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School community relations and youth subjectivities in vulnerable urban contexts of Cali Colombia

Daniel Campo Sarria

daniel.campo@correounivalle.edu.co

University of Valle

Harold Manzano Sánchez

University of Valle

Gloria Cecilia Pérez Díaz

University of Valle

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Abstract

This article analyzes school–community relationships through the lived experiences of high school students at a public institution in Cali, Colombia. Utilizing a qualitative and ethnographic perspective, the study explores how young people perceive and construct meanings within their personal, family, and community interactions through participatory workshops, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. The results reveal four relational dynamics: The ability of young people to resist adversity, the role of the school as an emotional refuge, the cultural richness derived from social migration and the growing influence of digital globalization.

The analysis is based on a theoretical framework proposed by Delors, Bronfenbrenner, Maturana and Freire, who conceived education as a psychosocial process based on dialogue, coexistence and holistic human development. School–community relations were concluded to constitute an affective, pedagogical and symbolic fabric, in which the school represents one of the few places of trust and reconstruction of meaning for young people in vulnerable urban contexts. Strengthening pedagogies that promote human dignity, the ethics of care and the dialogue of knowledges is recommended as a core approach to foster resilient educational and life trajectories in the midst of conditions of economic precariousness and family, social and political violence.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, schools have undergone profound social, cultural and technological transformations that affect the daily lives of young people. In urban contexts characterized by violence, poverty and fragmentation of the social fabric, such as Cali, secondary education students experience processes of socialization that combine exclusion with the search for recognition, belonging and social progress. In this scenario, family organization, community dynamics and digital networks are intertwined with school experience and life projects, configuring complex spaces of learning, identity and coexistence (Soletic and Kelly 2022).

Studies on the relationship between schools and communities have focused mainly on the implementation of educational policies, pedagogical flexibility and the strengthening of citizen participation. However, recent literature emphasizes that school–community alliances are critical for fostering social justice and equitable collaboration, particularly in marginalized contexts (Ishimaru 2020). Despite this importance, the voices and experiences of students are often left out, even though their daily lives are profoundly affected by the interactions among these factors.

In recent years, understanding this relationship has become relevant in Ibero-America, especially in contexts marked by inequality, violence and the expansion of digital technologies as new spaces of socialization (Bonal and González 2020). In the context of secondary education, schools not only organize formative processes but also act as a central space in the construction of youth identities and a sense of belonging in the school, where social meanings and student group relationships contribute to configuring specific educational experiences (Reyes Juárez 2009).

Gil Antón (2017) notes that decisions to remain in, drop out or leave the educational system are dependent not only on individual choices but also on social conditions, which unevenly delimit the possibilities of adapting to or disengaging from the school system. Therefore, the schooling of young people is configured at the intersection between social origin, institutional conditions and future expectations and mediated by preexisting social inequalities.

In this framework, the following question arises that guides this study: ¿How are school–community relationships configured, according to the life experiences of high school students in Cali?

From educational, psychosocial and cultural perspectives, the ways in which young people communicate their personal experiences with their school and community environments are analyzed revealing the processes of subjectivation, affective bonding and social participation in the face of contemporary challenges. The main purpose is to characterize school–community relationships on the basis of the life experiences of a group of high school students and explore the ways in which they construct meaning in the face of their daily realities.

A qualitative ethnographic approach is adopted in this research, with the aim to understand the meanings that students attribute to the relationship between their school context and their social environment. For this purpose, various information collection techniques were used, such as field and participant observations, participatory workshops, focus groups, unstructured interviews, pedagogical outings, document review, questionnaires and surveys.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that support the dialogue between the two central categories of this research —school–community relations and the life experiences of secondary education students—are based mainly on the ecological approach of Urie Bronfenbrenner and on the pillars of education for the 21st century proposed by Jacques Delors, complemented by the critical perspective of Paulo Freire and the humanist vision of Humberto Maturana.

Bronfenbrenner (1987) provides an ecological description of human development by stating that the person is formed in the constant interaction between various systems: the microsystem (family, school and peer group), the mesosystem (neighborhood and community relations), the exosystem (urban and national environment) and the macrosystem (social institutions, culture and digital networks). From this perspective, the life experiences of high school students are configured at the intersection between the school, family, community and virtual platforms, which are understood as interdependent environments that directly affect the students' well-being and the development of their life plans.

From a psychosocial perspective, Delors (1996) proposes the four pillars of education—learning to be, to know, to do and to live together—as inseparable dimensions of integral human development. This approach contributes to our understanding of the relationships between schools and communities as

opportunities to strengthen meaningful learning and promote students' emotional, personal and social development.

From a critical perspective, Freire (1999, 2000) proposes that education is a practice of freedom and dialogue, where relations between the school and the community should be horizontal, participatory and transformative, transcending the banking model of knowledge transmission. From this perspective, the school–community relationship is understood as a pedagogical and political relationship in which subjects construct meaning from their experience and context.

Finally, Maturana (2003 2021) describes education as a process of interaction between the biological and the cultural, in which human beings are transformed through coexistence. The school, in this sense, is not a neutral place but a relational system that can promote learning, respect, cooperation and team work. Both the school and the community are configured as systems of coexistence and places of conversation and care that can become emotional refuges in adverse or violent contexts (Kaplan 2022 2024).

Together, these authors allow us to understand school–community relations not only as institutional links but also as an ecosystem of coexistence, learning and collaboration, where respect, mutual care and active participation are essential conditions for human and formative development.

3. Methodology

In this study, a qualitative approach with an ethnographic and participatory orientation was adopted, with the goal of understanding the experiences of students in their school and community context. Immersing themselves in the school environment allowed the researchers to observe the daily lives of the young people and characterize the meanings they attribute to the school–community relationship. The main sources of information were the stories, practices and interactions of the students during the educational activities organized by the institution and the work days planned by the researchers.

In coordination with the school administrators, two groups of students—one from the tenth grade and the other from the eleventh grade—who were studying humanities and were oriented toward the development of educational and social research skills were selected. The activities were carried out in the time slots corresponding to the subjects of this module. In total, 63 students participated: 34 from the tenth grade (12 boys and 22 girls) and 29 from the eleventh grade (6 boys and 23 girls). The age of the students ranged between 14 and 19 years, and the majority of them were from socioeconomic strata 2 and 3.

Information collection included various methodological strategies: review of institutional documents and students' academic work; participant observation in school activities and events; social cartography workshops; unstructured interviews with administrators, teachers and students; and the administration of questionnaires and surveys to the participating groups.

In the analysis stage, student voices were categorized and codified and four themes were generated: family life, everyday school life, community fabric and digital networks. This process was supported by conducting focus group discussions, unstructured interviews and literature review on the objects of the study. The information was organized with the support of the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti, which allowed rigorous and systematic comparison and interpretation of the data.

In accordance with the ethical criteria of educational research, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the confidentiality of the information collected was guaranteed. Student participation was voluntary and mediated by the authorization of institutional directives and parents or guardians. The researchers attempted to establish a horizontal relationship with the participants by recognizing the voices of the students as valid and legitimate sources of knowledge about their own school and community experiences.

4. Results and analysis

The information obtained from the activities developed in the research was organized under four thematic clusters that provide structure to the relationships between the school and the community: family life, everyday school life, community fabric and digital networks.

4.1 Family life

Most of students' families had roots in other regions of the country, such as southwestern Colombia, including Huila, Cauca, Nariño and Putumayo, and the coffee zone, including Quindío, Pereira, Caldas and Antioquia. Some participants mentioned foreign ancestry, specifically Venezuela, or mentioned that one of their parents resided in another country, such as Spain, Ecuador or Mexico.

Most family groups had experienced reconfiguration because of the separation of parents and the formation of new couples. During the study period, a good proportion of the students lived with their mothers and siblings, although they maintained frequent contact with their parents who resided in other households. It was also common for some students to live with grandparents, uncles or cousins, either because their parents had separated or because one parent lived outside the country.

This type of family dynamic leads to conflicts related to paternal absence and emotional abandonment. When talking about their families, students repeatedly mentioned absent or emotionally distant parents as important reasons for suffering and pain. Similarly, they described experiences of rupture in family communication, marked by the inability to have a dialogue without shouting, the use of accusations and prolonged silences, and parents' authoritarian and controlling attitudes that limited freedom and denied youth autonomy.

Family histories reflected recurring experiences of violence, machismo and emotional deficiencies that are repeated generationally, constituting an inheritance of family suffering and unresolved collective emotional challenges. Additionally, students reported ambivalent relationships with paternal figures,

where feelings of affection and rejection coexisted and love and pain were directed toward the same person.

In general, the most admired figures were mothers, who were recognized for their strength and ability to support families emotionally and economically. They were described as hard-working, independent and resilient women. One student commented that *"Despite everything, my mother always strives to be positive and gives good life lessons"* and *"She is a woman who has been through many things but still has managed to overcome them"*.

4.2 Everyday school life

Everyday school life, according to students accounts, was classified into three types based on fundamental interactions: teaching and learning relationships, interpersonal ties and institutional practices. The first pertains to the meanings that students attribute to the pedagogical model and the curricular approach that guide daily educational activities. The second refers to the experiences of coexistence that emerge in the relationships between peers, teachers, administrators and other members of the educational community. The third is associated with the meanings attributed to the management of rules, institutional policies and administrative decisions that regulate school life.

The pedagogical model of the educational institution is guided by the principles of dialogic learning (Rodríguez 2022) and the methodology of the learning communities program (Elboj, Puigdellivol, Soler and Valls 2006; Morlà-Folch, Renta, Cuxart and Valls 2022). The curricular structure is based on the Curricular Reorganization by Cycles (RCC) proposal (SED 2011), which organizes educational work by training cycles on the basis of the rhythms, interests and learning processes of the students. The two groups that participated in the research were in cycle IV, whose central objective was to prepare for professional life and higher education.

One of the strategies the educational institution has adopted for cycle IV is to offer students four training modules. Students in the tenth grade select one module that fits their personal interests and abilities. The participants of this study chose the humanities module, which is oriented toward the development of social sciences skills and critical thinking. This module includes training regarding the formulation of a research project and the presentation of a monograph through a systematic process.

Regarding the selection of the training module, some students stated that in social networks, it was thought that those who chose the humanities module did so because they felt less intellectually capable than other students, since the humanities module had lower academic demands than the other modules. This perception is directly connected to social stereotypes that undervalue the work of professionals in the fields of philosophy, education and social sciences, as well as economists that place these occupations in the lower ranges of the salary scale.

One aspect that stands out in the context of daily life at school is the frequency of conflicts and aggressions between different educational actors. Almost daily, complaints and accusations regarding fights and abuse among students reach teachers' desks and coordinators' offices. Gossip and false

information are among the main problems that circulate through virtual networks. Lovers’ betrayals, jealousy, harassment and sexual abuse are also noted as common reasons for arguments and fights between emotional partners.

Institutional practices are marked by the dynamics of public education. In particular, political decisions, administrative procedures and budgetary allocations generate tensions between teachers and officials of the Municipal Education Secretariat. At the beginning and end of the school year, there are occurrences of conflicts related to efforts of the educational coverage policy to reallocate contributions from public education to private education. For the year 2026, there is a threat of cutting more than 100 teaching positions and 35 coordinator roles, which has alerted both the teachers' union and parents to stop the negative effects on the educational quality for children and youth in the city.

However, during 2025, 108 young people graduated from the educational institution with a high school degree, approximately 20% of whom intended to continue with higher education. Notably, the institution was the seventh in the city in terms of performance in the Saber 11 tests.

4.3 Community fabric

The neighborhood surrounding the educational institution is characterized by a mixture of residential, commercial establishments and microenterprises, where mechanic workshops, storage warehouses, fast food outlets and neighborhood stores predominate. During the day, the neighborhood is busy, but at night, it becomes secluded and is not suitable for walking or socializing in public places.

Female students feel uncomfortable when traveling through areas where there are workshops or bars because of the presence of men, who pass offensive comments or verbally harass them. The parks in the neighborhood are described as unsafe places that are poorly lit and frequented by users of psychoactive substances, which limits their recreational use.

The consumption of liquor in the neighborhood is perceived as a recurring social problem. Skill-based games and the sale of cocktails are common in the area. Students also mentioned houses where illegal drugs are sold and their use facilitated; these houses are recognized by the community and the authorities, but effective control measures are not exercised. These places, known as *ollas*, are inhabited or frequented by people in precarious conditions, generating fear and insecurity. Trust in the police is low, and a greater institutional presence is needed.

In terms of the physical conditions of the environment, some students expressed displeasure regarding the deterioration of the streets, the accumulation of garbage and the poor condition of the drainage gutters. They described the sector as an “ugly” place because of both its appearance and its social dynamics, marked by the presence of recycling workers, a homeless population and people with mental health challenges.

Despite these perceptions, young people recognized certain collective activities that contribute to improving coexistence and providing a sense of security. Parks have a positive environment when used

for walking pets, playing sports or other games, and talking. In contrast, parks are perceived negatively when associated with the consumption of psychoactive substances or the presence of homeless people.

Among community actions, political mobilization activities in defence of public education are notable. Faced with the possible reduction of school groups and teaching staff by the Municipal Education Secretariat, parents and community leaders have organized protests and expressed support for the educational institution. These efforts reveal a deep sense of belonging and a collective commitment to the quality of public education in the area.

In summary, these perceptions reveal a complex social environment in which problems of insecurity and urban deterioration coexist with expressions of solidarity, belongingness and the desire for transformation. In this context, the school emerges as a privileged space for strengthening reflection on the territory, promoting youth participation and consolidating community bonds with the aim to support well-being and coexistence.

4.4 Digital networks

Students consider the use of digital networks to be a fundamental part of their daily life and an essential tool in their relationships with the near and distant worlds. The main motivations for the use of digital networks include finding entertainment, communicating, quickly accessing information and overcoming boredom. In some cases, a relationship of dependence with social networks was mentioned, considering that “life in general depends on virtuality” and that currently “people cannot live without uploading everything to networks”.

The most commonly used virtual networks were Tik-Tok, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook. Streaming platforms, such as Netflix and Spotify, were also mentioned, as along with artificial intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT, Gemini and MetaAI. This high use of technologies demonstrates that the students are true digital natives and places them within what Tapscott (2009) calls the “net generation”, characterized by their ability to act in multiple virtual environments and adapt to the different languages, symbols and codes that are imposed in these spaces.

The digital interactions mentioned above have different emotional and subjective effects on students. Some are not affected in any way when they receive a notice, a like or a message, whereas others feel interest, affection, disgust or frustration depending on the message received: "With a like I feel good... a message if it is nice, I take it as a compliment" or "it makes me very angry because I think that I am not important to the public or another person”. These reactions indicate that virtual networks have become a permanent place of emotional interaction that can positively or negatively affect young people’s construction of their identity and self-esteem.

A very significant aspect of the students’ digital experiences is the type of relationship they establish with influencers and content creators, who become sources of inspiration given their social recognition and financial status. As personal motivators, work references, consumer guides or lifestyle models,

these characters strongly impact the lives of young people. In some cases, a bond of dependence is established, which is characterized by an emotional need to perceive the recognition and approval of these characters.

The students admit that virtual interactions have the greatest impact on their lives in terms of the construction of their self-esteem and personal identity. The online circulation of images portraying people with perfect bodies, happy relationships, lavish social celebrations or successful lifestyles makes young people engage in comparison and feel inferior to those ideal and unattainable references. For the participants, this recurring emotional shock, in addition to false rumors and cyberbullying, leads to negative thoughts and risky behaviors that can trigger the consumption of psychoactive substances or violent manifestations toward themselves or others (Khalaf, Alubied, Khalaf, and Rifaey 2023).

In the case of school–community relations, digital globalization has contributed to expanding the traditional limits of the educational community, including content, knowledge and relationships with distant and nonface-to-face actors. Owing to the mediation of digital platforms and virtual communication spaces, the school is influenced by discourses, experiences and cultural references from foreign and transnational contexts. The educational community has also been globalized; it no longer corresponds to a territorially referenced group but reflects a network of interactions that articulate local practices and global knowledge (Lopera-Zuluaga, Marín-Ochoa, and García-Franco 2021).

In summary, the students' experiences concerning the world of virtual networks have both negative and positive impacts. The greatest concern is the excessive time they spend in front of screens, postponing the fulfillment of other activities and obligations that are important for their individual growth and social belonging. On the other hand, the creative and innovative use of digital platforms allows the development of advertising and marketing channels for personal entrepreneurship and family businesses. For some senior students, the importance of social networks in the preparation for and participation in the Saber 11 state tests was evident.

5. Discussion

In the present century, the study of school–community relations has evolved significantly. The cognitive perspective, which links families to learning processes (Valls-Carol, Soler, and Flecha 2008; Puigvert, Oliver, Vals-Carol, and García 2012), and the social perspective, which is oriented toward transforming schools into community development centers (Carballeda 2023), have been expanded to consider the dynamics of psychosocial well-being and community health and to recognize the needs of gender equity, social inclusion and interculturality (Magendzo 2021; Flecha, Valls-Carol, Puigvert, Soler-Gallart, de Botton, Díez-Palomar, Aubert, Campdepadrós Cullel, Villarejo, Roca-Campos, Munté, Zubiri-Esnaola, López de Aguileta, Olabarria, Alzaga, Bordanoba-Gallego, and López de Aguileta 2025). Additionally, the demands of a globalized world and the conditions of digitized environments have introduced complex variables of interaction between educational actors and the outside world.

This new panorama requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis that addresses the different dimensions influencing local schools and global communities from the students' perspective. In this study, we decided to interpret the results in light of four perspectives: The ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (Monreal and Guitart 2012), the educational pillars of Delors (1996), Maturana's systemic approach (2003, 2021) and Freire's dialogue of knowledges (1999, 2000).

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, the study of school–community relations involves considering four interactive contexts: the micro, the meso, the exo, and the macro levels.

Based on the experience of the students, the microcontext is characterized by fragmented and unstable family environments which include paternal absence, emotional abandonment and communication deficiencies, although the presence of working and resilient mothers was highlighted as a source of emotional and material support by the participants. At the school level, stressful and conflictive educational environments were noted, with manifestations of interpersonal aggression, bullying, sexting and the consumption of psychoactive substances (SPA); however, pedagogical experiences are marked by dialogue, an emphasis on humanism and comprehensive training.

The mesocontext is represented as a heterogeneous neighborhood space characterized by subsistence economic initiatives and situations of social risk; at the same time, it has community resources that support gatherings, recreation and neighborhood coexistence. The students share a complex environment that combines the presence of unsafe places and homeless people, harassment of neighbors, street garbage, and the sale and consumption of SPA along with instances of protection, socialization, cohesion and community dialogue, at schools, parks, churches and fast food businesses.

The exocontext is characterized by administrative dynamics, educational policies and socioeconomic conditions in which educational actors do not participate directly. This scenario is shaped by budgetary cuts, the reduction in teaching staff and the weakening of public education. These issues place further pressure on families whose living conditions are characterized by job insecurity, economic inflation and an inability to satisfy basic needs.

The macrocontext, in the students' experience, is represented by the cultural dynamics of a globalized society dominated by the expansion of digital networks. There is evidence of a marked dependence on technological devices and virtual environments as places of socialization, emotional interaction and identity construction, where influencers acquire special importance as models of consumption and lifestyle. Although there are risks because virtual networks can affect young people's self-esteem and behavior, they can also strengthen academic knowledge and support personal and family entrepreneurship.

These interactions between systems and subsystems had a specific influence on the life experiences of the high school students who participated in this study. We classified and analyzed this influence on the basis of the four basic types of learning proposed by Delors (1996): learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. We sought to answer our central research question: ¿What

are the significant characteristics of the relationship between the school and the community according to the life experiences of students in a public educational institution in Cali?

Regarding knowledge, the students exhibited a high level of motivation to learn, although they preferred classes where teachers listened to them, respected them and valued them as people. They did not feel motivated in classes where the most important thing was not them but the content, exams and grades. Their interests were guided by knowledge that had practical applications in daily life, such as cooking, makeup, body care, sexuality and technology. Young people are critical of what they receive from school and think of themselves as subjects of rights when they feel abuse of power, inequity or social injustice. Reading texts no longer interests students, and writing is considered a mandatory exercise. Students prefer audiovisual content and oral interactions, although public speaking is difficult for them.

With respect to the dimension of doing, academic training is perceived by students as necessary but not essential. Family expectations and school ideals are tied to educational achievements that are considered important goals and necessary paths for leading a successful life. However, the pressures of unemployment, low family income and high cost of living lead young people to think primarily about traveling abroad, implementing entrepreneurial ideas and managing productive projects. Technical, technological, or university training remains a second or third priority. The students' initial labor choices are oriented to activities that produce quick and easy income. This is the case for work in family businesses, informal employment or internet sales.

In terms of being, the students' attitudes toward resistance and the capacity for resilience in the face of adverse social conditions and painful family experiences are notable. From an external perspective, it could be assumed that dropping out of school or becoming involved in illicit activities would be among the most frequent choices made by young people; however, a significant proportion manage to complete their education and seek to legally position themselves in an unfair and competitive world. Although digital platforms promote comparative relationships that negatively affect students' self-concept and self-esteem, the desire to improve and personal commitment continue to situate academic training as a path for individual and community development.

In the dimension of living together, a paradox is exemplified. On the one hand, the school environment is replete with gossip, complaints, tensions, aggressions and conflicts among the actors of the educational community. On the other hand, students perceive the school as a place of respect, communication and support in finding solutions to interpersonal problems. This indicates that, in the educational institution, practices of coexistence have been developed that simultaneously articulate processes of regulation and control with care and affection. This combination has shaped scenarios where conflicts are allowed to be expressed and made visible, creating opportunities to learn how to face and process them peacefully, which is a socializing dynamic that marks a significant contrast with what occurs in family, community, and civic spheres.

From the perspective of Maturana, the school, the community and the family are proposed to be autopoietic systems that are conserved and transformed through the exchange of emotions,

conversations and practices. As they are constituted by living organisms, these systems self-regulate the interactions between biological and cultural lives, creating ecological niches that affirm or deny the human dimension (2021). For this reason, the emotions of care and protection that are experienced in mother–child relationships can be extended and expanded in pedagogical experiences as affectionate and dialogic relationships and can be replicated at the community level in terms of cooperation and solidarity. In contrast, this can also happen with the emotions of abandonment and family separation, which are reproduced in individualistic and competitive school dynamics, and experiences of rupture of the social fabric.

From this perspective, students appear to view the school as a liberating and protective space where they can express negative emotions, be heard and supported by teachers, and feel safe from abuses of power and threatening external situations. In this relational framework, the experiences of independent and resilient mothers who build domains of respect and care were collected and amplified by the school through interactions that nurtured student trust and security and allowed them to express private matters, such as sexual harassment and interpersonal abuse.

In this way, the school community relationship is constructed as an ecological niche that affirms the humanity of those involved, highlighting their emotionality, their capacity for self-regulation and their modes of coexistence on the basis of respect and mutual care (Maturana 2021, 2003). With respect to students, the school broadens its interactions with the cultural environment through the development of human capacities, such as language, critical reflection, informed decision-making and the construction of shared meanings. In this relational framework, teachers who were interested in and committed to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of their students played important roles.

Finally, Freire's view highlights the need to recognize family-based, community-based and cultural knowledge in relation to academic knowledge to understand the psychosocial and educational dynamics of students' experience. In this framework, one of the aspects that stands out is the stories of families related to their migration. These stories contain a high emotional burden, cultural learning and life expectations that the students carry into their interactions with the school, generating new conversations and building tension with the traditional forms of coexistence.

Another type of knowledge that dialogues with school knowledge stems from the subsistence experiences that families and students face daily in contexts of economic precariousness and social vulnerability. These experiences strain school community relationships and cause conflicts within formative processes and the dynamics of social coexistence. According to Freire, the school cannot turn its back on this painful situation; instead, it must open spaces to speak, reflect, and act collectively, seeking to weaken the factors that fuel social inequality.

Faced with these adverse socioeconomic realities, the school maintains a critical and problematizing role regarding the conditions of marginality and rights violations, as it contributes to the formation of conscious subjects committed to social transformation. This is evidenced by the final research projects the 11th-grade students presented to fulfill graduation requirements, which address social problems

such as mental health, youth emotional well-being, emotional relationships, sexual diversity, digital networks and artificial intelligence.

6. Conclusions

The opinions of young people on the relations between school and community highlight significant characteristics that adult discourses and institutional knowledge do not typically record or value. Academic imaginaries primarily consider schools as unsafe and violent places that have gradually lost recognition and social respectability. However, stories narrated by the youth include experiences of school as a place of refuge and socialization, where it is possible to communicate emotions and develop a creative and productive life.

The different dimensions that interact in the school community dynamic have unique attributes according to the young people's point of view. First, student subjectivities exhibits signs of regeneration and renewal in the face of personal crises. School environments are perceived as spaces that provide care and support in threatening and harmful environments. Community relations highlight a symbolic diversity derived from the ethnic, territorial and cultural encounters of different migrant groups. In the global context, all of the above are dominated by technological tools and virtual platforms that hegemonize cultural exchange and commercial interactions.

Student resilience as a relational and community process. The experiences recounted by the participants indicate that resilience is not an individual characteristic but rather a process derived from emotional support and interpersonal bonds (Masten 2014). Amid insecurity and abuse in the streets, economic subsistence challenges, family violence and school conflicts, students develop personal skills and collective strategies to remain in school and develop creative and realistic life plans.

The school assignments reviewed, such as *letters to people with whom the students had difficult relationships* and *stories of family migration*, reveal that affective bonds are not only a source of suffering but also experiences where young people construct meaning about love and identity. The act of writing becomes a practice of emotional recognition and an essay of symbolic reparation, where reflecting on past damages allows us to begin to understand and transform them. Taken together, the stories express the youth's desire for more empathetic bonds, emotionally stable families and adults who provide guidance without judgment.

The school as a place of protection and emotional support (Kaplan 2022, 2024). For the young participants, the school represents an important place of socialization, where they engage in moments of emotional expression, attentive listening and empathetic dialogue about their personal and family experiences. The disposition of the school leaders, the openness of the teachers and the provision of places for conversation contribute to facilitating contact and trust with the students, creating the foundation for exchange and reflection based on affective bonds.

One aspect that strengthens the perception of the school as an emotional refuge is the educational institution's development of the academic modality emphasizing the humanities, which reflects a commitment to the ethical, research and community training of young people. Although some parents and a significant portion of students undervalue the work performed within this modality—labeling it an unwise choice with weak professional and labor prospects—school leaders and teachers defend and justify it due to its alignment with the holistic formation project and the dialogic learning approach that underpins the school's mission.

Despite this perception, the graduates of the humanities modality are those who enter public universities in greater numbers and immediately; and, when this is not possible, they usually manage to continue their higher education at other university institutions.

Digital networks as an extension of the educational community. The educational community no longer comprises only close face-to-face actors, nor is it delimited by the school and its physical environment. Currently, digital networks represent an extension of the educational community, introducing new influences into educational processes (Cabero & Llorente, 2010). Young people learn and build their lives in hybrid spaces, comprising both physical and virtual spaces. The relationships between peers, teachers and family members are mediated by digital platforms. Social networks and influencers become sources of privileged information regarding academic, emotional, occupational and social decisions.

However, these digital spaces that function as educational, identity-based and professional referents can also result in isolation, dependence and risk exposure. Young people are aware of these threats, and the school must consider virtual interactions as educational opportunities, that is, as learning experiences that require critical accompaniment, ethical training and articulation with daily life.

Intercultural learning as a pillar of the school and social coexistence. Young people's ability to accept the migratory experiences of their families and coexist with new migrant groups, both nationally and internationally, can be interpreted as a form of ethical and social learning. This disposition has been fed by the cultural diversity inherited from their own families, many of which come from different regions of the country, such as the Caribbean Coast, the Pacific Coast, and the Andean or Coffee Zones. From these trajectories of internal migration, young people have learned to value and coexist with different ways of life, customs and beliefs, cultivating empathy that transcends geographical borders and grows through their neighborhood and community experiences.

In this way, daily cultural exchange has strengthened the students' ability to coexist with the ethnic and social diversity present in their environment. In their spaces of life and study, Afro-descendants, indigenous people, mestizos and farmers converge, bearing values, traditions, languages and rituals that enrich collective life. This symbolic conglomeration favors shared learning about intercultural coexistence, particularly in a city such as Cali, which is recognized for its hospitality and openness to differences. In this context, young people not only assume diversity as an inevitable reality but also transform it into an opportunity for encounters, solidarity and community building, reaffirming that learning essentially occurs in the recognition of the other and in social coexistence (Maturana, 1990).

Humanizing education to strengthen school community relations. From a pedagogical perspective, these findings highlight the need to recognize that learning processes are not limited to the classroom but are nourished by family, community and digital experiences, which model values, expectations and ways of feeling. Similarly, they indicate that students' motivations and interests are closely linked to the relational and cultural contexts in which they participate. Therefore, the school must establish educational environments that support integral learning, the construction of subjectivity, the recognition of cultural diversity and the collective construction of the meaning of living together.

Faced with this challenge, the contribution made by Freire and Maturana is to humanize education through the development of pedagogies that foster human dignity, promote the dialogue of knowledges, contribute to the inclusion of cultural diversity, and stimulate the creation of collaborative and solidary actions aimed at transforming common problems. In the case of the participating educational institution, the dialogic learning approach and curricular integration strategies appear to be contributing significantly to the achievement of these formative purposes (Flecha et al. 2025).

In synthesis, the voices of the students indicate that in contexts where vulnerability, violence, exclusion, and social injustice have become naturalized and everyday experiences, school community relationships must be sustained by educational processes guided by hope, autonomy, and cooperation. An active hope, understood as a form of ethical resistance against the generalized crisis of humanity and as an impulse to dream of a more equitable and peaceful world (Freire 1992). A critical autonomy that motivates young people to question digital alienation, irrational consumerism, and the powers that fragment community life. And a loving cooperation based on mutual care and the strengthening of affective bonds that seeks to organize transformative actions beyond the school (Maturana 1990). These findings reaffirm the need for contemporary education to be guided by pedagogies capable of developing these ethical and political stances, allowing students to understand the world in crisis they inhabit and to feel capable of transforming it.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest:

The authors have no financial or non-financial interests to disclose. None of the authors have any conflicts of interest directly or indirectly related to the work submitted for publication.

Ethical approval:

The authors confirm that the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the research committee of the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy at the authors' institution.

Informed consent:

Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants included in the study (rector, parents, and students). Informed assent was obtained from all participants under the age of 18.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy at Universidad del Valle (CEI-FEP), in Cali, Colombia.

All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and followed the guidelines of Resolution 8430 of 1993 of the Colombian Ministry of Health, the Declaration of Helsinki, and Title 45, Part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants and their legal guardians included in the study.

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Author Contribution

Author Contributions: All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by Daniel Campo Sarria, Harold Manzano Sánchez, and Gloria Cecilia Pérez Díaz. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Daniel Campo Sarria, and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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