (Soll et al., 2020). However, in modernity, social, political, and religious actors have recognized childhood as a population with rights, allowing each person to develop from their own experiences and characteristics within a specific sociocultural context (Aguirre-Pastén et al., 2017).

Regarding the construction of personal identity in children residing in rural areas, notable studies include Rossel and Torrejón (2019) in Las Palmas de Llay-Llay, Chile, which expanded knowledge of the rural context through research with young children attending a rural school. Cortés (2021) explored the narratives of children from the Márquez rural area, examining their psychosocial structure. In Argentina, Schmuck (2022) documented how rural youth construct collective identifications rooted in school territory, reinforcing a sense of belonging to the countryside in the face of migration and urbanization dynamics. From Colombia, Cifuentes-Garzón (2024) has analyzed the construction of student identities

in rural youth, showing that the rural school operates as a negotiation space between local knowledge and formal educational system demands.

It is necessary to recognize and make visible the conceptions, behaviors, and differentiating factors of minors residing in rural areas in their construction of personal identity. This allows professionals to provide relevant, efficient, and contextually coherent intervention proposals.

In conclusion, studying, understanding, and recognizing personal identity in children in a rural context contributes—through analysis—to generating more effective social and community intervention processes. In this sense, the guiding question of this study is: What is the construction of personal identity in children aged 8 to 12 years in the rural context of vereda CONTEXT BLINDED FOR REVIEW PURPOSE, Colombia?

2. Method

2.1. Design

This research adopted a qualitative approach grounded in descriptive phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), aimed at understanding how children living in rural contexts experience and make sense of the construction of their personal identity. Descriptive phenomenology, as distinct from interpretive or transcendental variants, seeks to describe the structures of lived experience as they appear to the participants themselves, privileging their own language and meaning-making rather than imposing external theoretical frameworks. This approach allowed for the exploration of deep subjective experiences from first-person accounts, situated in the specific sociocultural context of vereda CONTEXT BLINDED FOR REVIEW PURPOSE, located in Bucaramanga, Colombia. Semi-structured interviews and self-narratives were used as data collection techniques. The unit of analysis was the narrative utterance in its totality: not only what was said, but how it was organized, what was placed first, what was left incomplete or deliberately compressed, and what structural tensions appeared within individual accounts. Data were analyzed through thematic content analysis by categories, a procedure consistent with descriptive phenomenology when categories are derived from, and remain anchored in, the participants' own experiential accounts rather than being imposed deductively (Vagle, 2018). Rather than pursuing a formal eidetic reduction or essence-identification procedure, the study aimed at a dense, situated description of identity construction as experienced and narrated by the participants — an approach Moustakas (1994) terms phenomenological description. The main purpose was to describe in detail the process of personal identity construction in each participant.

2.2. Participants

The sample consisted of six children aged 8 to 12 years, residing in vereda CONTEXT BLINDED FOR REVIEW PURPOSE, located in the municipality of Bucaramanga, department of Santander, Colombia. All participants were born and raised in this rural environment and hold Colombian nationality with Santander cultural identity. This age range was selected because it encompasses the close of middle

childhood and the beginning of early adolescence, a critical stage for the structuring of personal identity (Branje et al., 2021).

Participants lived in diverse family contexts, including extended nuclear families (parents, siblings, and relatives such as grandparents or aunts and uncles) and single-parent households headed primarily by mothers. This family heterogeneity allowed for observation of differences in affective bonds, access to care, and daily dynamics that affect the socialization process and self-development.

Regarding their education, children attended rural educational institutions near the vereda, specifically a branch of the Gustavo Duarte Alemán school, located at kilometer 12 on the road to Cúcuta. School journeys were made on foot and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Educational levels ranged from third to sixth grade of primary school, consistent with their ages, allowing observation of differentiated levels of cognitive, reflective, and communicative competence in their narratives.

Inclusion criteria were: (1) being between 8 and 12 years old, (2) residing in the vereda for five or more years, and (3) consenting to participate with proper informed consent from parents or guardians and assent from the children themselves. Exclusion criteria eliminated minors not meeting the first two requirements. The identification and approach of participants was facilitated by the leader of the vereda's Community Action Board, who supported criterion verification and family contact.

The sample size of six children was determined by the difficulty of territorial access, limited mobility conditions in the vereda, and family availability to participate. This decision was consistent with the qualitative and phenomenological approach of the study, which prioritizes the depth and interpretive density of narratives over statistical representativeness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In phenomenological studies, samples of three to ten participants are recognized as methodologically appropriate when seeking deep understanding of lived experiences, as the goal is not generalization but contextual transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, the richness and consistency of the data obtained allowed for sufficient thematic saturation to respond to the proposed objectives, as narrative patterns repeated and complemented each other across participants without the emergence of new relevant categories toward the close of the analysis process.

2.3. Research Context

Vereda CONTEXT BLINDED FOR REVIEW PURPOSE is located in the rural area at kilometer 12 on the road to Cúcuta, in Bucaramanga, Santander. It has approximately 150 inhabitants distributed across approximately 35 dwellings. The main economic activity is agriculture, with crops including cassava, plantain, corn, coffee, avocado, and citrus. While it has basic services such as water, electricity, and natural gas, the area lacks educational, religious, and health institutions, requiring inhabitants to travel on foot along dirt roads. This context represents a close-knit community environment with high exposure to nature and a cultural dynamic deeply rooted in rural peasant life.

Culturally, the Santander region is characterized by a collective identity marked by territorial rootedness, agricultural work as a central value, and a tradition of autonomy and independence that has historically

distinguished the Santander peasantry. In rural areas of the department, community relations are organized around the vereda as the basic social unit, the Community Action Board as a participation body, and daily practices such as the minga (communal work gathering) and intergenerational exchange of agricultural knowledge. These cultural characteristics shape a particular socialization environment that directly affects identity construction processes in children growing up there, distinct from both urban contexts in the same region and other Colombian rural areas.

2.4. Instruments

Two main instruments were used for data collection. First, semi-structured interviews designed to explore children's experiences, emotions, and perspectives regarding their personal identity and life in the rural context. Questions addressed topics such as family relationships, natural environment, child labor, daily activities, and perceived differences compared to urban contexts. The semi-structured format allowed a balance between guided exploration and narrative spontaneity, favoring free expression by participants.

Interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes and were conducted in a room belonging to the community action board. Children were initially accompanied by the board's leader, with prior authorization from their primary caregivers, and subsequently with the researchers.

Second, participants wrote texts expressing who they were, what they liked, what they remembered, and what they imagined for their future. This tool provided access to a more subjective and introspective understanding of their identity, giving them the opportunity to narrate their own stories.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the content analysis method by categories. For the self-portraits, three theoretical sensitizers were established drawing on the personal identity theory of Quiroga et al. (2021) — unity of the self, integration of the self, and integration with others — not as fixed a priori categories imposed on the data, but as conceptual lenses that oriented analytic attention without foreclosing the emergence of new meaning. This distinction is methodologically significant: in descriptive phenomenology, pre-existing theoretical constructs may serve as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954; Van den Hoonaard, 1997) that sharpen the researcher’s perception of what is salient in participants’ accounts, while remaining open to revision or expansion by the data itself. Consistent with this logic, three additional categories emerged inductively from the interview content:

Unity of the self. This category refers to the recognition of the self as a unique and distinct being, including psychological, bodily, and sexual differentiation.

Integration of the self. Refers to the accommodation of past, present, and future experiences, granting continuity and coherence to the self.

Integration with others. Involves the recognition of and relationship with others, including participation in social and cultural groups.

These categories allowed for the structuring and understanding of participants' narratives, facilitating the identification of patterns and meanings in the construction of their personal identity.

2.6. Methodological Integrity and Analysis Validation

Methodological triangulation was applied, combining semi-structured interviews and self-narratives as complementary data collection techniques applied to the same participants. This strategy allowed for the contrasting and enrichment of information from different forms of narrative expression. Analysis was also conducted collaboratively by three researchers, constituting researcher triangulation, which favored interpretive consistency and increased the internal validity of the study. It should be noted that member checking — the practice of returning interpretations to participants for validation — was not conducted in this study, given the age of the participants (8–12 years) and the logistical constraints of accessing the territory. This constitutes a limitation of the validation strategy. The absence of member checking was partially mitigated by researcher triangulation, the use of verbatim participant quotes as the primary evidentiary basis for all interpretive claims, and the validation of the research process with the Community Action Board leader, who served as a community informant and supported the verification of contextual accuracy in the findings.

2.7. Large Language Model (LLM) Disclosure

Artificial intelligence (AI) language tools were used during the preparation of this manuscript for tasks including language editing, formatting compliance, and translation assistance. All scientific content, data interpretation, and conclusions are solely the responsibility of the authors. No LLM is listed as an author in accordance with the journal’s authorship criteria.

3. Results

Data analysis proceeded in two complementary stages, consistent with the descriptive phenomenological approach adopted (Moustakas, 1994). In the first stage, self-narrative accounts were analyzed using three theoretical sensitizers derived from Quiroga et al.’s (2021) personal identity model — unity of the self, integration of the self, and integration with others — which functioned as conceptual lenses orienting analytic attention without foreclosing the emergence of new meaning (Blumer, 1954; Van den Hoonaard, 1997). The unit of analysis was the narrative utterance in its totality: not only what was said, but how it was organized, what was placed first, what was left incomplete or deliberately compressed, and what structural tensions appeared within individual accounts. In the second stage, semi-structured interview transcripts were subjected to open thematic analysis, yielding three emergent categories: child labor, interpersonal relationships, and rural perspective. After individual case analysis, a cross-case structural synthesis was conducted to identify invariant features of experience common across participants.

Unity of the Self: The Body, the Territory, and the Rural Self

In descriptive phenomenology, unity of the self refers to the child's capacity to recognize themselves as a distinct, coherent being — a singular presence in the world with identifiable characteristics, preferences, and a sense of inner continuity. What is analytically significant is not only what participants said about themselves, but the order and form in which self-descriptions appeared, since these reveal the implicit hierarchy of anchors through which the self is constituted.

Across all six self-narratives, participants opened with embodied, sensory, and relational markers rather than psychological abstractions. Child 1 (girl, 12) began by naming her body's limits and aversions: allergies, food dislikes, physical features. The body — its preferences, its boundaries, its sensory experience — is the first territory of self-presentation. Identity is narrated from the inside-out, from somatic experience outward toward the social world. This ordering was structurally consistent across participants and constitutes a phenomenologically significant finding: for these rural children, selfhood is anchored first in corporality, then in relationships, then in aspiration.

Individual self-descriptions revealed a non-fragmented, integrated sense of self characteristic of healthy middle childhood (Branje et al., 2021). Child 5 (boy, 9) combined physical distinctiveness with positive self-appraisal in a single gesture:

"I think I'm a very big-eared and cute boy" [Original: "Me creo que soy muy orejón y lindo"]

Holding together an apparent physical imperfection and affective self-acceptance without contradiction reveals an integrated self-concept. Child 4 (boy, 9) displayed the same capacity, describing himself as simultaneously intelligent and mischievous — integrating competence and playfulness as complementary, not opposing, dimensions of the same self.

Gender differences in the elaboration of self-descriptions were analytically notable. The two older girls (Children 1 and 6, both aged 12) produced the most narratively developed accounts — detailed, multi-layered, and explicitly reflexive, naming specific relationships with full names, specifying allergies and preferences, and projecting futures with professional and geographical detail. By contrast, the two 9-year-old boys produced accounts that were more action-oriented and embodied, organized around sports, physical incidents, and peer interactions. This differential is consistent with developmental research on the earlier emergence of narrative identity elaboration in girls (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), and suggests that age and gender jointly modulate the form — though not necessarily the depth — of identity work in this age range.

What structurally distinguishes these self-descriptions from those documented in urban-centric developmental studies is their grounding in rural materiality. Children did not describe themselves through digital identities or consumption preferences — the dominant registers of urban childhood self-presentation — but through animals, terrain, agricultural rhythms, and community participation. Both boys named their pets individually: Child 4 listed Princesa, Milu, and Ari; Child 5 named Betoven, Ovira, Michi, and Michimiau. The individualization of animals through naming — the attribution of singular identity to non-human beings — is a phenomenologically significant practice. It reveals a self that

constitutes part of its social world through human-animal bonds, for whom animals are not resources or background but relational presences with distinct identities of their own. This form of interspecies belonging is structurally available only within rural lifeworlds and functions as a distinctive anchor of selfhood unavailable to urban children (Green et al., 2016).

Child 6 (girl, 12) further illustrated the constitutive role of the rural environment through a phenomenologically rich account of agricultural participation:

“I like going to la hoja with my parents, making bundles but not carrying them” [Original: “Me gusta ir a la hoja con mis papás, hacer paquetes pero no cargar”]

“La hoja” refers to tobacco leaf harvesting — agricultural labor that forms part of the economic and daily life of the vereda. What is analytically significant is not merely that Sara participates in agricultural work, but the internal distinction she draws: she participates and marks a limit. The self is constituted through voluntary inclusion (making bundles) and the simultaneous assertion of a boundary (but not carrying). This is identity negotiation in action — a child constructing herself as a participant in the rural productive world while exercising agency over the terms of that participation.

Table 1

Theoretical sensitizers and representative excerpts from self-narrative accounts

A priori Categories	Excerpts
Unity of the self	*Topic 1: I am* "I think I'm smart" (Child 4, 9 years old) "I am [name] and I like to play soccer, I like the pool, I am 9 years old... I consider myself an annoying kid" (Child 5, 9 years old) "I think I'm a very big-eared and cute boy" (Child 5, 9 years old) *Topic 2: Personal preferences* "I am 12 years old and my favorite colors are white and yellow. I like butterflies, on skirts" (Child 6, 12 years old) "My name is [name], I have a brother, I am allergic to seafood, I don't like beets" (Child 1, 12 years old)
Integration of the self	*Topic 1: Past–present integration* "An important moment for me was when a person important in my life passed away" (Child 1, 12 years old) "Once on my birthday Esteban was bothering Patricia and I got angry and punched him, knocked out a tooth" (Child 5, 9 years old) *Topic 2: Present–future integration* "When I grow up I want to be a fashion designer and makeup artist, I would like to travel to Mexico" (Child 1, 12 years old) "I would like when I am older: travel to Korea, meet BTS, see the ocean, be a veterinarian or a singer" (Child 3, 11 years old)
Integration with others	*Topic 1: Integration with close persons* "with my dad I get along very well, but I trust my dad more because right now my mom is not close" (Child 1, 12 years old) "My relationship with my mom and dad: bad" (Child 3, 11 years old) *Topic 2: Group membership* "I talk to everyone in the class... I mess around a lot with [names]" (Child 2, 10 years old) "I train in a soccer team" (Child 4, 9 years old)
Note. This table presents representative verbatim excerpts from self-narrative accounts organized by theoretical sensitizer. Excerpts are identified by participant number, sex, and age. Names were anonymized with [name].	
Integration of the Self: Biography, Tension, and Temporal Selfhood	

Integration of the self refers to the capacity to weave past, present, and future into a coherent biographical narrative (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Bruner, 1991). In the self-narratives examined, this capacity manifested in developmentally and culturally specific forms that illuminate how rural children experience temporal selfhood, including how they manage contradiction, loss, and aspirational tension.

Past-present integration

Past-present integration appeared most powerfully in narratives of embodied memory — accounts of episodes that left physical, emotional, or relational traces on the self. Child 5 (boy, 9) narrated two incidents of conflict with unusual phenomenological density, both involving physical confrontation with his cousin Esteban:

"Once, my cousin Esteban had a stick with a big nail, a hose, and a machete, and I had a ladle, and I got angry and threw the ladle at him and split his head open. Once at my birthday, Esteban was bothering Patricia and I got angry and punched him and knocked out a tooth" [Original: "Una vez yo y Patricia no queríamos jugar con mi primo Esteban y él tenía un palo con una puntilla muy grande, una manguera y una macheta, y yo tenía un cucharón y entonces me dio rabia y le tiré el cucharón y le reventé la cabeza. Una vez en mi cumpleaños Esteban estaba que molestaba a Patricia y a mí me dio rabia y le pegué un puño, le saqué un diente"]

Phenomenologically, these are not simple anecdotes. They reveal a self that narrates its history through moral positioning: in both cases, violence arises as a response to perceived injustice toward another (Patricia), not in self-interest. The child defines himself through loyalty and protective anger. The body — the fist, the ladle, the injury — is the instrument through which moral agency is enacted in a world where the physical environment is immediate and present. This is ethical selfhood constructed through action rather than abstraction, characteristic of middle childhood in rural contexts where direct physical engagement with the environment constitutes the primary medium of experience (Piaget, 1970).

Child 4 (boy, 9) narrated a different kind of embodied memory: a bicycle accident on an unbraked bike, without a shirt, falling face-first onto a thorny plant. The specificity of detail — no brakes, no shirt, the exact plant species (corona de Cristo) — marks this as a vivid, recurrently revisited biographical landmark. For these children, the landscape does not merely surround their history — it inscribes itself onto their bodies. The self is literally marked by the rural world.

Child 1 (girl, 12) articulated loss as a biographical marker with deliberate protective vagueness:

"An important moment for me was when a person important in my life passed away" [Original: "Un momento importante para mí fue cuando se murió una persona importante en mi vida"]

The person is not named; the event is not described. This is not emotional evasion but phenomenologically sophisticated boundary-setting: the self marks the formative weight of loss while protecting its most intimate wound from the research encounter. Identity can absorb and metabolize loss without requiring its full disclosure.

Child 2 (girl, 10) offered a structurally different form of past-present integration through her relationship with institutional authority:

"I have never had a formal disciplinary note because the teacher always forgives me" [Original: "Nunca he firmado observador porque la profe siempre me las perdona"]

This statement reveals a child who constructs part of her school identity through a relationship with institutional authority that flexibilizes its norms in response to her. In a rural school setting where the teacher occupies a multi-layered community role, this flexibility is not exceptional but constitutive of a particular kind of rural school belonging. The child's identity is co-constructed with an institution that adapts to her rather than demanding rigid compliance — a structural feature of rural schooling that differs substantially from urban educational environments where norms are more uniformly enforced (Ortega Bravo & Solano León, 2023).

Present-future integration and the tension between rootedness and aspiration

Present-future integration revealed aspirations structurally shaped by what rural life makes available, visible, and imaginable. The futures projected by participants bore the imprint of both local possibility and global desire, and their analysis reveals a phenomenologically significant tension between territorial rootedness and aspirational mobility.

Child 3 (girl, 11) offers the most analytically rich case of this tension. She was the only participant born outside Bucaramanga — born in El Socorro, a municipality approximately 90 km away — a biographical detail that may carry weight in how she positions herself within the vereda's social fabric. Her self-narrative is the most structurally sparse of the six, organized as a list with minimal connective prose, and includes the most compressed emotional disclosure of the entire dataset:

"My relationship with my mom and dad: bad" [Original: "La relación con mi papá y mamá: mal"]

One word. In a document where other children write freely, this compression is not limited reflexivity but deliberate containment: the self marks the relational rupture without dwelling in it and moves on. Identity is being constructed around a wound rather than through it. Yet this same child projects the most expansive future of the six:

"When I grow up I would like to: travel to Korea, meet BTS, see the ocean, be a veterinarian or a singer" [Original: "Me gustaría cuando fuera grande: viajar a Corea, conocer a BTS, conocer el mar, ser veterinaria o cantante"]

The coexistence of these two registers — compressed relational pain and expansive aspiration — within the same narrative is phenomenologically significant. The veterinarian aspiration is locally intelligible: it extends her expressed love for animals into a future profession, grounding aspiration in what the rural world has made available for love. The BTS aspiration is globally oriented, reaching toward a cultural phenomenon accessible through screens but not through the body's daily experience. The ocean, which

she has never seen, appears as a figure of what exists beyond the territory of the known self. These are not contradictory futures but complementary ones: the self projects outward toward the global and simultaneously extends the rural inward toward a future vocation. The tension is the productive tension of an identity in formation.

Child 1 (girl, 12) navigated a related version of this tension: her future aspirations (fashion designer, makeup artist, travel to Mexico) are coded as urban and cosmopolitan, yet she simultaneously affirms her attachment to the rural environment and expresses no desire to leave. Crucially, none of the six participants projected futures that involved abandoning rural life as a condition of aspiration. Futures were oriented toward things not yet accessible — the ocean, foreign countries, urban professions — without the underlying rejection of rural identity documented in older cohorts facing educational transition (Schmuck, 2022). This temporal structure — aspiring forward without repudiating the present — suggests that positive valuation of rurality at this developmental stage is phenomenologically stable, and may represent a distinct feature of middle childhood identity before the renegotiations that accompany early adolescence.

Integration with Others: Trust, Belonging, and the Rural Social World

Integration with others refers to the child's recognition of themselves as a social being embedded in networks of care, affiliation, and collective action. In the narratives examined, this dimension revealed a social world organized around differentiated trust, graduated belonging, and the specific texture of rural community life.

Differentiation of relational quality

Children did not simply list relationships — they positioned themselves within them, distinguishing between types and qualities of bond. Child 1 (girl, 12) drew a phenomenologically precise distinction:

"with my dad I get along very well, but I trust my dad more because right now my mom is not close" [Original: "con mi papá me llevo muy bien pero le tengo más confianza a mi papá porque en este momento mi mamá no está cerca"]

This sentence reveals a child who understands closeness and trust as distinct relational dimensions — who can get along well with someone while allocating trust according to presence and availability. The mother's absence is acknowledged matter-of-factly, without dramatization, as a condition that reconfigures trust without eliminating love. This is relational intelligence operating within the structural realities of rural families, where parental absence for work or migration is a lived condition rather than an exceptional event.

Child 3's relational compression ("my relationship with my mom and dad: bad") stands at the opposite phenomenological pole — not as contradiction but as structural complement. Both children navigate family configurations that deviate from the normative two-parent model; both do so with a matter-of-factness that suggests these configurations are not experienced as aberrant but as the given conditions

of their relational world. This shared structural feature across two otherwise very different participants points toward a broader pattern: rural children in this context demonstrate pragmatic relational intelligence — the capacity to work within imperfect relational configurations without being defined by them.

Group belonging and collective identity

Participation in sports teams was narrated with particular intensity by both boys, and foregrounded collective achievement as a self-definitional marker. Child 5 (boy, 9):

"I am joining a football team called Real Bucaramanga; in 4 days we have scored 7 goals" [Original: "Estoy entrando en un equipo de fútbol que se llama Real Bucaramanga, en 4 días hemos hecho 7 goles"]

The collective pronoun — we have scored — is the phenomenological center of this statement. Individual identity is expressed and confirmed through collective achievement; the team is not a context of identity but a constitutive arena of becoming (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Religious participation (Child 6: "I like going to church"), school sociability (Child 2: "I talk to everyone in the class"), and the desire to make new friends (Child 6: "I like making friends") further revealed the multiplicity of social arenas through which rural children construct their belonging. The vereda functions not as a socially thin environment but as a dense network of interlocking communities — each offering a different facet of social recognition.

Emerging Categories: Child Labor, Interpersonal Relationships, and Rural Perspective

Child Labor: From Experience to Ethical Self-Positioning

The emergent category of child labor revealed a phenomenological dimension absent from the a priori framework: the children's capacity not merely to experience labor but to evaluate it morally, compare it to alternative realities, and position themselves as rights-bearing subjects. This constitutes a qualitatively distinct form of agency (Lansdown, 2005).

Child 6 (girl, 12) articulated a rural/urban comparative framework:

"the work is hard here; city kids don't have to work" [Original: "el trabajo acá es duro, los niños de ciudad no tienen que trabajar"]

This is not complaint but comparative social analysis: the child constructs an urban/rural differential and locates herself as disadvantaged within it. The urban world functions as critical mirror, not aspirational model. Child 4 (boy, 9) expressed phenomenologically complex ambivalence:

"I work and I feel… sometimes I do like to work and sometimes I don't… I think it's normal, but I almost don't like it because it's heavy and I end up tired" [Original: "yo trabajo y me siento… a veces sí me gusta trabajar y a veces no… creo que es normal, pero casi no me gusta porque es pesado y termino cansado"]

The ellipsis in the original Spanish marks a live moment of self-search — the child reaches into ambivalent experience before naming it. He neither fully rejects nor fully accepts the labor; he inhabits the contradiction. Child 3 (girl, 11) included work among her dislikes alongside dietary preferences — "I don't like: going to work" [Original: "no me gusta: ir a trabajar"] — delivered matter-of-factly, without dramatization, as a simple assertion of preference. The phenomenological significance lies in this normalization of refusal: labor is not narrated as trauma but as a condition one simply does not prefer.

Children 1 and 5 went further, invoking a normative children's rights framework spontaneously:

"kids our age aren't supposed to work" [Original: "niños de nuestra edad no deberían trabajar"]

"kids should study instead of work, because they're not at the age to work" [Original: "los niños deberían estudiar en vez de trabajar, porque no están en la edad de trabajar"]

The appearance of this framework — unrequested, self-generated — is among the most analytically significant findings of the study. These children are not merely experiencing labor as burdensome; they are evaluating their own conditions against a standard of what childhood should be. This constitutes what Lansdown (2005) calls the evolving capacity of children as rights subjects — the emerging ability to recognize one's experience as unjust without necessarily having the power to change it. From a cultural psychology standpoint, this spontaneous rights consciousness is a form of counter-hegemonic agency developed through the daily experience of structural disadvantage.

Table 2

Emergent categories and representative excerpts from semi-structured interviews

Emerging Categories	Excerpts
Child labor	"the work is hard here, city kids don't have to work" (Child 6, 12 years old) "I work and I feel... sometimes I do like to work and sometimes I don't. And well, I think it's normal, but I almost don't like it because it's heavy and I end up tired" (Child 4, 9 years old) "I think that's bad, because kids our age aren't supposed to work" (Child 5, 9 years old) "Kids should study instead of work, because they're not at the age to work" (Child 1, 12 years old)
Interpersonal relationships	*Topic 1: Being heard* "they don't listen to me, maybe because I talk too much" (Child 6, 12 years old) "whenever I tell my dad things he helps me solve them" (Child 1, 12 years old) *Topic 2: Relationships* "sometimes people come from the city that I don't get along with so well" (Child 4, 9 years old) "with my dad we go out on weekends to walk, and when he gets home from work we always read the Bible" (Child 1, 12 years old)
Note. This table presents representative verbatim excerpts from semi-structured interviews organized by emergent category. Excerpts are identified by participant number, sex, and age.	

Interpersonal Relationships: Recognition, Adaptation, and Rural Authority

Children's accounts of interpersonal relationships revealed a dialectic between presence and absence, voice and recognition, that is constitutive of rural childhood identity. Child 6 expressed a desire for maternal pedagogical presence:

Emerging Categories	Excerpts
Rural perspective	*Topic 1: Nature perception* "I like that here it is peaceful and the nature, the birds, the cows, the hens" (Child 6, 12 years old) "What I like most about the vereda are the springs and streams, and the reservoir you can see, I also like the silence. I like everything about the vereda" (Child 3, 11 years old) *Topic 2: Spaces* "here it's nicer, in the city there's a lot of traffic, a lot of fights and it's dangerous" (Child 4, 9 years old) "I have a lot of space to play and run" (Child 5, 9 years old) "Sometimes when we need something everything is very far, like the stationery store, when I need to print something, the shop, the hospital, everything." (Child 1, 12 years old)
Note. This table presents representative verbatim excerpts from semi-structured interviews organized by emergent category. Excerpts are identified by participant number, sex, and age.	

Interpersonal Relationships: Recognition, Adaptation, and Rural Authority

Children's accounts of interpersonal relationships revealed a dialectic between presence and absence, voice and recognition, that is constitutive of rural childhood identity. Child 6 expressed a desire for maternal pedagogical presence:

"I like my mom to explain things to me" [Original: "me gusta que mi mamá me explique las cosas"]

To be explained to is to be taken seriously as a thinking subject. This desire reveals a child who positions the parent not only as affective resource but as epistemic partner — someone through whom understanding of the world is constructed. Several children navigated experiences of being discounted or overlooked by adults, managing these experiences actively rather than passively. Child 2's ironic pride in her disciplinary immunity suggests not disobedience but relational skill — the capacity to navigate institutional rules through the affective texture of the teacher-student relationship. The density of named relationships across all six narratives — specific friends, cousins, classmates identified individually — suggests a social world of small scale but high relational intensity, where each bond carries weight precisely because the pool of available peers is limited.

Rural Perspective: The Landscape as Constitutive Self

The emergent category of rural perspective revealed the most analytically significant finding of the study: the rural environment is not experienced by participants as the setting of their lives but as a constitutive dimension of their identity — what Bronfenbrenner (1979) would call an active proximal process rather than a passive ecological backdrop. Child 1 (girl, 12) articulated this most completely:

“What I like most about the vereda are the springs and streams, and the reservoir you can see; I also like the silence. I like everything about the vereda” [Original: “Lo que más me gusta de la vereda son las quebradas y nacederos, y el embalse que se ve; también me gusta el silencio. Me gusta todo de la vereda”]

“Me gusta todo” — I like everything — is not an absence of differentiation but an expression of total, undivided belonging. The child can name specifics (streams, reservoir, silence) and then arrives at a formulation that exceeds enumeration: the whole exceeds the sum of its parts. The vereda is loved not for its features but as a world, in the phenomenological sense — as the totality of a lived horizon within which experience unfolds. This is territorial identity at its most fundamental: not preference for a place but constitution by a place.

Child 5 (boy, 9) expressed the same belonging through embodied action: “I like to throw myself down the slopes of the hill” — a statement that encodes freedom, physical risk, spatial mastery, and the specific joy available only in environments where the body and landscape meet without barriers. This is a fundamental mode of being-in-the-rural-world that Green (2017) describes as environmental identity formation through direct, unmediated bodily engagement with natural space. The spontaneous urban/rural comparison appeared across multiple participants and consistently constructed the rural as superior: quieter, safer, more natural, more free.

“here it’s nicer; in the city there’s a lot of traffic, a lot of fights, and it’s dangerous” [Original: “acá es más bonito, en la ciudad hay mucho tráfico, muchas peleas y es peligroso”]

These children do not experience their rurality as lack or deficit. They experience it as a form of richness that the urban world, defined by its noise and danger, does not possess.

Structural Synthesis: Invariant Features of Rural Identity Construction

Across all six participants, despite their individual differences in age, gender, family configuration, and narrative form, a cross-case analysis reveals three invariant structural features of personal identity construction in this rural context.

First, identity is territorially grounded. The rural environment is not the backdrop of these children’s development — it is its active medium. The landscape inscribes itself on their bodies (the thorny plant, the slopes, the bicycle), organizes their relationships (the vereda as the bounded social world within which all significant others are located), and provides the sensory-affective material through which selfhood is recognized and expressed. Human-animal bonds, agricultural rhythms, and direct physical engagement with natural space constitute forms of self-anchoring that are structurally unavailable in urban contexts. This territorial grounding is the most distinctive feature of rural identity construction in this context, and it has no equivalent in urban-centric developmental models.

Second, identity is constituted through adaptive relational intelligence. These children — whether navigating parental absence (Child 1), relational rupture (Child 3), institutional authority (Child 2), or the ambivalence of labor (Child 4) — demonstrate a pragmatic, non-dramatic capacity to work within

imperfect conditions without being defined by them. This is not resilience in the therapeutic sense but something more structural: a relational competence developed through inhabiting a world where relationships are dense, roles are multiple, and the community is both support structure and regulatory system.

Third, identity integrates rootedness and aspiration without contradiction. All six participants expressed futures that reach beyond the vereda — toward cities, toward Korea, toward the ocean, toward urban professions — while simultaneously affirming their belonging to and love for their rural world. This coexistence is not experienced as tension requiring resolution but as the natural temporal structure of a self that is from somewhere while also oriented toward elsewhere. It suggests that positive valuation of rurality at ages 8–12 in this context is not a product of limited awareness of alternatives, but a genuine, phenomenologically stable feature of identity in middle childhood — one that, as documented in older cohorts (Schmuck, 2022; Cifuentes-Garzón, 2024), may undergo renegotiation as children access new social comparisons and face educational transitions that demand choosing between the local and the mobile.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe the construction of personal identity in children aged 8 to 12 years living in CONTEXT BLINDED FOR REVIEW PURPOSE, a rural context full of significant sociocultural particularities (Green, 2017). The voices of the participants themselves were key in articulating their narratives with conceptual categories from psychosocial and cognitive developmental theories (Erikson, 1950; Piaget, 1970; Quiroga et al., 2021).

Results allowed the identification of three fundamental dimensions in self-configuration: unity of the self, integration of the self, and integration with others. These dimensions reflect identity processes consistent with the personal identity model of Quiroga et al. (2021) and Yañez Medina & Capella Sepúlveda (2021), which recognizes the evolutionary, relational, and cultural character of identity in childhood. Identity is thus a dynamic process configured throughout the life cycle, influenced by experiences, significant relationships, and culture. In this sense, the findings relate to the contributions of Cortés (2021), who analyzed the narratives of children in a rural context, demonstrating the importance of family, school, and social environment in identity construction.

In the unity of the self dimension, children described themselves through physical attributes, preferences, emotions, and self-defined perceptions. This recognition of singularity constitutes an initial basis of self-awareness, characteristic of Piaget's (1970) stage of concrete operations, where thinking becomes more reflective and structured. The choice of adjectives such as "intelligent," "cute," or "allergic" demonstrates a construction of the self that incorporates physical and symbolic elements, reinforcing the sense of individuality.

These findings coincide with Yañez Medina and Capella Sepúlveda (Yañez Medina & Capella Sepúlveda, 2021), who indicate that self-perception in childhood is initially based on concrete and observable

attributes, which progressively enrich with emotional and evaluative aspects as cognitive development allows. In rural children, this self-perception is closely linked to functionality within the household and community, reinforcing identity from a relational and utilitarian perspective. Additionally, Lozano Meneses et al. (2022) suggest that in rural contexts identity is formed in dialogue with concrete cultural practices, such as agricultural work, interaction with animals, or care of the natural environment—aspects clearly mentioned by participants in describing themselves.

The integration of the self dimension demonstrates participants' capacity to narrate significant past experiences—such as celebrations, accidents, or losses—and to project future aspirations related to professions, travel, or affective bonds. These narratives reveal a temporal line of self-understanding that allows conferring coherence to the self, constituting an indicator of the development of narrative identity (Bruner, 1991).

Children's capacity to construct a coherent personal narrative with past, present, and future projection reflects what Habermas and Bluck (2000) call "narrative identity"—a process in which individuals organize their experiences through accounts that give continuity and meaning to their own lives. In the rural context, this temporal integration of the self appears marked by experiences shared with previous generations—for example, learning to cultivate or care for animals—strengthening an intergenerational identity. Furthermore, Narvaja de Arnoux (2012) has noted that children's narratives in rural areas tend to anchor in the communal rather than the individual, also observed in this study, where significant memories were deeply connected to family celebrations, agricultural practices, or school routines.

In the integration with others dimension, the central role of affective relationships with family figures, friendships, and belonging groups (such as sports teams or school collectives) was evidenced (Jara Barnett et al., 2024; Lozano Meneses et al., 2022). Trust bonds with caregivers, peers, and the community reinforce or complicate a sense of territorial belonging, while comparisons with urban children allow for identity and social differentiation (Fan & Li, 2025). This dimension aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) ecological model, showing how microsystems—family, school, community—directly intervene in self-formation (Fig. 1).

In this dimension, findings align with Erikson's (1950) proposal, who emphasizes that identity is built in constant interaction with significant others, especially during childhood. However, recent studies such as Cortés (2021) and Jara Barnett et al. (2024) expand this view by showing that dynamics of belonging and exclusion in rural childhoods are mediated by the perception of being different from the urban world, which reinforces a differentiated collective identity. In this study, children clearly expressed this distinction, recognizing themselves as part of a quieter, more natural, and safer environment compared to a noisier and more stressful urban one.

One of the most relevant contributions of this research was the identification of the rural context as the structuring core of childhood identity. From a cultural psychology perspective, this finding is theoretically significant beyond its empirical content: it challenges the hegemonic developmental canon that treats rural contexts as understimulating or deficient environments, and instead reveals them as rich,

polyphonic arenas of human becoming — arenas in which nature, labor, community, and intergenerational knowledge constitute the very fabric of the emerging self. Children expressed a strong connection with nature, animals, agricultural work, and community practices—elements that configure their sense of belonging, security, and well-being. This identity construction, based on the daily rhythms of rural life, contrasts with urban models centered on technology, consumption, and mobility (Green, 2017). Appreciation for tranquility, landscape, freedom of movement, and close bonds were recurrently valued by participants, most of whom expressed little interest in leaving their rural environment.

Another particularly relevant finding was the critical awareness regarding child labor. Several children expressed dissatisfaction with the work responsibilities assigned at their age, making spontaneous comparisons with the lives of children in urban contexts. This reflective positioning constitutes an expression of children's agency (Lansdown, 2005) that goes beyond simple role internalization and demonstrates a capacity for ethical evaluation of their environment. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) estimates that child labor in rural areas of Latin America disproportionately affects the most vulnerable children, with documented consequences for cognitive development, school attendance, and identity construction. Recent research confirms that the absence of stable family figures and inadequate rural educational support compound these risks, significantly affecting the behavioral health of rural children (Zeng et al., 2025). The fact that participants in this study consciously express this tension suggests that psychosocial interventions in rural contexts must incorporate reflection spaces on rights, equity, and child well-being.

Findings coincide with Piaget (1970) regarding the role of environmental interaction in knowledge construction, and with studies such as Rossel and Torrejón (2019), who highlight the influence of the physical context on childhood identity. Likewise, recent studies (Quevedo Chigne & Ortecho Rodríguez, 2022; Yañez Medina & Capella Sepúlveda, 2021) have shown that in rural areas identity is configured from lived experience, ancestral knowledge, and affective bonds, clearly reflected in the narratives gathered.

It is important to recognize, however, that not all findings of this research converge with the available literature. While participants in this study expressed a positive valuation of rurality and little desire to migrate to urban contexts, research such as Schmuck (2022) in Argentina documents more marked tensions between rural identity and social mobility aspirations, particularly in adolescents close to school completion. This divergence may be explained by the age difference between the samples—children aged 8 to 12 in this study compared to young people at educational transition age—suggesting that positive valuation of rurality may change as children access new social comparisons and future projections. Likewise, Cifuentes-Garzón (2024) notes that the rural school can operate both as a space for identity strengthening and as a site of tension between local cultural capital and formal educational system demands, a dynamic only tangentially mentioned by participants in this study when referring to their school journeys and teachers.

Among the study's strengths, the narrative richness obtained through developmentally sensitive instruments, validation with community actors, and theoretical integration with contemporary psychosocial development models are highlighted. The study also contributes to making visible the voices of rural childhoods, frequently underrepresented in academic literature, and to generating useful evidence for designing educationally and psychosocially adapted programs for the territory.

The final sample of six children represents a limitation in terms of result transferability. This restriction was determined by inclusion criteria (residence time and age) and especially by physical access conditions to the territory, since the vereda presents mobility difficulties (dirt roads, absence of public transport, foot travel), making sample expansion difficult. Nevertheless, the phenomenological approach sought a dense, situated, and meaningful understanding of the phenomenon rather than its generalization. It’s relevant to remark, validity in qualitative research lies in the depth of contextual analysis, not just in sample size (Kakar et al., 2023).

Finally, findings open new research lines that can address identity construction in rural childhoods from an intersectional perspective, considering variables such as gender, ethnic belonging, ancestry, forced displacement, or migration. Demand-driven approaches — such as those applied by Zeng et al. (2025) to map the educational needs of rural left-behind children — offer promising methodological models for future studies. Longitudinal studies are also suggested to observe the evolution of the narrative and social self over the life course, particularly in rural territories undergoing transformation due to economic, environmental, and cultural factors.

5. Conclusion

Personal identity is a psychosocial and evolutionary construct that organizes key psychological characteristics from childhood. Children in vereda CONTEXT BLINDED FOR REVIEW PURPOSE construct their identity through processes of assimilation and accommodation of lived experiences, in constant interaction with their family, social, and cultural context. The vereda is configured as a significant proximal environment, where rural activities, affective bonds with animals, and non-conventional games contribute to self-identification and social recognition.

Identity constructed in rural contexts presents differentiated traits, with highlighted motor, cognitive, imaginative, and socio-affective skills, as well as notable development of naturalistic intelligence (Marulanda Londoño et al., 2023). Rural children face tensions between tradition and modernity, configuring unique challenges and opportunities in their identity process (Feixa Pàmpols, 2020; Aguirre-Pastén et al., 2017). Psychosocial development involves traversing various crises that shape identity. In the rural environment, this process is influenced by connection with nature, community life, and preservation of traditions.

The findings of this research allow for various implications for professional practice in the educational, psychological, and community spheres, especially in rural contexts. Therefore, psychosocial interventions must consider the rural environment not only as a geographic context but as a dynamic

cultural system that actively participates in the identity development process. The personal identity of minors is constructed in close relation to their environment, so professional actions must consider the influence of family, school, community, and nature as key agents in this process (Cifuentes Garzón, 2022). This implies, psychologically, the implementation of emotional support programs, strengthening of affective bonds, and prevention of psychosocial risks related to child labor and tensions between rural and urban life.

From the educational field, the design of contextualized pedagogical strategies is needed—integrating local knowledge, rural practices, and connection with nature as resources to strengthen the sense of belonging, self-esteem, and integral development of students. Teachers are encouraged to promote dialogue spaces where children can express their experiences, perceptions, and expectations, thus contributing to the consolidation of a solid personal identity.

Likewise, public policies and social programs must consider the needs and potentialities of rural childhood, generating scenarios that promote the recognition of their rights, access to educational and mental health resources, and promotion of their active participation in community life (Ortega Bravo & Solano León, 2023).

Finally, the importance of continuing research in rural contexts is emphasized to expand knowledge about identity construction processes in childhood, enabling the design of relevant, culturally sensitive, and sustainable interventions that contribute to strengthening psychosocial development from an integral and situated perspective.

Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests, financial or non-financial, directly or indirectly related to the work submitted for publication.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Author Contribution

H.A.P-A. conceptualized the study, led data analysis, and wrote the manuscript. V.R-V. contributed to data collection and initial analysis. D.C.G-D. and W.A.A-A contributed to methodological design and manuscript revision. All authors read and approved of the final manuscript.

Acknowledgement

AcknowledgementsSpecial acknowledgement is extended to the rural community of Vereda Retiro Chiquito, whose generosity and openness made this research possible. We also wish to acknowledge psychology student Andrea Bastos, whose support in facilitating access to the community was of utmost importance for the research team and for the advancement of knowledge on Colombian rural childhoods.1.1. Ethics approval and consent to participateThe study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Psychology at Universidad Manuela Beltrán (file PS22102). Written informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all child participants, and verbal assent was obtained from the children. All procedures were conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.1.2. Ethical ConsiderationsThe study was conducted with prior approval from the Ethics Committee of Psychology at Universidad Manuela Beltrán (file PS22102). Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were guaranteed. Informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians of the children, and participation was ensured to be voluntary and without risk to the minors. Participant identification was carried out in collaboration with the Community Action Board leader, who supported verification of inclusion criteria compliance.

Data Availability

The datasets supporting the conclusions of this article are included within the article (in the form of verbatim excerpts presented in Tables 1 and 2). Raw interview transcripts are not publicly available to protect participant confidentiality, in accordance with the ethical approval conditions. Data may be made available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

References

1. Aguirre-Pastén, B., Gajardo-Tobar, A., & Muñoz-Madrid, L. (2017). Construcción de identidad de la niñez en contextos de ruralidad en la comuna de Concepción, Chile. Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud, 15(2), 893–911. https://doi.org/10.11600/1692715x.1520722112016
2. Akhter, N. (2025). The psychological aspects of child development: Understanding the cognitive, emotional, and social growth of children. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*. https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i02.35450
3. Albarello, F., Crocetti, E., & Rubini, M. (2018). I and us: A longitudinal study on the interplay of personal and social identity in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *47*, 689–702. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0791-4
4. Branje, S., De Moor, E., Spitzer, J., & Becht, A. (2021). Dynamics of identity development in adolescence: A decade in review. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *31*, 908–927. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12678

5. Blumer, H. (1954). What is wrong with social theory? *American Sociological Review*, *19*(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.2307/2088165
6. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
7. Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, *18*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1086/448619
8. Castillo Henríquez, P., & Williamson Castro, G. (2023). Transiciones educativas de jóvenes en contexto rural mapuche: experiencia, aspiraciones e identidad. *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales Niñez y Juventud*, *22*(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.11600/rlcsnj.22.1.6306
9. Cifuentes Garzón, J. E. (2022). Contexto sociocultural y construcción de identidades en jóvenes de escuelas rurales. *Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales*, *13*(2), 498–520. https://doi.org/10.21501/22161201.3724
10. Cifuentes-Garzón, J. E. (2024). Construcción de identidades estudiantiles en jóvenes rurales. *Última Década*, *32*(63), 218–257. https://doi.org/10.5354/0718-2236.2024.76665
11. Cortés, A. (2021). Infancia rural: Una mirada a la construcción de identidades a través de las narrativas de niños y niñas de la vereda Márquez, La Calera [Master's thesis, Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas].
12. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
13. Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. W. W. Norton & Company.
14. Fan, W., & Li, M. (2025). Personal identity development in Chinese early adolescents: Predictions from parenting style and peer relationships. *Child Development*. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14227
15. Feixa Pàmpols, C. (2020). Identidad, juventud y crisis: el concepto de crisis en las teorías sobre la juventud. *RES Revista Española de Sociología*, *29*(3), 11–26. https://doi.org/10.22325/fes/res.2020.72
16. Fernández, M. (2019). La construcción de la identidad rural juvenil: Un acercamiento desde los eventos letrados de los estudiantes [Master's thesis, Universidad de Antioquia].
17. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (2023). *The state of food and agriculture 2023*. FAO.
18. Green, C., Kalvaitis, D., & Worster, A. (2016). Recontextualizing psychosocial development in young children: A model of environmental identity development. *Environmental Education Research*, *22*(7), 1025–1048. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2015.1072136
19. Green, C. (2017). Children environmental identity development in an Alaska Native rural context. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *49*, 303–319. https://doi.org/10.1007/S13158-017-0204-6
20. Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*, *126*(5), 748–769. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.748
21. International Labour Organization (ILO). (2020). *Child labour in agriculture*. ILO.

22. Jara Barnett, D. A., Velarde, J., Condori, C. R. H., M. Y., & Tello Ludeña, E. S. (2024). El juego libre y la construcción de identidad en los niños y las niñas del ciclo II de educación inicial [Bachelor's thesis, ITS].
23. Kakar, Z. U. H., Rasheed, R., Rashid, A., & Akhter, S. (2023). Criteria for assessing and ensuring the trustworthiness in qualitative research. *International Journal of Business Reflections*, *4*(2), 150–173. https://doi.org/10.56249/ijbr.03.01.44
24. Lansdown, G. (2005). *The evolving capacities of the child*. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
25. Larsen, B., Verstynen, T., Yeh, F., & Luna, B. (2018). Developmental changes in the integration of affective and cognitive corticostriatal pathways are associated with reward-driven behavior. *Cerebral Cortex*, *28*, 2834–2845. https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bhx162
26. Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
27. Lozano Meneses, C., Rodríguez Moreno, L. V., & García Jaramillo, H. A. (2022). Estado, familia y educación en la construcción de identidad de infancias étnicas de las ciudades de Medellín y Cali. *Revista Virtual Universidad Católica del Norte*, (65), 284–310. https://doi.org/10.35575/rvucn.n65a11.
28. Maiese, M. (2017). Transformative learning, enactivism, and affectivity. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *36*, 197–216. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-015-9506-z
29. Marulanda Londoño, L. F., Barreto, A., A. J., & Rincón Álvarez, G. A. (2023). Confiabilidad y validez del cuestionario de inteligencias múltiples. *Revista Perspectivas*, *8*(1), 85–95. https://doi.org/10.22463/25909215.3940
30. Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE.
31. de Narvaja, E. (2012). *Análisis del discurso: modos de abordar materiales de archivo*. Santiago Arcos.
32. Ortega Bravo, E. E., & Solano León, E. D. J. (2023). Inequidad en la educación rural en Colombia: revisión de literatura. *Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar*, *7*(1), 7257–7274. https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v7i1.4961
33. Piaget, J. (1970). Piaget's theory. In P. H. Mussen (Ed.), *Carmichael's manual of child psychology* (pp. 703–732). Wiley.
34. Pulga, J., & Díaz Linares, M. (2024). La identidad y la pluralidad dentro de la convivencia escolar en la escuela rural colombiana. *MLS Educational Research*, *8*(2). https://doi.org/10.29314/mlser.v8i2.2422
35. Quevedo Chigne, C. A., & Ortecho Rodríguez, Z. C. (2022). Identidad cultural en estudiantes de primaria en zona rural. *Tecnohumanismo*, *2*(3), 426–442. https://doi.org/10.53673/th.v2i3.171
36. Quiroga, F., Capella, C., Sepúlveda, G., Conca, B., & Miranda, J. (2021). Identidad personal en niños y adolescentes: Estudio cualitativo. *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales Niñez y Juventud*, *19*(2), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.11600/rlcsnj.19.2.4448
37. Rossel, I., & Torrejón, D. (2019). Identidad personal en niños y niñas de 6 a 12 años del sector rural Las Palmas de Llay-Llay [Undergraduate thesis, Universidad de Chile].

38. Schmuck, M. E. (2022). Somos estudiantes del campo: identificaciones de jóvenes rurales en Entre Ríos (Argentina). Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales. *Niñez y Juventud*, *20*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.11600/rlcsnj.20.1.4865
39. Soll, D., Guraiib, M., Rollins, N., & Reis, A. (2020). Improving assent in health research: A rapid systematic review. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *20*, 1000. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-020-01000-3
40. Vagle, M. D. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
41. Van den Hoonaard, W. C. (1997). *Working with sensitizing concepts: Analytical field research*. SAGE.
42. Yañez Medina, C. A., & Capella Sepúlveda, C. (2021). Construcción de identidad personal en niños y niñas aymara residentes en Chile. *Revista de Psicología (Santiago)*, *30*(2), 54–70. https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-0581.2021.60644
43. Zeng, B., Deng, Z., Zeng, L., & Mao, X. (2025). Supporting the behavioral health of rural left-behind children through rural education: A multi-dimensional demands-driven strategy study. *Scientific Reports*, *15*(1), 42591. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-26616-7

Figures

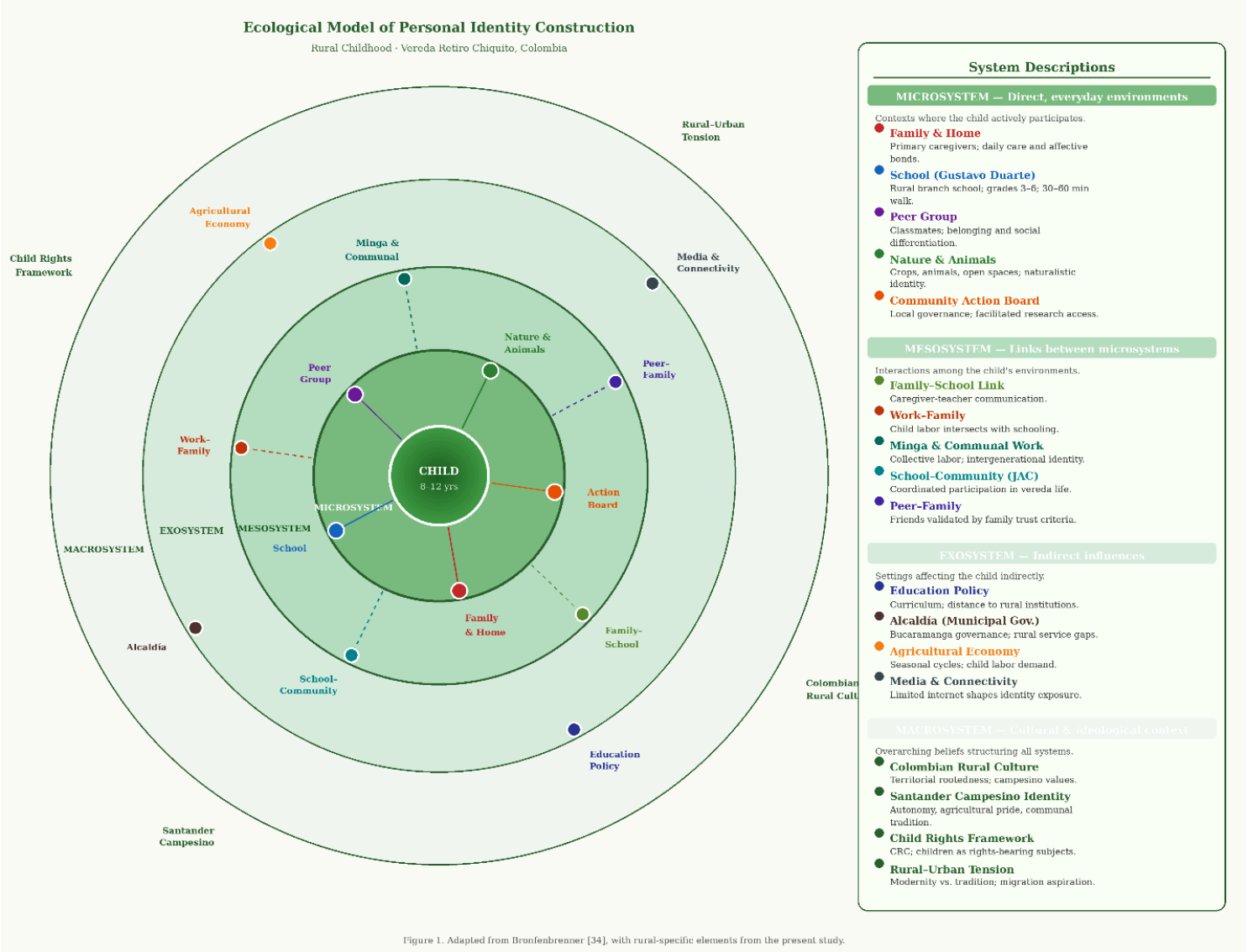


Figure 1

The rural vereda as an active arena of becoming: ecological model of personal identity construction in rural childhood (CONTEXT BLINDED FOR REVIEW PURPOSE, Colombia). The figure illustrates how microsystems — family, school, nature, peers, and community — function not merely as contextual layers but as constitutive media of rural childhood identity, organized around the territorial, relational, and temporal structures identified in the present analysis. Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- COREQChecklistv3.docx