

Making the invisible visible: the pressing reality of the rural school

Haciendo visible lo invisible: la urgente realidad de la escuela rural

Tornar visível o invisível: a realidade urgente das escolas rurais

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Abstract

This article sheds light on the pressing situation of village schools in Andalusia (Spain), using an example from a school in Almogía (Málaga) where a solo principal takes on many roles. The article emphasizes the need to highlight the unique challenges these schools face, despite Andalusian education legislation aiming for equality. The demographic challenge, recognized by the Andalusian government, exacerbates these issues. The article is based on the personal experience of the principal of a rural school, supplemented with references to Andalusian education legislation and reports on rural realities. A descriptive and reflective approach is used to illustrate the administrative overload and pedagogical characteristics of these schools. The main findings reveal the disproportionate workload faced by the principal, who must perform tasks in leadership, administration, guidance, and psychosocial support. General legislation appears poorly adapted to the reality of rural schools, leading to excessive bureaucracy and challenges with scheduling in digital systems like Séneca for multi-age classes. Despite benefits such as proximity and individual attention, unstable staff and a lack of specific training present significant obstacles. The conclusion is that the Andalusian rural school, despite its inherent value and strong ties to the community, faces challenges that require immediate attention. The current legislation does not adequately take into account the unique characteristics of these schools, resulting in a significant burden on leadership and teachers. There is a call for more specialized training for multi-age classes and evaluation systems that consider the rural context.

Keywords: School Management, Population Decline, Education, Early Childhood Education, Public Education, Primary School, Rural Schools, Childhood.

Resumen

Este artículo expone la situación apremiante de las escuelas rurales andaluzas, tomando como ejemplo una escuela en Almogía (Málaga), con una directora unipersonal que asume múltiples roles. Se justifica la necesidad de visibilizar los desafíos únicos que enfrentan estos centros, a pesar de la normativa educativa

andaluza que busca la equidad. El reto demográfico reconocido por el gobierno andaluz exacerba estas dificultades. El artículo se basa en la experiencia personal de la directora de una escuela rural, complementada con la referencia a normativa educativa andaluza e informes sobre la realidad rural. Se utiliza un enfoque descriptivo y reflexivo para ilustrar la sobrecarga administrativa y las particularidades pedagógicas de estos centros. Los principales resultados evidencian la desproporcionada carga de trabajo de la directora, que debe asumir funciones de gestión, administración, tutoría y apoyo psicosocial. La normativa general se revela inadaptada a la realidad de las escuelas rurales, generando una burocracia excesiva, y dificultades en la gestión de horarios en plataformas como Séneca para aulas multigrado. A pesar de la cercanía y la atención individualizada como fortalezas, la inestabilidad del profesorado y la falta de formación específica suponen obstáculos significativos. Se concluye que la escuela rural, a pesar de su valor intrínseco y su conexión con la comunidad, se enfrenta a desafíos que requieren una atención urgente. La normativa actual no aborda adecuadamente sus singularidades, generando una sobrecarga en el personal directivo y docente. Se aboga por una mayor formación específica para aulas multigrado y sistemas de evaluación sensibles al contexto rural.

Palabras clave: Dirección de Escuela, Disminución de la población, Educación, Educación de la primera infancia, Enseñanza pública, Escuela primaria, Escuelas rurales, Infancia.

Resumo

Este artigo expõe a difícil situação das escolas rurais andaluzas (Espanha), tomando como exemplo uma escola em Almogía (Málaga), com um único diretor que assume múltiplas funções. Justifica a necessidade de realçar os desafios singulares que estas escolas enfrentam, apesar das normas educativas andaluzas que procuram a equidade. O desafio demográfico reconhecido pelo governo andaluz agrava estas dificuldades. O artigo baseia-se na experiência pessoal de um diretor de uma escola rural, complementada por referências às normas educativas andaluzas e relatórios sobre situações rurais. É utilizada uma abordagem descritiva e reflexiva para ilustrar a sobrecarga administrativa e as especificidades pedagógicas destas escolas. As principais conclusões destacam a carga de trabalho desproporcional do diretor, que deve assumir funções de gestão, administração, tutoria e apoio psicossocial. As normas gerais demonstram estar mal adaptadas à realidade das escolas rurais, gerando burocracia excessiva e dificuldades na gestão de horários em plataformas como a Séneca para salas de aula multisseriadas. Apesar da proximidade e da atenção individualizada serem pontos fortes, a instabilidade dos professores e a falta de formação específica representam obstáculos significativos. A conclusão é que as escolas rurais, apesar do seu valor intrínseco e da ligação à comunidade, enfrentam desafios que requerem uma atenção urgente. As regulamentações atuais não abordam adequadamente as suas características únicas, sobrecarregando o pessoal escolar e os professores. Defendemos a necessidade de formação mais

específica para salas de aula multisseriadas e sistemas de avaliação que sejam sensíveis ao contexto rural.

Palavras-chave: Gestão Escolar, Declínio Populacional, Educação, Educação Pré-escolar, Educação Pública, Escola Primária, Escolas Rurais, Infância.

Introduction

Twenty students, and a principal who is also the head of studies, secretary, homeroom teacher, janitor, part-time psychologist and, sometimes, even plumber. This is the stark reality of our rural school in Almogía (Málaga). An educational microcosm where closeness is both our greatest strength and, at times, our heaviest burden. As a principal with a one-person leadership team, I experience firsthand the highs and lows of a system that often seems to forget our existence —despite the specific considerations that Law 17/2007, of December 10, on Education in Andalusia, should take into account in its pursuit of equity.

The social problems of the rural environment inevitably find their way into the classroom. Progressive depopulation (Defensoría de la Infancia y Adolescencia de Andalucía, 2023), an aging population, job insecurity, and the lack of opportunities for young people are all realities that directly affect our classrooms, which are seeing fewer and fewer children.

The Andalusian government itself acknowledges the seriousness of the challenges facing rural areas, presenting them as a top-tier demographic challenge, outlined in its *Strategy for the Demographic Challenge in Andalusia 2025-2030* (Junta de Andalucía. Ministry of Justice, Local Administration, and Public Function, 2025). However, for those of us living the daily life in these small schools, the question that echoes loudly is: will this strategy be yet another exercise in good intentions —just another document gathering dust on shelves without any real impact on our everyday lives? As always, we remain cautious and will observe closely whether these promises translate into concrete measures, and appropriate resources, to reverse the demographic decline our towns are facing.

The current legislation is like an oversized suit for a small body —it is outdated, it doesn't represent us. And although, in theory, it aims for equity and quality for all students and provides us with a framework that offers protection, the reality is that it's a set of regulations designed for large schools, which often ends up functioning like an ill-fitting corset. The bureaucracy generated by Decree 328/2010, of July 13, which approves the Organic Regulations for public schools under the Ministry of Education, is the same whether you have 20 students or 500—exponentially increasing the workload of a one-person leadership team. The

documentation requirements, deadlines, and interpretation of laws that bear little relevance to our actual context consume a significant amount of our time.

Within the structure of the educational system, rural schools—some of them single-classroom schools—represent a singularity that often faces disproportionately large challenges compared to standardized centers.

The Principal of a Rural School

In my role as principal and class teacher for a class of six students at a rural school, the daily reality is far from the workload division seen in a "normal" school with a full leadership team. It is important to note that I have no reduction in teaching hours to dedicate to leadership tasks. One must constantly "trick" the Séneca system to find a free slot in the timetable to carry out the enormous administrative task that leadership involves—or even skip teaching to fill out a form, meet an inspector, welcome a family, a colleague, or even a postman.

At a normal school, leadership and management responsibilities are divided between three key roles: principal, study director, and secretary. This division of labor is clearly defined in Decree 328/2010 of July 13th, especially in the articles that describe the competencies of each member of the leadership team. Each of them has a specific responsibility, and together they form a coordinated team that responds to the needs of the school – something unthinkable in our one-person reality.

Nevertheless, in the context of my school, the reality is that I must take on all these roles. My everyday life is a constant exercise in switching between roles, where planning a lesson with students of different ages is interrupted to fulfill an administrative requirement, or providing individual follow-up for a student must be postponed to write a report for the educational authorities.

A clear example of this overload is seen in the preparation and updating of the school's educational project (PEC). This document defines the school's identity, goals, organization, and function, adapted to the specific context of each school and described in Title II of Decree 328/2010, and the annual general plan (PGA), which sets activities and specific goals for each school year, according to Article 39 of the same decree. While this is handled collectively in schools with a leadership team, I have to write, revise, and update these fundamental documents alone, interpret general guidelines, and adapt them to the reality of my small school. The regulations, often detailed and tailored for larger schools, require a significant time investment to justify circumstances that are fundamentally different in such a small school.

Extra Functions in the Management of a Rural School

As the study director, I also have to create complex timetables that combine different levels in the same classroom. For this, I use Séneca, the large IT system from the Ministry of Education of the Junta de Andalucía – a mandatory and essential platform to meet the requirements of the educational authorities. The platform is used to manage a wide range of tasks in all educational institutions in Andalucía: from data about thousands of students and teachers to organizing the schools, grades, attendance, and countless bureaucratic processes. Through this online platform, teachers, principals, and administrative staff carry out many of the necessary tasks for the schools to function on a daily basis.

If, in a "normal" school, it is difficult to create a timetable where each teacher has their own classroom and students of the same age and level, you can imagine how much harder it is in a rural school... the difficulties increase. Why? Because one teacher must teach students of different ages in the same classroom (for example, children aged 6, 7, and 8, or in the case of a single-unit school, everything from 3 to 12 years old, all together). Therefore, the teacher has to manage curricula and learning needs that are very different from one student to another.

This means that, during the same period, the teacher must explain a math concept to a group of 6th graders, while monitoring a language exercise for a group of 3rd graders, and perhaps helping a 1st grader with a practical task.

Adding to this, the Séneca application is not adapted to the needs of our type of school, making it a real headache to create the timetable.

This application is designed to manage timetables for schools with homogeneous groups by age and level. Adapting the reality of a single-unit school or a class with mixed grades and levels, where one teacher teaches different subjects at different levels simultaneously, requires a lot of creativity and "tricks" from the principal. Not to mention that it must be ensured that the mandatory teaching hours, as specified in Annex I of the regulation of May 30, 2023, are followed to know the specific timetable for each subject and each grade, even though everyone is in the same classroom. This forces us to "properly place" the hours very precisely, sometimes in a way that shows one teacher teaching different things to different students within the same time frame.

We also need to coordinate the curricula for all subjects, follow up on each student's individual progress (which is crucial in such a small environment), manage absenteeism with special attention, organize extracurricular activities (often by seeking external resources and handling permissions without support),

and respond to academic inquiries from students and families. All of this generates an enormous amount of records and documentation that must be uploaded to Séneca. The bureaucracy that comes with this role involves filling out many follow-up records, detailed evaluation protocols for each grade, and individualized reports to families, which multiplies the administrative workload.

Administrative, Economic Management, and Other Tasks

The administrative and financial management also makes me the school's secretary. I have to handle the enrollment and documentation for each student, keep track of the budget (even though it is limited, it requires strict documentation to the administration), create an inventory of materials, process scholarships and support schemes (informing, collecting documentation, and forwarding it), and prepare protocols for the few school council meetings, whose composition is often limited. The administrative legislation, with its deadlines and specific requirements, does not differentiate between schools of different sizes, meaning that I have to spend a significant portion of my time on tasks that, in another context, would be the responsibility of specialized administrative staff.

Leadership and one-person representation require me to exercise pedagogical leadership, promote innovation with limited resources, represent the school to the administration, the municipality, and the local community, manage relationships with families in all areas, and ensure a good school environment. The bureaucracy associated with this role is evident in the need to fill out reports for different bodies, attend information meetings (which often involves travel and absence from my class and school), and manage all official communication from the school.

Managing the school environment and discipline is also my exclusive responsibility. I have to establish rules, mediate conflicts (which require individual attention due to the small number of students), and apply necessary disciplinary measures, which involves documenting incidents, informing families, and following established procedures, adding to the administrative burden.

Another responsibility is occupational risk and safety for the students, another aspect that falls on me. I must conduct risk assessments (often without the necessary specific training), create emergency plans adapted to our small scale, and keep all documentation in compliance with the law.

Although efficiency and adaptability are fundamental tools in my daily work, the disproportionate administrative workload is a real and noticeable disadvantage that makes my work harder.

Commitment to Addressing Issues

At the heart of every rural school is the commitment of teachers who often take on this task due to a deep sense of calling and a special bond with the essence of teaching. In our context, with a significantly reduced student-teacher ratio, the advantage of being able to provide genuine individual attention is evident. With only twenty students, knowledge of each child goes beyond the academic; we understand their learning rhythms, strengths, weaknesses, concerns, and family contexts. A bond is formed that goes beyond the simple teacher-student relationship, creating an environment that almost feels like a family, where trust and mutual support grow naturally. This closeness makes it possible to identify problems early and adapt teaching precisely to each student's specific needs.

However, this picture is marred by a problem that we have lived with for several years at our school and in rural schools in general, which I can discuss with other colleagues, and that is the lack of stability among teachers. Teacher continuity, a reality I know well, is a burden that makes it difficult to consolidate long-term educational projects. Staffing, often linked to fluctuations in student numbers and teacher turnover, creates constant uncertainty. It is difficult to build a cohesive team and develop innovative pedagogical lines when staff continuity is not guaranteed.

Every new school year can mean the arrival of a new colleague, which entails an adjustment period, the need to explain dynamics and ongoing projects again, and the loss of experience that those leaving leave behind. This instability directly affects both the quality of education and the sense of belonging, both for teachers and for the school community.

Another major challenge we face is specific training for rural areas. While ongoing training for teachers is a right and a need, the training offerings are often designed for large, normalized schools. The specific demands of a single-unit school, managing age and level diversity in the same classroom, the relationship with small and sometimes isolated communities, or the use of local resources, are aspects that require tailored training and are unfortunately not always offered systematically. Teachers working in rural schools often have to develop their own strategies and seek resources on their own to meet the specific challenges in our context.

One of the major paradoxes we, teachers working with multi-grade or multi-level classes, face is the significant difference between the continuous training offered by "mainstream" educational centers and the lack of training resources specifically targeted at the particularities of our context. The reality is clear: of twenty training offerings that reach teacher colleagues, barely one, with some luck, focuses on the pedagogical, organizational, and leadership strategies needed to handle the age and level diversity that coexists in the same classroom.

This alarmingly low percentage reveals an undervaluation of the specific training needs of teachers who face new challenges and realities every day. While training for schools with age and level-homogeneous groups is common, offering new tools and innovative methods, teachers in multi-grade classes are often referred to training that is not tailored to our context, and, with limited resources, must independently implement methods and strategies developed for other contexts in our classrooms.

The problem is not only related to quantity, not at all. Even when there is training for multi-grade or multi-level classes, the adaptation of content to the specific realities of these schools is often questionable.

This lack of specific and quality training has direct consequences for pedagogical practice. Teachers in multi-grade classes have to invest a significant amount of time and effort in developing their own strategies and searching for scattered resources.

It is crucial that educational authorities, and especially teacher training centers, become aware of this training gap and invest in a fairer and more tailored offering that meets the needs of rural schools and multi-grade classes. There is a need for investment in training that specifically addresses managing the multi-level learning plan, active methods that promote autonomy and collaboration among students of different ages, differentiated assessment strategies, making use of resources from the rural environment as a pedagogical element, and establishing support networks and exchanges between teachers who share this unique educational reality.

In the fabric of our small school, families form a fundamental support, and the communication established with them is generally fluid and direct. The closeness and mutual familiarity that characterize rural communities facilitate the creation of a trust-based relationship that goes beyond formal meetings. This mutual trust allows us to detect any issues affecting a student early, whether academic, emotional, or social. With an open and direct communication channel, the search for joint solutions becomes more effective and adapted to the specific reality of each child and their environment.

Additionally, knowledge of the students' family environment significantly enriches our pedagogical efforts. This contextual information is crucial for tailoring our teaching strategies, better understanding their behavior, and offering more personal and sensitive support to their needs. The school thus becomes an extension of the home, and collaboration with families is a key element for educational success.

However, this relationship, although generally positive, is not without challenges. Sometimes we encounter a lack of academic education among some parents, which can hinder their direct involvement in their children's learning process. Other times, we encounter families that do not cooperate, and we have to make

commitments with them to improve the learning process for their children.

Not everything is a disadvantage; the school is not just an educational institution but an important part of life in our village. In general, neighbors and the municipality show a positive willingness to collaborate, aware of the important role the school plays. This collaboration opens doors to a variety of enriching and contextualized activities carried out at the school, allowing the village to participate and benefit from them.

Participating in village activities with an educational focus, developing activities like "Coffee with Books" in the mobile library, or carrying out bureaucratic processes at the Telecenter, in addition to collaborating with the municipality to improve facilities or support a project, are some of the administratively demanding activities carried out at our school.

In the heart of our village, where access to certain resources can be limited due to distance or geographical spread, initiatives like the mobile library and Telecenter become windows to opportunities, extending culture and connection beyond the walls of our school.

The mobile library is a free service offered by the municipality and has become a monthly cultural driving force for the entire village. The regular visits to our school are not just about providing a traveling catalog of books but also about creating a lively space where participatory workshops are arranged for both our students and the elderly in the village. These workshops promote reading in a playful and engaging way.

But the mobile library goes a step further with its cozy initiative "Coffee with Books." Every month, neighbors meet over a cup of coffee to share the reading of a common book. This informal gathering becomes a rich space for idea and emotion discussions around the book they read that month.

On the other hand, the Telecenter is another service from the municipality that visits our school monthly and acts as a window to the digital world. In a rural context where the digital divide can be a reality, the Telecenter is a public space with internet access and various digital technologies. Its main goal is to give the village's residents the opportunity to learn, communicate, and develop the necessary digital skills for today's world.

The monthly visit from the Telecenter at our school enables both students and neighbors to perform digital tasks, from online administrative processes to information searches or using new digital tools. It becomes an important support for those who have difficulty accessing these tools or acquiring the skills necessary to use them with confidence. The Telecenter thus contributes to digital inclusion in our community.

These activities show the municipality's commitment to bringing learning and development opportunities to all residents of our village. I am firmly convinced that this is a real effort from the municipality, especially

when it comes to the duration and continuity of activities over the years, due to their open and free nature, the variety of activities, and their ability to adapt to different target groups, as well as the investment it entails. It is also a service offered in the three small towns that exist in our municipality.

The reduced number of students is another significant advantage of our school. It facilitates the creation of a community environment similar to a large family, where interactions are constant, and interpersonal knowledge is deep. This close environment makes it easier to handle the small conflicts that arise, which are usually less complex than in larger schools. The proximity and mutual knowledge allow us to address conflicts more directly through dialogue and mediation.

At our school, conflicts are minimal; they are the typical "the teacher said" or "the teacher did." Our approach is always to listen to all parties involved, promote empathy, and guide students towards finding peaceful solutions. Respect for each other among students, and between them and teachers, is almost naturally fostered in this close environment.

Cooperation and respect are solid pillars of our school, thanks to the familial environment and the reduced number of students, and we always promote a culture of respect that prepares our students to interact with a world increasingly heterogeneous.

Another important pillar of the school is the pedagogical inspection, which we can understand as an advantage if its focus is on monitoring our work and providing recommendations to help us in our daily work, or as a disadvantage if its role is controlling and evaluative. There are many ways to carry out this role, but they all share one common feature: the inevitable bureaucracy. The prioritized task set year after year by the inspection is to verify documents and follow standardized procedures, overlooking the specific characteristics of our educational context.

It is true that when the inspection visits, there is usually pressure, and we hope that everything is in order, focusing time on carefully reviewing documents, filling out registers, and preparing formal evidence. It is important that the inspection show us a perspective that shows a deep understanding and takes into account our particularities. So far, we have had a favorable scenario, as the inspection has given us flexibility, but the amount of bureaucracy for one person is very exhausting.

In the unique scenario of our rural school, the use of pedagogical methods is far from standardized recipes and, instead, we have to adapt and be creative. The actual reality in a unitary classroom, with students of different ages, learning levels, and interests sharing the same space and time, drives us to set aside traditional teaching and focus on flexibility as a fundamental principle.

One of the most significant advantages of this reality is the need to be creative in planning and developing lessons. We cannot just divide by grade level; we must develop strategies that allow us to meet the different needs simultaneously. This forces us to adapt existing methods and design our own suggestions, looking for connections between different levels and promoting meaningful learning for each student. Learning situations allow us to combine proposals where students do the same thing, but tailored to their level.

In our commitment to providing high-quality education, tailored to the individual needs of each student, we have actively integrated the Open Educational Resources (ORE) offered by the Ministry of Education in Andalusia. These OREs, according to the philosophy of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), represent a powerful tool for transforming traditional classroom dynamics and promoting active learning. The ORE/UDL project consists of more than 250 open educational resources in various subject areas for primary, secondary, and high school students. The resources revolve around learning situations where students acquire and develop specific skills for each subject area.

The use of open resources in our classrooms enables our students to engage in hands-on activities that allow them to manipulate objects, experiment with concepts, and draw conclusions on their own. Furthermore, we promote independent research through projects where students formulate questions, seek information from various sources, analyze data, build their own answers, and develop critical thinking and autonomy.

When relevant and contextualized problems are there, students are encouraged to work in teams, share their ideas, discuss different viewpoints, and collaboratively build a solution, which also develops social skills and communication abilities that are essential. We also incorporate participatory dynamics, often with a playful element, which facilitates the understanding of abstract concepts and promotes active participation from all students, regardless of their learning styles or levels of confidence.

Collaboration between students of different ages becomes a very important educational tool. Older students can act as mentors for the younger ones, strengthening their own knowledge while developing leadership skills and empathy, while younger students learn from their older classmates in a supportive environment. Independence is also fostered as students learn to organize their own work, seek information independently, and make decisions about their own learning within the possibilities offered by a multi-age classroom.

Additionally, by knowing each student well, we can continuously observe their progress, identify difficulties as they arise, and immediately adapt our teaching. Assessments are no longer limited to exam results, as was the case in the past, but we now have a wide range of activities that provide us with assessment data for the students, such as direct observation, information gathering, digital presentations, project

presentations, group work, etc.

It is true that we do not have a wide range of resources or teaching materials, but it is also true that thanks to the innovation projects we have participated in, we have been able to find synergies and acquire very useful and beneficial resources for our students. So much so that we have experienced at our school the most beautiful and educational project that the students who participated will never forget, and which, of course, I, as the principal, will never forget.

The Problem of Screen Addiction and a Proposal

When I worked with students in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades, I noticed that they spent far too much time at home in front of screens, a problem that many teachers today complain about, and which, for me, became a unique opportunity. I wanted to show them how to create a video game, and that a video game tailored to our age and used correctly could be a powerful tool to help us learn.

Therefore, we created a project together to make a video game from scratch, with three clear premises, after a thorough analysis of the games on the market: The protagonist had to be a girl, it had to promote healthy lifestyle habits, and it could not involve violence (Cenizo, 2019). They created characters, scenes, and dialogues, and when everything was finished, we realized that due to my IT skills, we could not bring our video game to life, but I was determined that after all the effort, I had to make the game that my students had dreamed of a reality. So, I asked for help from our partner institute, which offers Web and Multiplatform development modules. In the first meeting, they thought I was crazy, and that it was impossible, but just then, a teacher appeared who wanted to join the madness, and together we managed to give our students thousands of experiences that I am sure they will never forget. Through this project, we received several computers, thanks to the collaboration with an IT company.

Other Challenges in the Rural School

Another major challenge is the inadequate training in methodologies specific to multi-grade classrooms. Most of both initial and continuous teacher training focuses on teaching in age-homogeneous groups. We teachers who work in rural schools often have to develop our own strategies and learn "on the job" how to handle the diversity of levels and needs in a multi-age classroom. While the experience and exchange with other professionals from rural schools can be valuable, more specific and tailored training to our particularities would be crucial to improving our pedagogical practice and providing our students with a quality education. It is also true that more and more courses tailored to multi-grade classes are appearing in training centers, but they are at a much lower level than those offered for "mainstream" schools.

In terms of assessment, our school faces a complex landscape, where our own strengths directly collide with the requirements of a broader assessment system, designed without fully considering our specific conditions. Standardized tests, designed at the autonomous or national level to assess the performance of large student groups and compare schools with very different realities, often do not reflect the specific reality of our students or the adapted curriculum we develop in our multi-age classroom. Our content, our methods, and our learning rhythms cannot always align with what is assessed in these tests, leading to a distorted picture of our students' actual levels.

It is necessary to work towards assessment systems that are more sensitive to the diversity of educational contexts and that, in addition to the numerical results, value individual progress, effort, and the particularities of each school, especially in rural areas like ours.

In the 21st-century educational landscape, being the leader of a rural school is much more than a job; it is a deep calling, an unwavering commitment to education in often overlooked contexts. It requires a significant dose of faith in the transformative power of teaching and exhausting perseverance to navigate the complexities of a system that often overlooks our needs and realities.

Conclusions

In the educational landscape of the 21st century, being the principal of a rural school is much more than a profession; it is a deep vocation, an unbreakable commitment to education in contexts usually ignored. It requires a considerable amount of faith in the transformative power of teaching and an exhausting tenacity to navigate the complexities of a system that frequently ignores our needs and realities.

Ultimately, talking about the rural school is to acknowledge a space full of challenges but also transformative possibilities. Although much has been written and filmed about the Rural School (Abós, 2021; Bustos, 2012; Parejo et al., 2022; La España Vaciada, 2020; Macías and Santero, 2022; Carrete-Marín and Domingo-Peñañiel, 2023; Moraleda-Ruano and Bernal-Romero, 2025), the need to highlight its importance remains, because we cannot allow our schools to be made invisible (Moreno, 2018).

In these schools, innovative ways of teaching and learning try to meet the challenges of the society we are immersed in. An example of this is the educational video game developed in our center and nationally recognized (Cenizo, 2019), which demonstrates how, even in rural areas, pedagogical innovation can be led.

In this regard, it is urgent to promote meaningful changes from within the school, betting on transformative education (Carbonell, 2000). Documentaries, such as *Mi cole es rural* (Domínguez, 2023), reinforce this vision by showing the human and pedagogical value of our schools.

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