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Learning to be Responsible: Young Children's Transitions Outside School

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Abstract

This paper focuses on out of school learning during early childhood transitions through case studies of young children in two different rural communities in Peru. It shows that for young children, increasing participation in their social worlds is marked not only through specific rites, but also through a more subtle process that involves a progressive change in their roles and responsibilities within their households. This transition involves the learning of practical and social skills, develops a sense of identity, belonging and responsibility, and makes children feel valuable members of their families and communities. The process takes place at the same time as young children start formal schooling, but is often ignored by school itself. The paper contributes to current discussions on out-of-school learning and child work at specific life-course moments such as the transition to middle childhood, contributing empirical material as well in order to understand the transition itself.

Keywords: Childhood stages; family and community learning; indigenous children; transitions

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the increasing attention paid to the significance of early childhood transitions for the well-being and development of children has produced a wealth of studies on and theoretical approaches to the topic (Vogler et al., 2009). However, while most of this literature focuses mainly on minority world countries and educational transitions (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Woodhead & Moss, 2007; Corsaro & Molinari, 2005; Docket & Perry, 2005), it rarely addresses other, out of school transitions of young children in majority world countries. Nevertheless, the work of anthropologists has uncovered a diverse array of moments of change in children's lives, some of them identified as "rites of passage" (Van Genep, 1960), and others associated with learning processes outside formal education institutions (Rogoff, 1996).

This paper aims to contribute to current discussions on out-of-school learning, work and children competency within the context of early childhood transitions. It also provides empirical evidence on an under-researched topic: the transition from early to middle childhood.

The paper focuses on young rural children during their early years in a majority world country through longitudinal case studies. Five- and 6-year-old children from two different rural communities in Peru, as well as adults, participated in the research across two years. Participants belong to a Quechua indigenous community in the Andean highlands and to a coffee farming village in the tropical rainforest.

This paper originated from a wider study that included also urban children. The research uncovered the presence of a specific social transition in the life of rural children at the time

they started school, which did not exist among urban children in the sample, and thus the focus is exclusively in rural children.

Researching children's transitions outside school is necessary in order to make visible the process of change young children go through, the learning they gain through this process and how their competence is developed. The paper aims to understand the significance of these processes for children, their families and their communities. Two key features are explored in this paper: a particular type of learning based in observation and participation; and the beginning of child work as part of household economy. Both features entailed values for parents and children beyond practical needs and related to the development of a sense of responsibility, identity and belonging, which are discussed in the final part. This introduction briefly presents theoretical and methodological issues. Afterwards, the results and discussion follow.

1.1. Theoretical framework

The conceptualisation used in the current study adopts a socio-cultural approach. This perspective stresses that the "changes of individuals are assumed to be inseparable from their involvements in socio-cultural activity" (Rogoff, 1996, p. 273). Transitions therefore are conceptualised as processes of change in the life of children where individual changes are studied not in isolation but as part of interpersonal and community processes.

In anthropology, transitions have often been studied within a framework of linear life stages or life cycle model. The life cycle model states that life stages are universal (all go through them), strictly ordered (in the same sequence for all) and coherent (changes are consistent across different domains of life) (Johnson-Hanks, 2002, p. 866). However, this model has

been criticised as it oversimplifies life course and obscures social reality. Instead, several anthropologists advocated for a model of life trajectory as process in which stages are always in the making, recognising that life events vary greatly in timing, pacing, order and synchronization (Johnson-Hanks, 2002, p.867). This approach does not deny the existence of life transitions, but alerts the researcher to look at the processes that make possible such transitions instead of taking them as natural events: recognizable life stages are socio-cultural constructions rather than biological facts.

A socio-cultural approach to human development is compatible with such a shift, as it moves away to the study of the isolated individual, by studying individual change as it constitutes and is constituted by interpersonal and community process, recognising as well that multiple paths are possible and accepting the importance of social interaction to shape and acknowledge changes through the life course.

This approach also allows for the identification of transitions beyond those marked in ritualistic ways, such as the classic “rite of passage” as defined by Van Gennep (1960), which refers to a key ritual moment in the life of a person where an important and socially recognised change of status takes place. Although much anthropological attention has been devoted to rites of passage associated with puberty, much less has been paid to early and middle childhood, although transitions in these periods have been indeed documented (Lancy & Grove, 2011). If transitions are understood as processes of change in the life of children, either marked by rituals or not, it allows recognising more subtle processes as the ones described here. Considering transitions as longer processes rather than events that take place at one point in time also makes evident the usefulness of longitudinal research (Bell-Booth et al. 2012)

From a socio-cultural approach it is also clear that even if transitions are mostly about change, they are also inextricably attached to learning processes. The concept of learning is therefore central to understanding the transitions observed. Within the socio-cultural approach, learning is understood as a socially situated practice, which involves progressive participation of the apprentice in the socio-cultural practices of a given community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). As the communities studied were rural, many of their socio-cultural practices included children's participation in agricultural and domestic work, and thus child work is strongly present in relation to learning practices. Literature on child work, which includes children's productive and domestic activities inside and outside their households and both paid and unpaid, points out its benefits and harms, which depend to a great extent not only on the type of activity but also on the context, relations and values that are embedded in children's activities (Woodhead, 2004; Bourdillon, 2006; Boyden, Ling & Myers, 1998). This literature has contributed to understanding the data collected as child work also seems a defining feature of the transition to middle childhood. Middle childhood may be defined as a distinctive time in the life course, between early childhood and puberty. Lancy and Grove (2011), in a study based on an extensive review of ethnographic data, point to several characteristics of this phase, such as more visible participation of children in family and community endeavours through their assumption of more roles and tasks, the acknowledging of children's sense of responsibility linked with greater sensitivity to the expectations and needs of others, and increasing gender differentiation and segregation. Although the authors refer to specific stages, they do recognise the elasticity of both the beginning and the end of such phases and rather than looking at the individual in isolation, they show that the above-mentioned characteristics account for children in

interaction with others and the changing roles and expectations that are part of such interaction, making this approach compatible with that of Rogoff (1996).

1.2. Research Participants & Questions

The case studies analysed in this paper are part of a larger study, Young Lives, a longitudinal study of childhood poverty. Young Lives periodically collects qualitative and quantitative data from two age cohorts: survey information from 3,000 children that was collected in three rounds (2002, 2006 and 2009) and qualitative, in-depth case studies that were developed in two rounds (2007 and 2008) with 50 children randomly selected from four sites where children from the main sample lived. Further rounds of data collection are planned up to 2015.

This paper analyses primarily the qualitative data, focusing on the case studies from the two rural villages (N= 27). I focus mainly on the Younger Cohort children (born 2001–2002) – six boys and seven girls. In one village we work with all Young Lives children. In the other, we selected randomly the participants. Information from 14 Older Cohort children (born 1994–1995), who lived in the same communities, complements the analysis.

Household survey data provided background information.¹

The household survey covers a broad range of themes, which include parental background, livelihoods, time allocation of adults and children, household assets, earnings, consumption

¹ The Young Lives sampling strategy was based on randomly selecting 150 children within 20 clusters or geographic sites throughout Peru. The aim of the project was over-sampling poor areas, thus the richest 5 per cent of districts were excluded from the above selection (Cueto et al 2011).

and expenditure, socioeconomic status, child education and activities, child health and anthropometry.²

The research questions that guided the process of qualitative data collection in 2007 and 2008 focused on transitions, wellbeing and programs and services. Thus, the team was interested in identifying what are the key transitions in children's lives, how are they experienced and what influences these experiences. There was also an interest in knowing how children's wellbeing is understood and evaluated by children, caregivers and other stakeholders. Finally, we were also interested in how do policies, programmes and services shape children's transitions and wellbeing. In this paper, I address the first question, presenting the key social transitions identified during early childhood, and focusing on a particular transition: the transition from early to middle childhood. It is in the context of this transition that the question on the relationship between learning, work and children competency became of major concern.

1.3. Methods

Children participated in group-based participatory sessions and individual interviews. Interviews with their caregivers not only provided information about current transitions they were going through but also helped to reconstruct young children's biographies and give details about previous transitions they had experienced. Semi-participant observations at children's homes, schools and communities complemented interview data. Semi participant observations refer to those observations in which the presence of the observer is always explicit, never hidden from the subjects observed and developing the activity,

² The full set of questionnaires used in Peru are available online at: <http://www.ninosdelmilenio.org/base-de-datos-y-cuestionarios/cuestionarios/>

although the observer is not a full participant of the activity³. In addition, 31 adults, including community leaders, participated in group interviews in both villages to elicit community understandings about and expectations towards children. Interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and transcribed for later analysis. Group sessions and observations were reported through narrative accounts based in field notes carried out during the activity or shortly afterwards. Audio recordings and photographs of the activity supported the narrative reports.

The author led the fieldwork team that collected the data; in that capacity I directly carried out some of the interviews and observations, while others were carried out by my colleagues. All members of the team used the same semi-structured instruments of data collection (interview guides, observation protocols and protocols for group activities) and report formats to warrant uniformity and comparability.

The different sources of data were put together and analysed for each case study child, creating a richer understanding of each child biography and allowing comparison between them at the same time. Research questions guided the analysis and thus when focusing on transitions I looked at what children were doing (i.e. what tasks they perform) and what was expected of them in each transition, taking in consideration the point of view of the child himself, his mother and his teacher, if it was the case, searching for consistency as well as divergence, and complementarity of information. Data was also analysed with the qualitative software Atlas ti, using thematic codes for each one of the main questions. After

³ For example the observer may be at the classroom, but it is not an active participant (neither a teacher nor a student) although may occasionally participate in a game or talk with research subjects. Similarly the observer may observe children play, but he or she is not playing and thus not fully participating.

this analysis I selected four case study children – two from each community – that are illustrative of the whole group in each village to offer more detailed narratives in this paper.

1.4. Research Settings

In Peru, there is widespread poverty in rural villages. Indeed, although Peru is now considered as a middle-income country (using the World Bank classification, 2010), deep inequalities exist in relation to geographical location: thus 60 per cent of the rural population live in poverty in contrast with 21 per cent of the urban population, according to national standards (INEI, 2010).

The two rural communities selected for case studies thus presented high levels of poverty – according to the Young Lives Round 2 survey, over 90 per cent of the sample in each village live in poverty. Both communities were of a similar size (about 2,000 inhabitants) and had similar basic services: running water, latrines and electricity; public preschool, primary and secondary schools and basic health facilities. For contrasting purposes, the team chose villages that differed in geographical location, livelihoods, mothers' educational attainment, ethnicity and main language spoken. The villages are briefly described below.⁴

Andahuaylas is a farming community located at between 3,000 and 3,500 metres in altitude in the southern Peruvian Andes. Around 96 per cent of population in this village have Quechua, the main indigenous language in the country, as their first language. People grow mostly Andean tubers and cereals, and sell some of their crops. Most mothers have low

⁴ Pseudonyms are used for both sites and people, in order to protect research participants' anonymity. Villages are named after the province they belong to.

educational attainment – 96 per cent of them have not completed primary school, and some have no education at all (data from Young Lives survey Round 2).

Rioja is a rural village of coffee-farming smallholders located in the north of Peru, on the eastern slopes of the Andes, a tropical mountain area, at about 1,500 metres of altitude. The population are of migrant origin: they come from the neighbouring Andean region of Cajamarca. All people in the village speak Spanish as their mother tongue. Most mothers have low educational attainment (although to a lesser extent than in Andahuaylas) – 75 per cent of mothers have not completed primary school (data from Young Lives survey Round 2).

2. Results

Results are presented in two parts. The first part briefly presents early childhood transitions in both communities from birth to three years old; the second part focuses on the transition to middle childhood that research participants were experiencing at the time of the research, which starts at around 4 to 5 years old (depending on the community). Four case studies are presented within the second part to illustrate the type of learning and child involvement with work activities that take place at this period in time.

2.1. Rituals of Growing Up: Social Transitions During The Early Years

The existence of specific transitions during early childhood, celebrated at times in ritualistic ways, was in some cases observed and in others reported when children's biographies were reconstructed through caregivers' interviews. Common transitions were also checked against community understandings in group interviews and also confirmed by young children themselves or older children from the same communities.

In the case of Andahuaylas, the first social transition of a child occurs shortly after birth: the naming ceremony. Our team got to know about the rite of naming when a baby was born in the home of Hector, a case study boy, during the first visit. One of the field researchers was asked to become the godmother of the baby girl, and asked for details of the rite. A week after birth a child goes through a kind of “pre-baptism”. One godparent is chosen to pick a name and say it when dropping water over the child’s head. This “Andean baptism” not only names the child (giving him or her social existence) but also aims to protect the newborn from supernatural hazards. It also establishes a first social relationship outside his or her nuclear family by relating him or her with a godparent.

After birth, babies in Andahuaylas spend their first months tightly wrapped up and placed on their mothers’ backs in a carrying blanket (*lliclla*) until they are able to sit, stand up and walk. Breastfeeding is common for the first 12 months, or until a new baby arrives, and children are very much cared for during the first two years. During babyhood, both girls and boys are called indistinctly *wawa*, a word that does not indicate gender.

At around the age of 2 to 3 years old another major transition occurs, the first haircut: in a ritualised gathering, guests cut a bit of hair from the child and leave money or presents in exchange. Godparents are chosen for this occasion and they are the first to cut their godchild’s hair (and the most generous with their presents). The first haircut indicates the end of a phase such as babyhood: young children stop being with the mother most of the time and start to socialise with others, joining peer groups, entering into early childhood properly.

The first haircut has been associated in previous literature in other parts of the Andes with weaning or walking, but also with the beginning of a social existence with social relationships, and a recognised gender identity (Román de Silgado, 1990; Ortiz, 2001; Bolin, 2006). Indeed, in Andahuaylas, when children stop being *wawas*, they use clothes more specific to their gender, resembling the ways males and females dress in the community, putting aside the use of baby clothes.

In Rioja, there was no rite associated with naming at birth. Children up to the age of 2 were kept close to the mother, and adults emphasised the need for affection and care in this period. Women also carried their babies on their backs in a carrying cloth or *manta*, especially when going to the fields. Breastfeeding was common up to the age of 18 months. After children turn 2 years old, they start joining peer groups. In two cases the first haircut was reported at about the age of 3. The structure of this period then is very similar to that of Andahuaylas. In Rioja however, adults emphasised the first five years as a crucial time for children, one in which care and affection are necessary and when a lot of learning takes place.

Finally, another ceremony that takes place during early childhood is the Catholic baptism, as Catholicism is the main religion in Peru. Through baptism, a child is admitted into the Catholic Church – and into further social relations, as new godparents are chosen and a long life relationship of mutual obligations starts. However, the Catholic baptism marks a religious transition (i.e. entrance to a religious community) and is not associated with a particular moment of developmental change as in the previous cases. Some children among the Catholic families in both villages have been baptised, while others have not yet, as the

family was saving for the ceremony and party afterwards. There are also some evangelical families in both villages that do not practise infant baptism.

In summary, both communities maintain traditional practices as rites that mark important transitions in the life of young children: their very arrival in a family and the end of babyhood and close dependence on the mother. As regards the transition from babyhood to early childhood, biological age has been indicated roughly as a reference, but more attention is paid to what children are capable of doing, as will be even more observable in next section when looking at the transition from early to middle childhood. The rites mentioned above mark the progression of the child through life; they are thus part of a “folk model of child development”, as Lancy (2010) terms it, which marks the transitions from one phase to another in ritualised ways. These rites need to be seen not as exotic customs but as part of coherent local knowledge about child development that feeds into child-rearing practices. Thus for example, research has demonstrated that the use of a carrying blanket in the Andes protects young children against the stressors of a high-altitude environment (cold temperature, dryness, lower oxygen pressure) and conserves their energy, while at the same time helping them to adapt progressively to the characteristics of the environment (Tronick, Thomas & Daltabuit, 1994). Furthermore, through the rites described children strengthen or expand their social relations by acquiring a long-term relationship with their godparents, which involves mutual obligations and the chance to access further resources and support. However, it is observable that there is high heterogeneity; not all families follow all these practices nowadays and some customs are disappearing, showing the impact of new models introduced into rural societies.

2.2. Learning to be Responsible: A Progressive Inclusion in Social Life

In contrast with the transitions in early childhood presented in subsection 2.1, which often take the form of rituals, group interviews with parents and community leaders revealed that from about 5 to 7 years old another, less visible, process of change takes place: the progressive inclusion of children in a range of tasks, which is accompanied by changes in children's roles and responsibilities within their homes. Visiting children for two consecutive years, between the ages of 5 and 6 years old, allowed us to confirm this progressive change, and showed how children went from being "little children" who are taken care of, to more "grown up" children who are able to take care of others. Indeed, children were assuming progressively more responsibility for domestic and productive activities and developing skills that prepared them to be productive members of their households. The Young Lives Round 3 survey, conducted in 2009 when children were 8 years old, showed for the whole sample that the participation of urban and rural children in schooling, studying at home and leisure activities was very similar, but that there was a higher percentage of rural children caring for family members (84 per cent vs. 64 per cent of urban children), doing household chores (42 per cent vs. 29 per cent) and engaging in unpaid work on the family farm or business (40 per cent vs. 8 per cent) (Cueto et al., 2011). This higher participation of young rural children in the above-mentioned activities started earlier in their lives than in the lives of their urban peers, and was a process clearly identified by rural caregivers, but not urban ones, as qualitative data showed (Ames & Rojas, 2009). I will focus next on the process of change young rural children were living between the two visits, when they were between 5 and 6 years old. I highlight the learning that took place during this process, how it is linked with the beginning of child work in agriculture and domestic tasks, and with the development and recognition of children's

competence. I use the results from all case studies in each village and provide more detail in two case studies, a boy and a girl, one in each community, to illustrate the above points.

2.2.1. Young Children of Coffee Growers

The six case study children in Rioja were participating more and more in a great variety of everyday activities from one visit to the next. This was consistent with adults' expectations in their community: adults clearly signalled children would start a more significant involvement with household and farm tasks from the age of 5. Although some adults said children might start to help at an even younger age – about 2 or 3 years old – most agreed that at 5 years old children “have more knowledge” (“*tienen más conocimiento*”) and “they can understand” (“*ya te entiende*”) and thus they are required to take on more responsibilities at home. Adults also agreed that as a result of the progressive participation of children in these responsibilities, between the ages of 10 and 12 they were already fully involved in farm work and competent in a variety of household and agricultural activities. The activities performed by children from the Older Cohort (aged 12) in the same village confirmed this: they were already participating fully in the coffee harvest and cattle raising, sometimes within their household's farm and sometimes as paid workers in other people farms, as well as in domestic chores at home.

For children to take on more responsibilities and participate in work a key process was necessary: learning. Although adults signalled that the period from birth to 5 years old was an intense learning period, it is from the age of 5 that responsibilities and tasks are required on a more routine basis. This may indicate that children of this age have “more knowledge” precisely because of their spontaneous learning during the previous period. This is clearly

reflected in an explanation given by one mother when her 5-year-old daughter was able to turn on the stove, boil noodles, add seasoning and peel potatoes for a soup, all by herself, because her mother was coming back late from the fields: she confirmed that children as young as her daughter know a good deal “because they take interest when you are doing something” (*“Es que nos toman interés cuando uno está haciendo”*). This woman’s words show that children observe with attention without being explicitly taught. Furthermore, the example of the girl also shows that children are eager to display what they know when the opportunity arises and adults welcome such initiatives. Children in this community thus learn long before they are required to perform the activities, and learn by observing and being part of family life. However, it is only at around 5 years old that they are considered ready “to understand” the requirements of others and thus cooperate with family endeavours, which signals an informal but socially recognised transition point. It is also at this age that children are considered ready to gain the necessary competence to increase participation in family activities. I illustrate this process through looking in more detail two of the six case studies, a boy and a girl, in what follows.

Hugo

Hugo was a clear example of the progressive and subtle change referred to above. At 3 years old, Hugo had his first haircut, which marked the end of a phase of close dependency on his mother, as explained in subsection 2.1. However, he still needed attention and dedication, and was considered a “small child” when I first met him. Hugo was then 5 years old and had been attending preschool since the age of 4. He lived with his parents and his 7-year-old sister. Being the youngest in a small family, he was still very much cared for by his mother and sister. Most of the help with domestic activities was carried out by his sister.

At that time, Hugo did not like going with his mother into the fields while she was working. He got tired and bored and his mother had to carry him for a while, so she preferred not to bring him along so often. The following year however, he was not only taking more care of himself (getting dressed on his own and taking care of his school materials) but he was also helping with more domestic tasks: he reported (and was observed) feeding the animals, washing the dishes and carrying water, while his mother added that he was doing errands and going to the shop for small amounts of shopping. Moreover, Hugo joined his parents in the fields more frequently and helped clear the garden with his machete, which he was able to manipulate well, starting in this way an active participation in agricultural work. He had also started first grade at the local primary school. These changes were consistent with Hugo's mother's views on when children should start helping at home:

“... my daughter [has been helping at home] since she was 5 years old. Now she cooks. She is 7 years old, she cooks rice, fries eggs, prepares soups [and] peels potatoes, washes the dishes [and] sweeps.”

“... mi hija [ayuda en casa] desde los 5 años, y ahorita cocina, tiene siete años, cocina arroz, fríe huevos, hace sopitas, pela papas, lava servicios [platos], barre.”

Hugo was acquiring more responsibilities at home during the year that separated the two visits. This process involved for him gaining more autonomy, developing specific competences and learning new skills. His mother was aware of the changes her son was going through, and recognised the learning and increasing autonomy he was developing:

Interviewer: In comparison to last year, does he help more, less or the same at home?

Hugo's mother: More. ... He helps doing errands, small amounts of shopping. ... [At the beginning] we sent him with my daughter at first, later he went alone. ... [At the beginning] you sent him to buy something and he came back with something else.

Interviewer: And when did he learn?

Hugo's mother: Just very recently. Now he already goes shopping. ... He already takes care of his things; he knows they belong to him, that he has to put his things in their place. ... Now he changes his clothes by himself. ... He does not give [me] so much work.

Entrevistador: Comparando con el año pasado, ¿le ayuda más en la casa o menos o igualito?

Madre de Hugo: A veces, un poco más... Así lo que me ayuda mandadito, a comprar. ... [Al principio] le mandabas para una cosa, traía otra cosa.

Entrevistador: ¿Y cuándo aprendió ya?

Madre de Hugo: Recién, ahorita ya compra... Ya pues, ahora ya se da cuenta de cuidar sus cositas. ... Sabe qué cosa es suyo, que no lo tiene que dejar tirado... Ahora se cambia solito, ya. ... ya no te da más trabajo, ya.

Hugo's mother recognised that she was giving less attention to Hugo than the previous year, acknowledging he was not a little boy any more, but one that could take care of himself and help others, as he was participating more in the different activities of the

household. The issue of adult care and child competence seems to be a key feature of this period in the life of children. Indeed, even though the transition out of babyhood or infancy signals the end of complete dependence on the mother, it does not mean that the child is not taken care of: the child can be put under the care of older siblings or other adults because he or she still needs some supervision, as he has not developed enough competence to take care of himself. All the same, during this transition, children go from being cared for to taking care of themselves and even others, as exemplified more clearly by the case of Gabriela below.

Gabriela

Gabriela was 5 years old and was attending first grade when I first met her. She was the sixth of eight siblings and lived with both parents. At the school grounds, Gabriela seemed tiny and shy. However, when I joined her at home, she transformed herself into a much more “grown up” girl: although she was very small and thin, she was strong enough to carry her baby brother, aged 18 months, and to feed and clean him. She used to change his clothes without anyone asking her to do so. Gabriela also helped her mother by carrying water and wood for cooking, peeling vegetables, cooking rice and feeding the chickens. She said she liked going with her mother and siblings to the fields, especially at weekends, and once I joined her. While her older siblings milked the cows and grazed the flock with her mother, she took care of the younger ones and played around. On the way back she carried some milk. Gabriela displayed a competence in performing all the above activities difficult to find among 5 year olds in urban settlements (if at all allowed to do so).

The following year the family grew: a new baby was born. Gabriela, by then aged 6, helped to bathe him, and she also carried him on her back. She continued taking care of her younger siblings (aged then 5 and 2½ years old), in addition to the four-month-old baby, going into the fields, helping with clearing the fields and coffee harvesting and carrying produce and other things. She was learning to cook meals already and according to her mother she helped “a lot” (“*bastante*”).

Comparing Hugo and Gabriela helps to clarify that gender, birth order and family structure affect the experience of children of the same age, producing notable differences even in the same village. Indeed, Gabriela’s family is different from that of Hugo: there are younger children to take care of and a family dynamic that allows or promotes greater participation in home and farming activities. Although both girls and boys are expected to help with household chores, girls are especially requested to do so, and over time they assume more responsibility for household chores than boys. Because of all this, Gabriela’s involvement in these activities happened earlier than Hugo’s, and kept growing and expanding during the year separating the two visits.

The other case study children showed similar patterns: Carlos, like Hugo, was the youngest in his family, and Alejandro was the only son in a young family, and thus they were very much cared for when the first visit happened. However, in the second visit they were more involved in household chores and started to help in the family farm. In addition, Alejandro got a baby brother, and thus his status at home changed, becoming the older brother, and taking care of his baby brother too. Among the girls, Carmen was also the youngest sibling, but helped with domestic chores since the first visit, as well as Belen, who was the only child in her grandparents’ home. The following year, Carmen expanded her activities,

helping more at home and in the farm. Belen moved out to his father house to take care of her younger half-brothers, as she was considered more capable to do so.

These six children thus were acquiring learning through participation in family life and developing progressively competences that allow them greater involvement in the livelihoods of their families. This process is indeed an economic need, as families do live in conditions of poverty and require the contribution of every family member. Older children in this community, already fully involved in agricultural and domestic work, were very aware of this and more able to express verbally their views. Rodrigo (12) for example, in a group discussion on children's activities stated that "[child] work is important to bring money to the family" ("*trabajar es importante para poner dinero en la familia*"). However, beyond economic necessity, the involvement of children in household and farm work is also valued as a source of learning and developing competence. Thus, Maria (12) pointed out that child work involves learning for the future, so when children grow up they can do any job, while if not learning and practising in advance, they will not know. Child work has also a moral value, as it avoids laziness and teaches humility, as Luis (13) put it. Similarly, the older girls in a group discussion indicated that they considered children's participation in domestic chores and agricultural work positively as part of being a good, obedient girl, and as an attribute of a good life.

The transition younger children were experiencing then involved learning new skills, and using previous learning to develop increasing competence, which in turn allowed them to start working in the farm and household activities. The competence they develop in the activities performed allows for increasing responsibility over such activities and thus a change of status within the household. Learning, work and children's competency therefore

develop in interconnected ways during the transition to middle childhood that young children go through. A similar picture emerged in Andahuaylas, as explained below.

2.2.2. Young Children in a Quechua Village

In Andahuaylas, when inquiring about collective and shared views of children's transitions at community level among local authorities and caregivers, it was found that adults expected progressive participation in a wide range of activities from an early age, about 4 years old. One woman indicated that by 5 years old children start to be more "judicious" ("*Se vuelven más juiciosos*") and thus able to take on responsibilities. The expected process enabled almost full participation at about 7 or 8 years old, although some tasks (usually those involving more physical strength and dexterity) had to wait until the age of 10 or 11. Once again these expectations were confirmed by observations of and interviews with Older Cohort children, while observation of the younger ones showed the beginning of such a process. Two case studies again illustrate the progressive and increasing involvement of children in domestic and agricultural work and the type of learning that occurs when performing them.

Ana

I met Ana for the first time when she was 5 years old. She was the second of three daughters and lived with both parents. I observed Ana helping her grandmother with the cattle, even though she was very young, and she regularly joined her mother in grazing the flock, a typically female activity in her village. Ana reported she also assisted with cooking, laundry, cleaning, and feeding hens and guinea pigs. During our visit the following year, when Ana had started first grade, she also reported that in addition to the above activities,

she cared for her younger sister and helped to harvest potatoes. Her mother also acknowledged the changes Ana was going through over time and indicated new activities.

Ana's mother: Last year she was not very aware of some things, because she was little. ... [Now we say] bring water, anything. When we say that, she goes; she goes to do light shopping. She is changing, Madam. ...

Interviewer: Does she do anything to earn money?

Ana's mother: To earn money we grow vegetables. She sells them in the [local] market ... Ana, with my Ofelia ... here in the village market. ... They do that, they want to sell ... this Friday they are preparing themselves, to sell on Saturday ...

Interviewer: Is she playing more or less than last year?

Ana's mother: Now she likes to sell.

Madre de Ana: El año pasado todavía no se daba cuenta de nada, porque era pequeñita. ... Trae agüita, cualquier cosita trae, cuando le decimos que traiga, va a comprar, está cambiando señora.

...

Entrevistadora: ¿Y ahora hace algo por dinero?

Madre de Ana: Para dinero señora, sembramos verduras, luego lo llevan a la feria para ella misma. ... Ana, con mi Ofelia. ... aquí a la feria [del pueblo]. ... A eso se dedican, quieren vender, con los animales no mucho. ... Para este viernes ya están preparando, para que vendan el sábado. ...

Entrevistadora: ¿Y ahora están jugando más o menos que el año pasado?

Madre de Ana: Ahora señora les gusta vender.

Although Ana was already initiated into supporting domestic and productive activities when we first visited her, in the following year she had consolidated and expanded her participation in a range of activities that are part of the daily life of her home and community, including earning some money by her own. Her mother indicated that she was more “aware” about things, an attitude that seems to mark the transition towards assuming more responsibilities. Indeed, being aware of the needs and requirements of others around allows children to develop the disposition to collaborate with others. Awareness also seems fundamental to the type of learning that takes places during this transition. Indeed, when the team asked about who the children learn all their different skills from and how they do it, the most common answer from both children and caregivers was that they learn from their parents:

Interviewer: So, Ana, what do you do at home?

Ana: I cook ... I fry... I fry potatoes.

Interviewer: And who taught you that?

Ana: My mother, Miss.

Interviewer: Do you like it?

Ana: Yes, Miss.

Entrevistadora: ¿Y en tu casa [qué haces]?

Ana: Cocinar. ... Freír. ... Papa profesora.

Entrevistadora: ¿Y quién te enseñó a hacer eso?

Ana: Mi mamá profesora.

Entrevistadora: ¿Y te gusta hacer eso?

Ana: Sí profesora.

This learning usually takes place by observing and helping parents in everyday activities, as Ana's mother explained when asked about how Ana learned:

When we act, she looks at us, when we weave [she looks at us], for she can follow us ... this is the way my older daughter does it. ... In the kitchen it is the same: she will know in the future. They [the daughters] will do it ... whatever we prepare, by looking at us, they will prepare.

Así cuando hacemos [ella] nos mira, cuando tejemos para que nos pueda seguir... Así hace también la mayorcita ... En la cocina también, ya sabrá, ellas nomás ya harán... lo que preparamos, mirando, ellas prepararán.

The kind of learning explained by Ana's mother applies not only to Ana and other children in her community, but also to Hugo and Gabriela, discussed above, and their peers in Rioja. Although parents and children did not elaborate much on this, for this learning to happen, an intrinsic motivation is necessary in the learner (to look at people, to pay attention) – eagerness to learn the task that is being performed and identification with the performers. García (2005) points out that among Quechuas, learning is considered a responsibility of the learner: they may have the help of more expert members of the community, but ultimately learning is a personal responsibility, since the society gives the chance to access all learning situations by watching, imitation and helping. Organised attempts to teach children are therefore uncommon, as has also been observed in other non-western contexts (Lancy, 2010). However, the primary people to learn from are the parents, and as much as

Ana was learning with her mother, this is the time boys start to learn with their fathers, as the case of Felipe shows next.

Felipe

Felipe, a boy aged 5 years old during the first visit, lived with his parents and four siblings. During the first visit, he joined his mother or his older sister on their visits to the hills around the community to graze the flock or to work on the farmland; he helped at home with cooking, washing, feeding the animals; and fetched water and wood. In the year between our visits, Felipe not only expanded his activities but also was closer to his father, helping on the farm, and using a new, miniature tool his father made especially for him. He reported new agricultural skills and said he enjoyed the new activities:

Interviewer: Do you cut wheat?

Felipe: Yes ... with a [small] scythe.

Entrevistadora: ¿Y tú ya agarras trigo o no agarras trigo?

Interviewer: Do you like it?

Felipe: Sí, con segadera.

Felipe: Yes ... I [also] use a pick

Entrevistadora: ¿Y te gusta hacer eso?

Felipe: Sí... tengo pico [también]

Interviewer: Who taught you to do that?

Entrevistadora: ¿Quién te ha enseñado?

Felipe: Mi papá.

Felipe: My father.

Interestingly, Felipe emphasised agricultural skills and learning from his father. Although he still spent a great part of his time with his mother, he was experiencing the beginning of differentiation of gender roles especially in relation with productive work, which is observable among older children. Felipe also stopped being a small child, the one to take care of, as his mother conveys:

Last year, in preschool, I took care of him more ... now that he is going to school I leave him [to look after himself]. ... He is more grown up now [Before] I said the car may hit my son [referring to the road] ... not any more, now I've left him [to go alone] he already knows where to walk[In preschool] he played in the mud, in the water, now he has changed since he was in first grade ... I used to say, "He will play in the same way", but he does not play anymore, he comes back home clean.

El otro año en su jardín yo no más le cuidaba más. ... Ahora desde que va a la escuela ya lo he dejado, mamá ... Ya es mayorcito, mamá. ... El carro le puede pisar a mi hijo diciendo decía [refiriéndose a la carretera] ... Ya no, ahora ya le dejo [ir solo], ya sabe por dónde venir ... Juega en el barro, en las aguas juega en el jardín [inicial] mamá. ... Ahora ha cambiado desde que está en primer grado. ... Yo decía, "igual jugará decía", ahora ya no juega señorita, ya regresa limpio.

Felipe's mother's words resemble those of Hugo's mother: her child was changing and developing his competence: he was becoming more capable of taking care of himself and he was taking over more chores in the domestic and productive activities of the household. He also took care of his younger siblings in particular, characteristic ways, as was observed

when we joined him in the pastures: Felipe joined his older and younger sisters, aged 11 and 4 years old respectively, and his young uncle, aged 3. On the way to the pastures, Felipe, aged then 6, took care of the younger children, taking their hands in some difficult parts of the irregular terrain or helping them to get up if they fell over, while his older sister was busy with the cow and a little blind lamb. Once in the pastures, while the older sister sat in the grass, singing religious songs in Quechua, Felipe played with the younger children: they climbed a tree and played games in which they hide the little lamb under the bush, and threw things and ran to pick them up. In all these activities, Felipe usually took the initiative and was quickly followed by the younger ones. A female cousin of about 9 years old who saw the group when she was washing clothes in the river, joined in and played with the little ones for a while, before being called back by her mother: she had forgotten to hang the clothes out to dry and was slapped because of this. On the way back home, Felipe was once again in charge of the younger ones while his older sister watched over the cow and lamb.

Felipe loved to play but for him play was also a way of taking care of others. However, if Felipe's play distracted him from doing his chores, his mother disciplined him. Felipe's mother explained that it was important for her child to learn domestic and farming skills: "Perhaps even if I make him study, he won't complete [his studies], therefore he will have to live like us" ("*Quizás cuando le hago estudiar no va a terminar, entonces así como nosotros no más va vivir pues*"). The progressive participation of children in adult activities therefore allows them to acquire the skills and develop the competence necessary to live off the land, if schooling does not result in urban jobs.

The cases of Ana and Felipe show again that gender matters and girls are involved earlier than boys in home activities. The other case studies showed as well similar patterns as those observed in the two selected as examples. As Felipe, Fabricio started to go to the fields with his father to harvest potatoes in the year that separated the two visits, and took more responsibility on taking care of the cows. In the case of Hector, since his father is away, he joined his older brother to graze the flock and enjoys learning things from him. As for the girls, Flavia and Rosa, as Ana, helped their mothers with cooking, farming and grazing the flock and learned from them by watching and being around. Rosa was the youngest sibling in her family but Flavia had a younger sister and she took care of her as Ana with hers.

Parents in this community frame participation of children in domestic and productive activities as something necessary for their future, recognising the formative side of this work. But as in the case of Rioja, child work is not only for the future, but also a source to provide for family and children present needs, as Sandro (12), one of the Older Cohort boys, reminded us:

Sandro: It is ok that children work [in agriculture] ... because it is easy to get (money) for pay.

I: What do you need to pay? ... Do you need to pay things?

Sandro: Yes ... to pay photocopies, for the exam.

Sandro: Está bien que los niños trabajen. Porque es fácil para pagar.

Entrevistadora: ¿Qué necesitan pagar? ...¿Necesitan pagar cosas?

Sandro: Sí... Para examen... las fotocopias...

Children's needs in this community involve expenses at school, such as uniforms, school materials, and even the paper sheet to print the exams, that cost money. In order to pursue

school education, children and their families have to ensure such money is available, and as Sandro remind us, this is not a task for parents only, but children actively contribute to it. Similarly, Eva (13), one of the older girls, pointed out as well that child work helps to provide resources for children's needs in times of household shocks: [When my father got sick] there was no money for our bus ticket [to the school] (...) (thus) my brother and I went to work on Saturdays (*[cuando mi papá se enfermó] no había plata para nuestro pasaje así... nosotros nos íbamos a trabajar los sábados, o sea yo y mi hermano nada más*). Eva and her brother studied in a nearby town and thus they need to take the bus each day. The sickness of their father mean there is no money for the transfer, and thus they may stop attending school, but in this case children were considered competent enough to go to work in other people's farm for a wage and thus supply for their own, as well as family needs.

However, children's work is not only a practical strategy for survival, but has also other meanings: it is a space to learn and develop competence, as Felipe's mother made clear above. In this community it is also clearer that child' work is related with forging affective relations and gender identities. In group discussions Older Cohort boys attached an affective value to working in their fields as a way to get appreciated by the father, a feature that was observed in the case of Felipe as well. Meanwhile, girls emphasised helping their mothers at home during group discussion, and Ana's mother also showed how her daughters learn from observing her cooking or weaving, which involved sharing time with her. In general, for all domestic activities and work in the family farm children in Andahuaylas used the phrase "help at home" and differentiated it from paid work on other people's farms. This last activity was regarded both positively as a way to pay for school

supplies, as in the case of Sandro or Eva above, but also with concern if it got too heavy and involved missing school lessons.

3. Discussion

The case studies examined in this paper come from two rural sites that are very different in terms of ethnic composition, environmental setting, and livelihood. Nevertheless they show important similarities related to cultural models of child development, such as identified moments of change during early childhood, and the progressive participation of children in household activities. The cases examined here thus allow identifying the key transitions during early childhood as lived in both communities, as well as how are they experienced and what they entailed in these two rural settings.

Some of these transitions, such as naming and the first haircut, have been reported occasionally in ethnographic literature, but there is also a transition process frequently overlooked: children's increasing involvement in domestic and agricultural activities, with a consequent change of status within their families, which some authors consider the transition to middle childhood (Lancy & Grove 2011). Two fundamental features of this transition have been highlighted through case studies: a particular type of learning that goes with it, based in observation and participation; and the emergence of child work, an activity with practical value due to conditions of poverty all families share, but also considered as key in the development of a sense of responsibility, identity and belonging among children, as will be discussed in the current section.

In both rural sites all case study children shared the type of experiences illustrated by the four case studies presented in more detail. All of them demonstrated high levels of

autonomy and at the same time collaboration in family life, which increased notably from one year to the next. This increase, acknowledged by children and parents, was also consistent with adult expectations in each community in terms of when children should start taking responsibility for domestic activities, caring for younger siblings, and helping with agriculture and cattle-raising. In both communities, children joined their parents working in their gardens and fields from babyhood, but at around 5 years old they actually helped to perform some activities, while learning other skills progressively by observing older siblings or adults undertaking them.

This way of learning has been characterised as learning by “observing and pitching in” by Paradise and Rogoff (2009). In contrast with common interpretations that consider observation rather a passive behaviour, Paradise and Rogoff have stressed that “observation is an active process, accompanying or in anticipation of contributing to events of importance in the family and community” (2009, p. 104). This type of learning is facilitated in societies where children share the adults’ world (rather than being separated from it), and where adults are engaged in work organised within the household and in the immediate community, as children are more likely to be around (Gaskins & Paradise, 2010).

Since children in both Rioja and Andahuaylas participate from an early age in the family and community endeavours, within a culture that promotes such participation, this type of learning takes place in both sites and situates children as part of a shared economic and social reality with adults (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009).

As part of this social reality, gender differences also appear more strongly in children’s lives at this point in time, as noticed by Lancy and Grove (2011) in other contexts.

Although gender differentiation appears more explicitly in Andahuaylas, with the boys emphasising farm work as part of a relationship with the father while the girls undertake more female activities and learn from their mothers, this difference is also present in Rioja, where girls perform a wider range of domestic activities than boys. However in both cases it is evident that girls are introduced slightly earlier than boys to a range of activities.

Moreover, the dominant theme with the boys' mothers was the mothers' declining involvement with caring for their sons as a central feature of this transition; while for girls, the amount of care they received was not such an issue but starting to work, learning and helping at home were the main points discussed.

In both communities, children and caregivers seemed to value children's involvement with family activities and increased responsibility. During interviews, young children reported they liked the tasks they were learning to perform; when observing them at home it was even more evident they felt proud of the things they could do, and when we were working with them in group sessions, they enthusiastically listed and draw all the things they were able to do to help at home. All of this suggests children were aware that the activities they participated in were duties they had to perform for the collective well-being of their families and they were proud to contribute.

Older Cohort children in both communities were more able to elaborate their views on their activities and expressed positive opinions of children's work as a vehicle for learning, autonomy, responsibility and practical skills, as well as a source of income. Following the framework developed by Woodhead (2007), and based in the evidence presented, children's work in both communities may be characterised both as a way of survival and a means of socialisation: this means that children not only recognise the long-term necessity

of their work for the overall well-being of the family, but that they also see it as an opportunity to acquire adult skills that they and their immediate social group value.

Parents and children alike considered that children were on the path to gaining both knowledge and skills that would help them to make a living in the future – either as a complement to their schools careers or instead of them if the school failed to provide access to urban jobs. However, parents were concerned not only with the practical aspects of children's involvement in family endeavours, but also with the development of responsible persons, as their cultural and social worlds rest in the mutual obligations among the interrelated persons that belong to the family and beyond – the importance of these relations was present even in earlier transitions such as naming, the first haircut and Catholic baptism. Older children were also aware of this moral side of their activities when stating that child work helped children avoid becoming “lazy” or when valuing and associating obedience with the fulfilment of domestic chores.

In this sense, Paradise & de Haan (2009, p. 197) point out that through the gaining of specific economically and socially relevant knowledge, children at the same time learn how to participate reciprocally as responsible members of a social group, gaining thus not only practical skills but also socio-cultural knowledge. Similarly, Ochs & Izquierdo (2009), concerned with moral development, have argued that children's participation in domestic activities not only affords practical competence and social responsibility, but is also crucial for promoting moral responsibility, as it nurtures social awareness, responsiveness to the needs of others and self-reliance. Thus, it could be argued that along with practical skills, a sense of moral responsibility is acquired early in both villages, through the transition described and the associated learning that goes with it.

Furthermore, this particular moment in children's lives involves not only the development of domestic and work skills, or of responsibility in carrying them out, but also a sense of belonging to the group children participate in (whether the family or the community), which in turn is expressed in a shared identity. As Paradise and de Haan (2009, p.199) have argued, participation in this type of activities "carries with it the building or strengthening of a relation of identity with family and community", which is developed, exercised and ensured through such participation. Thus, children's social transition at this point is related to their overall well-being and sense of identity within their social group, which helps us to further understand children's positive views on child work as referred above.

At this point, the literature taking a socio-cultural approach reaches similar conclusions to that of authors researching child work from a child-centred perspective, which acknowledges the benefits (and not only the harm) it may entail for children (Boyden et al., 1998). Thus for example, Woodhead (2007) points out that children acquire self-esteem when they feel competent, respected and valued for their contributions to the household, and their feeling of self-worth is enhanced. Bourdillon (2006) reviews several studies across different contexts that illustrate how children and parents alike view child work as a way of gaining self-confidence and learning a variety of skills, and how children can gain status and self-esteem in the family through their work. Both literatures therefore point to similar conclusions in relation to the complexity of issues surrounding children's involvement in domestic and productive activities: beyond practical skills, there are in place moral values such as responsibility, obedience and hard work; a sense of identity and belonging is built and feelings of self-esteem and self-worth develop out of participation in such activities.

The transition process from being an infant who is cared for to becoming a child that takes care of him- or herself, as well as of others, and contributes to the family work, takes place at a similar time in both these communities, a time also coincidental with the beginning of primary school. Caregivers are very aware of this since, when referring to the increasing range of activities children performed at home, and how they became more responsible for their duties, in many cases they associated this change with the beginning of children's school life, as both events were occurring at the same time. It was clear however that starting school did not *produce* the change, but as it was an observable change in the lives and routines of children, schooling marked a turning point. Perhaps the widespread presence of schooling is becoming fused with the ongoing process of progressive autonomy children experience in rural areas, and educational transitions serve as markers of this otherwise less visible and progressive learning of skills and abilities that starts early in their lives.

Indeed, Lancy and Grove (2011) highlight that ethnographic evidence shows the existence of a transition in several non-western societies in the period from 5 to 7 years old, characterised by the assumption or assignment of specific roles. This transition, according to the authors, would lead to middle childhood, as distinct from early childhood (Lancy & Grove, 2011). This period was also carefully scrutinised in the ethnographies contained in the Human Relation Area Files, where Rogoff et al. (1975) showed that in most cultures sampled, children from 5 to 7 years old began to take on responsibilities such as taking care of others and doing a variety of household chores, becoming also responsible for their own behaviour. The authors concluded then that there was an indication that at 5 to 7 years old the child was categorised differently than before this age. However, in an article about 20

years later, Rogoff (1996) stressed that the transition during this period should not be viewed as an inherent property of the individual child at a particular age, but as a product of group and community processes. Thus it is necessary to observe the changing participation of children in socio-cultural activity to identify the transitions they go through. The focus is therefore on the transformation of roles that children assume: it is the social organisation of families and cultural expectations of children in each community that explain why some children take on responsibilities within a given age range, while others do it much earlier or much later.

4. Conclusion

Young rural children in Peru experience different transitions in their first years: their very arrival in a family home (naming); the end of babyhood (first haircut); and the assumption of household responsibilities (middle childhood). While the first two are usually marked by a ritual, the third entails a less visible process, as it is progressive, but it is clearly identified by adults. Learning and social interaction are key in these transitions, as they are associated not necessarily with a chronological age or physical appearance, but with the kind of skills and abilities children are able to manifest at different moments of their lives and with the changing expectations of adults and other children around them.

Gender identities are strengthened progressively during these transitions, as gender differences are increasingly marked as children grow up. Girls started their transition to middle childhood earlier than boys and were more involved in domestic chores while boys helped at home but were orientated more towards agricultural work.

Most of the discussion focused on the transition to middle childhood since it was occurring at the time of the research. It was clearly a turning point in children's "informal" learning process as they were gaining a status of more responsibility within their own households. This new status involved children taking over some tasks on a more routine basis, taking care of themselves and taking care of others. In doing that children felt they were competent and capable in many of the activities they carried out at home or on the farm, contributing in real ways to the economic and social well-being of their families and communities.

Children were also at a turning point in their formal learning process as they started primary schooling at about the same time they were experiencing the process described in this paper. I have explored children's school experiences in other works, focusing for example in Ana's and Felipe's educational transitions (Ames, 2012) or the experiences of Hugo and Gabriela when starting school (Ames et al., 2010). In those papers, I found that children were usually assessed according to their errors and considered incompetent in the skills taught at school (reading, writing, counting, etc.). Far from building on rural children's strengths, the school seemed to focus on their weaknesses, with poor results. This strategy produced a stark contrast with children's experiences outside school as described here and may be counterproductive for children's motivation to learn and for their future performance at school.

The evidence analysed here highlights the existence of important out-of-school learning processes and mechanism that take place at a particular point in the life of rural children in a majority world context. It helps us to realise the need to pay attention not only to the transitions young children are experiencing within school, as most of the literature does, but

also to those experienced outside it, particularly in contexts of cultural diversity. In majority world contexts where schooling is rapidly expanding as a result of global trends and commitments, more information is needed on children's experiences outside school, in order to understand better their lives and needs.

Different professionals working to enhance children's wellbeing and development may be better able to support and expand the children's learning process in majority world contexts, by recognising that young children already know some things, have different but effective ways to learn and that certainly the school is not the only place where they learn.

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