

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PEDAGOGICAL MODEL OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: SPACES, MOMENTS AND PROCESSES

LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UN MODELO PEDAGÓGICO DEL EMPODERAMIENTO
JUVENIL: ESPACIOS, MOMENTOS Y PROCESOS

A CRIAÇÃO DE UM MODELO PEDAGÓGICO DA CAPACITAÇÃO JUVENIL:
ESPAÇOS, MOMENTOS E PROCESSOS

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ABSTRACT: The present paper is the result of a research project (EDU2013-42979-R) which investigated youth empowerment from different perspectives. The initial question was where, when and how youth empowerment takes place. The aim was to build an educational model that could serve as guidance for the organization and study of these spaces, moments and processes. The starting point was a previous extensive documentary analysis that formulated an initial conceptualization of youth empowerment. It was based on the review of 297 bibliographical references from the year 2000 onwards that addressed youth empowerment from a socio-educational perspective. The methodology consisted in the reflective analysis of the abovementioned documentary sources and the subsequent systematization of the data obtained, in order to build a reasoned and well-argued theoretical proposal.

This paper provides its own definition of youth empowerment by focusing on previous studies carried out by the research team and on M. Nussbaum's capabilities approach. A general pattern was constructed in the form of a pedagogical model intended to offer a benchmark to describe, explain and interpret youth empowerment, as well as to plan and guide interventions intended to optimize it. We conclude with some final reflections on some possible—but undesirable—ways to understand and exploit these empowerment processes.

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| <p>PALABRAS CLAVES: Empoderamiento jóvenes modelo pedagógico educación pedagogía social</p> | <p>RESUMEN: El presente artículo es fruto de un proyecto de investigación (EDU2013-42979-R) en el que se profundiza desde diferentes perspectivas en el empoderamiento juvenil. En la aportación que aquí presentamos partimos de la pregunta inicial de dónde, cuándo y cómo tiene lugar el empoderamiento juvenil. Se pretende construir un modelo educativo que pueda servir de orientación para ordenar y estudiar estos espacios, momentos y procesos. Se parte de un extenso trabajo previo de análisis documental en el que se formulaba una primera conceptualización del empoderamiento juvenil a partir del análisis de 297 referencias bibliográficas posteriores al año 2000 que abordaban desde una perspectiva socioeducativa el empoderamiento juvenil. En la presente aportación partimos de este trabajo realizado y en esta ocasión la metodología utilizada ha consistido en el análisis reflexivo de dichas fuentes documentales y la posterior sistematización de los datos obtenidos con el propósito de construir una propuesta teórica razonada y convenientemente argumentada.</p> <p>El artículo fundamenta una definición propia de empoderamiento juvenil centrada en trabajos anteriores del equipo de investigación y en el enfoque de capacidades de M. Nussbaum. Se articula un patrón general, en forma de modelo pedagógico, con el propósito de presentar un referente con el que poder describir, explicar e interpretar el empoderamiento de los jóvenes, así como proyectar y orientar intervenciones para optimizarlo. Se concluye con unas reflexiones finales sobre ciertas formas posibles pero indeseables de entender o instrumentalizar los procesos de empoderamiento.</p> |
| <p>PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Capacitação jovens modelo pedagógico educação pedagogia social</p> | <p>RESUMO: O presente artigo é fruto de um projeto de investigação (EDU2013-42979-R) no qual se aprofunda a capacitação juvenil de várias perspectivas. No contributo que aqui apresentamos, partimos da pergunta inicial de onde, quando e como acontece a capacitação juvenil. Pretende-se criar um modelo educativo que possa servir de orientação para ordenar e estudar estes espaços, momentos e processos. Parte-se de um extenso trabalho prévio de análise documental no qual se formulou uma primeira conceptualização da capacitação juvenil a partir da análise de 297 referências bibliográficas posteriores ao ano 2000 que abordavam a capacitação juvenil de uma perspectiva socioeducativa. No presente contributo, partimos deste trabalho realizado e, nesta ocasião, a metodologia utilizada consistiu na análise reflexiva das ditas fontes documentais e na posterior sistematização dos dados obtidos com o propósito de elaborar uma proposta teórica bem fundamentada e convenientemente argumentada.</p> <p>O artigo fundamenta uma definição própria de capacitação juvenil centrada em trabalhos anteriores da equipa de investigação e na abordagem de competências de M. Nussbaum. Articula-se um padrão geral, em forma de modelo pedagógico, com o propósito de apresentar um referente com o poder de descrever, explicar e interpretar a capacitação dos jovens, assim como projetar e orientar intervenções para o otimizar. Conclui-se com umas reflexões finais sobre certas formas possíveis, mas indesejáveis, de entender ou instrumentalizar os processos de capacitação.</p> |

1. Introduction

Although there is extensive literature on empowerment, there is only limited literature that is specifically focused on *youth* empowerment. For instance, there is a gap regarding a framework or a general model upon which to map processes for youth empowerment. This is the proposal presented in this study: providing a model to describe, explain and interpret youth empowerment, as well as to plan and guide interventions intended to optimize it.

This model will seek to investigate and provide systematic answers to the following question: *where, when* and *how* does empowerment occur? The aim is to determine the most significant *spaces, moments* and *processes* for empowerment. These are three mutually inclusive, complementary analytical approaches that must come together in order to provide a holistic and coherent interpretation of youth empowerment. No *process* exists outside a given *space* and *time* context; nor can any *time* be studied separately from the

space where it takes place. Once the - the three elements of the model have been recognized as being complementary, there follows a need to accurately and differentially define the characteristics and peculiarities of what has been labelled as *spaces, moments* and *processes*.

This study is part of a larger research project¹ which is discussed in the current issue of the journal, where other articles offer further results. The closest precedent to this article is a recent study by the same authors (Úcar, Jiménez-Morales, Soler & Trilla, 2016) which carried out a literature review on empowerment and included a conceptualization of the term. The present article is more reflexive and systematic and would not have been possible without the sources and contributions provided by the previous study². The methodology used in this paper consisted in the reflective analysis of the abovementioned documentary sources and the subsequent systematization of the data obtained for the purpose of constructing a reasoned and well-argued theoretical proposal. In addition to the section that provides the actual

model, the article includes two other sections. The first one discusses how to conceptualize the term “empowerment” which, as is well known, is still far from having a universally accepted definition. This is why this concept is clarified before dealing with the model itself. The paper closes with some reflections arising from two literary quotations on certain possible—but undesirable—ways to understand and exploit the processes of empowerment.

2. A proposal for conceptualizing empowerment

The concept of empowerment used in this paper relies on a previous literature review specifically aimed at conceptualizing the term (Úcar *et al.*, 2016), based on renowned authors such as Rapoport (1981, 1987), Freire (1987) and Zimmerman (2000), among others.

Bauman defined an empowered person as the one who is “able to choose and act according to the choices made; that, in turn, implies the ability to influence the range of alternative actions available, as well as the social scenarios in which those options are chosen and become true” (Bauman, 2010, p.270). We start from the idea that the most essential core of empowerment refers to two different but consequent abilities: the ability to *decide* and the ability to *act accordingly*. Certainly, empowerment means more than being able to decide: it also involves the possibility of carrying out what has been decided. Being able to decide is already an achievement; but unless one is able to make decision and act on them, the outcome will only be frustration.

Another question also needs to be answered: which issues are to be considered in order to decide, and act on, within an empowerment process? The answer here must be twofold. The degree of empowerment of individuals increases simultaneously as their ability to:

- make decisions and act consistently on *what affects their own life* and
- be able to participate in the decision-making and to intervene in a shared and responsible way in *what affects the community to which they belong and the environment in which they live*.

In everyday language, we clearly differentiate between the decisions that we make on those things that will have a major and direct impact on our own life, and those that, in our view, will have a major and direct impact on other individuals or groups (family, community, nation, humankind, environment, etc.). It is true that what we decide and do for others also affects our own life and vice

versa; decisions about our own life will also affect, in some way, others, the environment, etc. Indeed, everything is interrelated, everything affects everything else. But despite the fact that what we do for ourselves has an effect on others, and what we do for others has an effect on ourselves, this does not mean that we should deal with it in the same way. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between what can be used to autonomously control our own life, and what can be used to participate in public affairs (social, civic, political issues...). We believe that the concept of empowerment must *jointly* embrace both dimensions. By focusing only on the ability to decide on the individual's own life one runs the risk of slipping into a solipsistic, individualistic and meritocratic notion of empowerment; a concept consistent with certain approaches of the current and predominant neoliberalism. From this perspective, empowerment would be closely linked to another main trend: entrepreneurship. The ideal model of an empowered and entrepreneurial person would be a *self-made individual*.

Another important distinction should be made to further specify the concept of empowerment used here. In order to be able to actually decide (or to be able to participate in decision-making) and act accordingly, at least two conditions must be fulfilled, both of which are equally necessary. If both conditions are not met, the decision and, above all, the consequent action, would not be viable.

The first condition relates to certain capabilities that an individual must have that can be called *internal, personal* or *psychological* (knowledge, attitudes, aptitudes, values, skills ...)³. These personal capacities will be used as necessary or appropriate in order to make the decisions involved and to carry them out. This first condition has a specifically educational nature, since such capacities are developed through education.

The second condition is that the environment should allow individuals to decide and act on their decision. This would include the political, economic, legal and material conditioning factors mentioned above (among other), but also aspects such as social norms and pressures, stereotypes, trends, etc.

To make a decision and act on it, both internal and external conditions must be met. In order to decide that reading is part of my leisure time, it is essential to be able to read (*internal* condition) but also to have books available (*external* condition). In order to vote in the general election, the current legislation has to enable it (*external* condition); however, in order to cast a vote based on informed and responsible choices, it is also

necessary to have accurate information about the different options (*internal condition*). In fact, real empowerment is always the result of a dialectical relationship between both conditions⁴:

Although both conditions are essential for real empowerment, a distinction between them should be made from an analytical point of view in order to apply the model that will be presented later in this paper. This will provide a better understanding of when, where and how people become empowered, as it would not be surprising that certain spaces, moments or processes might be more suitable for one type of condition than for the other. Certain spaces or processes will surely prove to be more effective in providing empowerment training (*internal condition*), while others are more likely to provide material, economic or legal resources (*external conditions*). Some spaces may prove to enable both conditions at the same time (extremely empowering spaces), and others may not facilitate

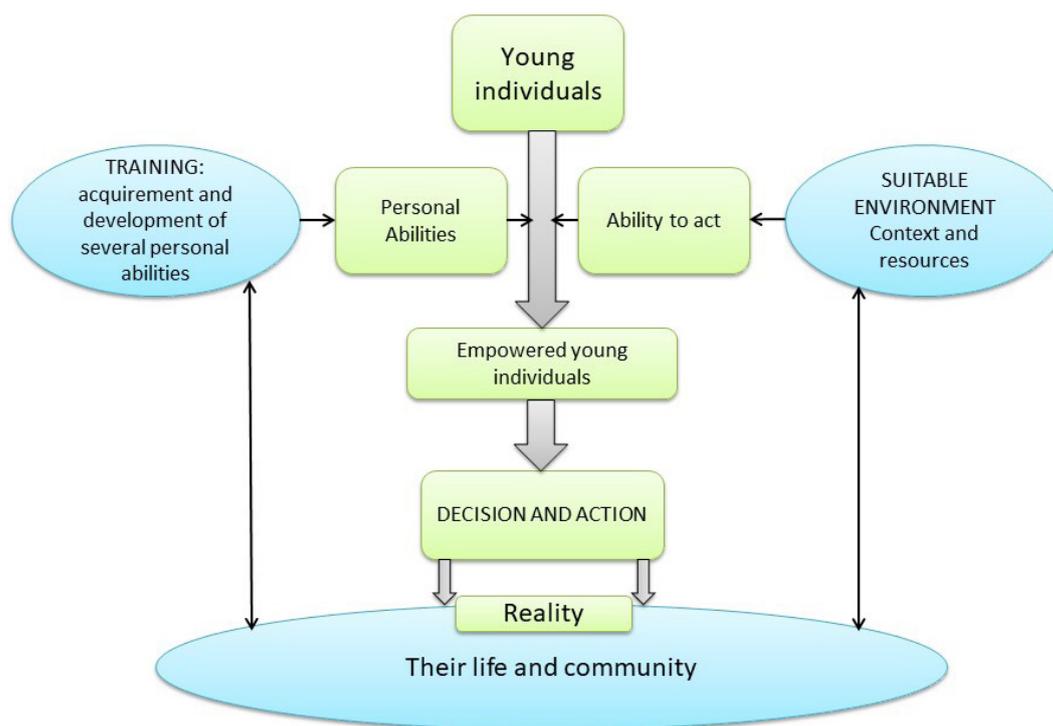
empowering and could even prevent it (minimally empowering spaces or disempowering spaces).

To summarize, in light of the above, we propose the following characterization of the concept at stake:

Empowerment is the process that increases the opportunities to decide and act consistently on everything that affects an individual's life, to participate in decision-making and to intervene in a shared and responsible way in the issues affecting the community to which he / she belongs. To achieve this, two conditions must be met: acquiring and developing a set of personal capacities (knowledge, attitudes, skills, abilities...) and having an enabling environment that can facilitate the effective exercise of such abilities⁵.

Figure 1 schematically represents our idea of empowerment by highlighting the determining action regarding both education and environment.

Figure 1. The concept of empowerment



Source: Developed by the authors

We consider that every process of empowerment is (although not exclusively) an educational process (Shirazi, 2011). Without education, empowerment is not achievable; however, this alone is not enough. As stated before, in order to decide and act consistently with one's decision, an enabling context is also necessary. Somerville (1998) pointed out to the need for different elements

and processes in order for empowerment to be achieved, in addition to education. He also underlined legislation, resource mobilization and the transfer of power. Therefore, the environment, the social and political context, and its structure and services can also be regarded powerful educational agents. In some cases, the environment can be a good ally for the promotion of empowerment, but

on other occasions the challenge will be precisely to find a way to avoid, counteract or elude the effect of a limiting, worsening, accommodating or alienating setting.

3. Youth empowerment: where, when and how

3.1. Spaces

This category encompasses everything that can be an answer to the question about *where* youth empowerment is produced or manifested. The notion of spaces refers to “settings”, “areas”, “environments” and “institutions”. This section includes the various place designations used by authors when referring to empowerment.

Different classifications, typologies and criteria have been proposed in various studies to identify and organize the most significant spaces for empowerment (Luttrel *et al.*, 2009; Shaw *et al.*, 2014; Boluijt & de Graaf, 2010; Gaventa, 2006; Masa, 2009). This paper includes a broad catalogue of places which are actually or potentially related to youth empowerment, followed by some proposed criteria and distinctions which facilitate their appropriate analysis. This list is not intended to be a new taxonomic proposal; instead, it is a sample intended to highlight the diversity of significant spaces for youth empowerment mentioned by different authors.

- *Formal educational institutions*: secondary schools, universities, vocational training centers... (Peterson *et al.*, 2011; Ozer & Schotland, 2011; Pearrow & Pollack, 2009; Messias *et al.*, 2005; San Saturnino & Gaicoechea, 2013).
- *Non-formal education and social education institutions*: youth centers, leisure time education institutions and groups, social education institutions and services... (Lawrencejacobson, 2006; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Wright, 2010; Wong, 2008).
- *Political, civic and religious associations*: political parties, social movements, non-governmental organizations, religious denominations ... (Claret, 2013; Messias *et al.*, 2005).
- *Cultural, artistic, sports and health institutions and facilities*: museums, libraries, sports clubs, hospitals and health centers... (Cargo *et al.*, 2003; Kronenberg, 2007).
- *Public areas for citizens*: squares, parks, streets, shopping and recreation centers... (Nolas, 2014; Somerville, 1998; Pato, 2014; Trilla *et al.*, 2011).
- *Family environment*: different types of families, as well as family substitution services.

(Kaplan, Skolnik & Turnbull, 2009; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

- *Work environment* (Richez *et al.*, 2012; Cloete & Auriacombe, 2013).
- *Virtual space, ICT and the media* (Carlsson *et al.*, 2008; Fortunati, 2014; Qiu, 2008; Wang, 2006; Subirats & Parés, 2014).

3.1.1. Spaces as settings for the practice and promotion of empowerment

The different spaces provided can be analyzed and assessed from a double perspective: to what extent are the subjects empowered in each one of them; and to what extent can each space generate some kind of empowerment which can be transferable to other spaces. These dimensions are two different (but complementary) ways of approaching the relationship between space and empowerment.

The first dimension considers spaces as areas where empowerment is displayed, expressed and put into practice. Obviously, the degree of empowerment of each individual depends, to a large extent, on the particular space under consideration. The second dimension, where spaces are significant regarding empowerment, considers how such settings can be empowering. In other words, they are areas which have a positive or negative impact on people's empowerment, not only in terms of the specific space involved, but also regarding others. The empowering ability in a certain space must be measured not only by the empowerment it generates among the individuals within that specific setting, but also by how it can be transferred to other spaces. This transferability is due mainly to the inherent educational dimension of the empowerment referred to earlier.

In the catalogue of spaces presented, some of them could be identified as having a greater responsibility for empowerment because of their nature and purpose. However, this is so under the assumption that empowerment, like any other form of learning or ability, is only acquired or developed through practice. Family and educational institutions will act as agents of empowerment transferable to other spaces if, and only if, they actually allow young people to exercise the power which belongs to them. A family where hierarchical and/or paternalistic relationships predominate will hardly be a space for empowerment capable of being transferred to other spaces.

3.1.2. Youth spaces and intergenerational spaces

The different spaces presented here include some that are specifically or predominantly intended for

young people, while others are of an intergenerational nature. Among the former, two subtypes can be distinguished. The first subtype are those regarded as *youth* spaces because they are institutionally designated for members or users who belong to this age group: youth centers, secondary schools, youth information centers, youth shelters... These places will be called *institutionalized youth spaces*. But there are also other spaces that are predominantly – or even almost exclusively – frequented by young people, even though this has not been formally established. These are spaces that actually select their users through the kind of activity that takes place there, or simply because they have become meeting points predominantly for young people (skate parks, certain urban areas and commercial and leisure venues...). We have called these places *informal youth spaces*. Finally, there are other spaces that will be referred to as *intergenerational*. These are very significant for youth empowerment as well, and include: family, workplace, various institutions and cultural facilities, etc.

In general, *informal youth spaces* can be considered as areas provided for young people to enjoy autonomy – and personal power – to a greater extent than they can have in other areas. In these informal spaces intended for horizontal socialization without adult supervision, young people can express their individuality. This is where young people act as such and, therefore, where they can truly be young. In contrast, a critical view would claim that the most common and unpleasant stereotypes attributed to youth (consumerism, frivolity, irresponsible *carpe diem*...) are the main behaviors found and perpetuated within those spaces. The epitome of this type of behavior would then be the so-called *botellón* (group binge drinking in public spaces), a clear example of the contradictions involved in leisure settings as learning spaces for youth (Comas, 2001).

Institutionalized youth spaces, from a positive perspective, are the most favorable in promoting transferable empowerment. In fact, the large majority of these spaces are primarily and explicitly designed to have an educational role (educational institutions, socioeducational and sociocultural organizations...). Their educational nature turns these institutions into especially empowering spaces, as they provide opportunities for the acquisition of competences that are capable of being transferred to other spaces. It should be noted, however, that there are many different forms of education. A distinction can therefore be made between empowering and disempowering education, although the latter is considered undesirable. Some educational procedures are designed to educate obedient, menial, submissive, conformist,

and dependent individuals. Some would say that all that you can learn in certain educational institutions is the need to be taught by someone who prescribes what to learn and how to learn it. In order for educational institutions that work with young people to provide training in empowering transferable competences that, they should become spaces where young people can actually exercise their share of power.

Contemporary societies are becoming increasingly diverse in many respects (race, origin, culture, ideology, religion ...), and this may be the reason why they tend to generate different spaces: for children, for young people, for the elderly; some neighborhoods for rich people and others for poor people, some for immigrants and others for locals... But this should never result in socially-excluding ghettos. Secluding youth to specific spaces (even if they seem to be artificial paradises) is not the best way to empower them; it is just a form of paternalism that will only effectively exclude them. For this reason, *intergenerational spaces* should be considered the norm rather than an exception.

Intergenerational spaces should be the best points of reference for youth empowerment. Empowering youth does not only mean enabling them to participate in the decisions affecting them, but also in the decisions that affect the whole community they belong to. Intergenerational spaces are the spaces where young people learn to participate in what affects them, but also in what affects everyone else.

3.2. Youth empowerment: when does it take place?

This section addresses the second question in our model: when does empowerment occur? Does it happen differently depending on specific stages or periods? Are certain moments in time more auspicious for empowerment than others?

3.2.1. Empowerment and life stages

It can be assumed that the timing for empowerment can be identified with different life stages (childhood, youth, adulthood, old age). The chronological variable is obviously significant in studying how empowerment occurs and how to promote it. The only way to identify any specific features characteristic of youth empowerment, is comparing the youth stage with other life stages, especially those periods immediately preceding it (childhood) and immediately following it (adulthood).

Likewise, substages in the psycho-social development of young people could also be

considered, given the fact that in the period from 18 to 28 years old individuals might undergo significant changes. Comparatively, that ten-year period is considerably more important than other similar time periods from later life stages, for instance, when comparing it with the possible differences between an individual aged 38 and another one aged 48.

3.2.2. Empowerment and timing in everyday life

The question about *when* youth empowerment occurs may attribute a meaning to the word “timing” that differs from the one used in the previous section. Timing could be considered as specific time slots in daily life. Studying specific matters such as “empowerment during holidays”, “nightlife and youth empowerment”, “time to go home at night and consequent family conflicts”, etc. could be very beneficial (Masa, 2009; Wright, 2010).

Daily life is undoubtedly an important concern regarding empowerment. Empowerment also involves teaching young people how to manage their own time, and this entails at least two things. First, an awareness of the actual use of time: the activities that occupy their time and the level of satisfaction that they provide. Once the use of their time has been analyzed, a way to optimize its use needs to be found according to preset goals and criteria. Being aware of the use of time and being able to manage it in a responsible autonomous way are very important aspects in stimulating empowerment.

3.2.3. Empowerment and critical events

Life events can also be very meaningful for empowerment. These specific events are very different in nature, but they all have in common that they are experienced with a great intensity: first love, first breakup, loss of a loved one, emancipation from, and the leaving of, the family home, loss of a job... Some may be positive, some negative, but even the negative experiences generate self-knowledge that can reveal hidden aspects and unknown abilities. These experiences make young people aware of their own limitations, and also helps them discover that seemingly insurmountable boundaries that are in fact feasible, simply because they decided to deal with them and managed to succeed, turning those negative events into empowering experiences. Moreover, these events are memorable, they multiply their empowering nature, as they felt empowering at the time when they happened and they still do later every time they are remembered.

3.2.4. Empowerment and specific social or collective periods.

So far, we have considered personal time: life stages and daily and exceptional events. But *collective* periods can also be regarded as being empowering; certain social events can become very significant for the empowerment of young people who had the chance to live them collectively. Two examples could be the events of May 1968 in France and the 15-M Movement in Spain in 2011. These cases are iconic because their protagonists were young individuals and the very names of the events refer to the time when they occurred. Both movements have been largely addressed⁶, and there are numerous first-hand testimonies which accurately illustrate empowering processes lived collectively by young participants. One of them said about the 15-M Movement: “Personally I learned a lot about democracy. It was a lesson never to be forgotten. Collectively, we learned to interact with one another, strive for democratic decisions in an assembly and engage with other groups” (Ana, health worker, member of *Indignados* (Outraged), a political protest group made up by members of the health sector) (AA.VV., 2011: 53).

The differences between empowerment occurring in the context of an economic crisis or during an economic upturn are obvious. Neither the situation nor the needs of youth are the same in each of these contexts; therefore, the goals, priorities and strategies for the implementation of empowerment policies must be also different.

3.3. Processes for youth empowerment

This section addresses *how* empowerment occurs. Our goal is to provide an approach to those methods, systems, techniques, procedures, plans and activities that promote, inspire and facilitate youth empowerment. In order to analyze them, three levels are suggested: macro, meso and micro, based on the scope and dimension of each process.

3.3.1. Empowering processes at the macro level. Youth empowerment through public and youth policies.

What should be the role of public policies in order to enable youth empowerment? How should governments act to prevent excessive control that can limit the ability for young people to make decisions and take action? Some examples follow that, in our view, can inform public policies intended to foster youth empowerment.

a) *The educational approach as a key element in youth policies*

Providing an ample and thorough education is the first and essential principle for any empowerment process. Political literacy is indispensable and is decisive in enabling free and conscious choices (Freire, 1997; 1997b). This objective requires taking the educational dimension into account regarding different programs (health, job, housing, leisure, culture, etc.), and not only from the perspective of formal education. It also involves recognizing that the environments and life settings of young people can be powerful educational agents.

b) *Enabling the actual exercise of recognized rights*

The current participation of youth in political, economic and social structures is insufficient. Decision-making spaces have been reduced and taken away from citizens, and even more so from young people, despite the development of the current democratic systems. Young people should be trusted and inspired, and recognized, valued and encouraged to take action and participate. The goal is to enable them to achieve actual power, to have influence and exert power.

In this scenario, there is a need to engage citizens in government decision-making (Cornwall, 2008). A more democratic state is demanded, where participation is understood as a basic right upon which other rights are built, and not only as a favor from governments or as a privilege for citizens.

If the participation of adult citizens is in general not sufficient in many cases, and they are not a good example, how could the engagement of young people be achieved? B. Checkoway (2011), Christens & Peterson (2012) and Cornwall (2008) believe that governmental and non-governmental institutions should strive to increase youth involvement and representation in work, social and political improvement.

c) *Enabling autonomy and independence for young people. Respect for the principle of subsidiarity*

Autonomy and independence should be inseparable from youth empowerment, since empowerment is about enabling youth to decide and act freely, about urging their necessary and healthy collaboration and their critique of government and community action. Richez, Labadie & De Linares (2012) claimed that empowerment policies require

promoting young people's autonomy in order to strengthen their position in society and develop a proper democratic logic.

This way of understanding the design and implementation of public policies, especially youth policies, must respect the principle of subsidiarity. The aim is to enable young people to play a vital role, while minimizing the actions performed by adults and governments, which should only be taken on specific and justified occasions.

3.3.2. Empowering processes at the meso level. Youth empowerment through groups and institutions

This is an intermediate level between policies (strategic planning and action), and direct action on groups and people (operational planning and action). It corresponds to those processes that are mainly carried out through groups and institutions that implement political manifestos via programs and projects.

a) *Open programs encourage creativity and freedom*

It is necessary to put in place processes enabling young people's freedom, prominence and creativity. Without freedom, an individual cannot experiment, risk making decisions and executing them through action. Institutions and groups that seek to promote youth empowerment should offer the means and tools required to foment a proper climate for trial, creation and action.

According to Kronenberg (2007), an empowering environment should enable exploration (instead of identifying artistic creation as good or bad), the acceptance of a certain number of mistakes in order for young artists to grow, and the appreciation of the imagination of every individual. This idea should be extrapolated to other areas and practices beyond the art sphere. When young people feel that they are part of a team and have responsibilities and a proper setting in which to achieve their goals, their self-esteem grows. Salusky *et al.* (2014) proposed that project goals should be explicit to encourage young people to take the initiative to meet those goals. They argued that there should not be *a priori* rules, and that empowerment is facilitated when young people are considered responsible individuals, expectations are placed on them, they are invested with support, and when they are taught perseverance and teamwork.

b) *Programs contributing to raise awareness*

Youth empowerment requires personal and community awareness, depending on the social or institutional setting involved. Ricaurte *et al.* (2013) suggested four different stages in order to illustrate the requirements of this process: a) knowing the past, b) understanding the present, c) planning the future and d) taking action and materializing a plan. They proposed different methods and suitable techniques in order to effect this. These proposals prompt further reflection, findings, critiques, open debate and discussion of opinions; everything needed to make up their own minds and raise awareness on essential issues. According to Freire (1997), if individuals are not critically aware of the visible and invisible structures and processes constituting social practices and institutions, and not critically aware of their personal role within those institutions and practices, empowerment cannot occur.

c) *Specific techniques for empowerment*

This section includes some specific techniques identified explicitly as acknowledged resources for empowerment processes. These are not focused on contributions by famous pedagogues or well-established pedagogical proposals, although they might also provide specific proposals enabling empowerment.

There are two important specific contributions that have been identified as techniques for empowerment in recent years: *Photovoice* and *Reflect-Action*. Wang (2006) presented *Photovoice* as a methodology for empowerment that comprises the following steps: a) selecting a target audience for which images, stories or recommendations (politicians, journalists, etc.) are intended; b) selecting the participant group and organizing a workshop to explain the project and basic concepts of social photography; c) jointly agreeing on the topics to be addressed; d) providing young people with cameras and enough time to take pictures; e) enabling dialogue about the meaning of the pictures by conducting a structured debate⁷ and plan a way to share the pictures and stories with the chosen audience (politicians, journalists, community, etc.).

Reflect-Action⁸ (2009) is an innovative proposal for literacy and social change that combines Paulo Freire's theories with the methodology from Rural Participatory Analysis. It provides democratic spaces where meetings and debate take place. Participants freely choose the topics to be discussed according to their own priorities and with the support of a neutral facilitator. This

project aims to help people to fight for their rights, to defy injustice and change their place in society. It also proposes working *with* people and not working *for* people. It is conceived as a political process where the multiple dimensions of power and social stratification are always the center of reflection, and actions are destined to change unjust power relations. Reflect-Action draws on a wide range of participatory methods seeking to minimize dependence and provide the right conditions with which to promote popular power and empowerment.

Beyond *Photovoice* and *Reflect-Action*, there are many experiences presenting further methodology and strategies for the empowerment of groups and communities. To name but a few: *Community-based service-learning (CBLs)* as a suitable method for empowerment through community programs and pedagogical proposals committed to the community; *4 D Process (discover, dream, design and destiny)*, a method for awareness and improvement; *community mapping*, upon which a community is built from its own perspective. A special mention must be made of the *participatory video*, given that it has been one of the techniques more frequently used by our research team (Salvadó, Jiménez-Morales & Sourdis, 2017). Processes of empowerment are clearly experienced through the use of a camera, filming and storytelling, while young people become aware of their reality and play a leading role in their development.

3.3.3. Empowering processes at the micro level. Course of action to promote and enable empowerment in interpersonal relationships

In this third group, we have compiled guidelines concerning attitudes, abilities, and ways of acting in personal relationships and in face-to-face interactions with young people.

a) *Building a relationship based on mutual trust.*

Young people having confidence in their own abilities is an evident boost for motivation and personal growth. Cargo *et al.* (2003) explained the importance of developing an environment that enables young people to take responsibility, and thus transferring power to them. This is understood as the responsibility to express themselves, to make decisions and to take action.

b) *Learning by doing / taking action*

Strengthening the best attitudes, skills and competencies for empowerment involves

learning by doing, among others. There are many examples and experiences with young people, in which first-person action is the central axis of the relationship. After all, empowerment is not learned, but is achieved through actions and ways of facing life. From this, Shaw *et al.* (2014) proposed that many civic engagement activities be considered optimal for youth empowerment: community and volunteer activities, mutual assistance, etc. *Presence / absence of adults*

The opportunities for empowerment might be limited by processes that are excessively managed or scheduled. A balance between plans and freedom of action should ideally be achieved. Messias *et al.* (2005) and Salusky *et al.* (2014) analyzed the role of adults in youth empowerment processes, and agreed that their role should be flexible and secondary, even though they have clear guidelines to encourage, support, listen and review.

4. Concluding thoughts

We will end this article by providing some brief considerations regarding the possible ways to conceive empowerment, along with two literary quotations: some stanzas from a poem by José Agustín Goytisolo (1994) and an aphorism by Franz Kafka (1983). While each of these texts could generate further debate, since they are in themselves rather eloquently expressed, a mere comment will be briefly outlined.

*“La vida es lucha despiadada
nadie te ayuda así nomás
y si tú solo no adelantas
te irán dejando atrás atrás.
Anda muchacho dale duro
la tierra toda el sol y el mar
son para aquellos que han sabido
sentarse sobre los demás.”*

(Goytisolo, 1994: 45-46)

(Life is a heartless fight / nobody helps you for no reason / if you don't move on by yourself / they will leave you behind / come on boy, work hard / because the Earth, the sun and the sea / belong to those who knew / how to sit on others).

These are some lines of the well-known poem written by the oldest of the Goytisolo brothers, which Paco Ibáñez turned into a song: “Me lo decía mi abuelito, / me lo decía mi papá, / me lo dijeron muchas veces / y lo he olvidado siempre más.” (My Grandpa told me / my Dad told me / I

was told many times / and I always forgot). Grandpa and Dad probably didn't know the term “empowerment”, but their advice perfectly suited the idea: a way to acquire power and use it. However, professionals who currently use the concept of empowerment do not have the same understanding, as youth empowerment is not about teaching youth to put themselves above others.

Nonetheless, a question arises at this point: does power work in the same way as other educational contents or targets? Take culture, for instance, in any of its forms (anthropological or academic understanding, etc.). In any of these definitions, culture is transferable. With the appropriate means available, everyone could have access to culture without the need for sharing or division. In other words, if an individual improves their cultural competency, this does not mean that another individual then sees theirs diminished. In fact, spreading culture actually multiplies its effects; the more, the better. But, is this the case with power? Is it possible for many individuals to hold power and exercise it simultaneously? Is it not true that if one has power over others, the others have less power? If somebody has a high level of control at home, is it because the rest of the members of the family have less control.

That is why when we talk about empowering we are not referring to a situation in which every individual has to acquire more power, but to one where the existing power is better shared or socialized. Empowering processes should prioritize the least powerful individuals and groups. When we call for an education for empowerment, perhaps we should say that we must learn how to share power; we must learn that everyone has the right to take a seat but, contrary to what Grandpa said, they are not entitled to sit on others.

“El animal arranca el látigo de la mano del amo y se azota por su cuenta para convertirse en amo de sí mismo, y no sabe que eso es sólo una fantasía, nacida de un nuevo nudo de la correa del látigo propietario.”

(Kafka, 1983: 24)

(The animal wrests the whip from its master and whips itself in order to become master, not knowing that this is only a fantasy produced by a new knot in the master's whiplash).

To a member of the school of suspicion, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, the concept of empowerment could be a scheme established by the dominant hegemony to enable individuals to control themselves. In fact, this aphorism by Kafka (1983) has come true on many occasions: self-flagellation as a way of mortifying the flesh in former religious

communities; masochism for sexual perversion; austerity and sacrifice as key principles for puritanism; brainwashing in order to become subordinated to a sectarian leader under the guise of false freedom, etc.

Empowerment does serve to wrest the whip from the master, but only if it can destroy the whip (and, consequently, its meaning) immediately afterwards, with a vow never to whip oneself or anyone else.

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Notes

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- ² 3.262 bibliographic references after the year 2000 and that included the key words "youth empowerment" or "empowerment indicators" were used. The online work was conducted via the reference and citation manager Mendeley. All this material was revised by the research team, fitting the selection criteria which sought to choose documents directly addressing youth empowerment from a socio-educational perspective. Contributions related to health, medicine and economy, among others, were dismissed, given that they were outside the scope of the study. In this way, 297 bibliographic references were finally chosen. Every document was labelled with several key words regarding the goals of the research. Detailed information on labels, databases and criteria for the analysis are available in the reference.
- ³ Marta Nussbaum (2012, p. 400.) used the expression "internal capabilities" with a meaning similar to our understanding. It would also be interesting to revisit her mentor, Amartya Sen (2000), who has extensively covered this topic.
- ⁴ In the aforementioned book, Nussbaum explained and gave examples of this relationship using her concept of "combined capabilities".
- ⁵ When empowerment addresses the general population or a specific group (youth, children, people with special educational needs, immigrants...) instead of a single individual, we have replaced the word "individual" with the respective word for any specific case.
- ⁶ Carandell, 1974; Cohn-Bendit, 1970; Glucksmann, 2008; Le Goff, 1998 on events from May 1968 and Álvarez, Gallego & Gandara, 2011; Figueras et al., 2011 concerning the 15-M Movement.
- ⁷ Wilson et al. (2007) and Wilson et al. (2008) proposed questions referring to each letter in the word "SHOWed": 1) What do you SEE here?, 2) What's really HAPPENING here?, 3) How does this relate to OUR lives?, 4) WHY does this problem, concern, or strength exist?, 5) How can this image EDUCATE the community policy makers, others? and 6) What can we DO about it?
- ⁸ Information available at <http://www.reflect-action.org/>. Consulted on January 25, 2017.

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