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## A pedagogical model of youth empowerment

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to present a pedagogical model of youth empowerment and some tools developed, throughout several national research projects, to be able to analyze and evaluate it. The research questions at the base of these products connect both with the lack of clarity of the concept itself and with the nonexistence of works that, from the field of social pedagogy, provide guidance to social educators to help young people to empower themselves.

Through three consecutive national research projects (Ref.: DU2010-15122; Ref.: EDU2013-42979-R y Ref.: EDU2017-83249-R) financed by the Ministry of Science, Innovation, and Universities, we have been working on youth empowerment in the framework of what we have called the HEBE Project ([www.projecteheber.com](http://www.projecteheber.com)). These projects have sought to answer research questions from the perspective of social pedagogy.

The pedagogical model we present provides a map of spaces, moments and processes that allow the analysis and pedagogical design of the actions and processes that foster youth empowerment. From this model we derive a series of dimensions and indicators that allow us to characterize youth empowerment. These dimensions and indicators make it possible to create the HEBE rubric, an instrument for evaluating actions and socio-educational projects for youth empowerment.

### **Introduction**

Since the 1970s the concept of empowerment has been gaining traction in such varied academic fields and areas of investigation as psychology, sociology, politics, education and health (Heath & Moreau, 2022; Bajt & Frelih, 2022; Thulin et al., 2022; Noordink, Verharen, Schalk & Regenmortel, 2021; Dimitrova & Wiium, 2021; Adams, 2017). Its use has also become increasingly common in everyday language, probably due to the semantic versatility and usability of the term, as well as the pleasant ring of the word itself with its links to the concept of power.

However, this increase in the academic and popular use of the term has not contributed in a decisive way towards clarifying its meaning. Empowerment continues, even today, to be a complex, ambiguous and poorly defined concept that can be applied to very different situations and processes and in highly varied ways (Sala-Torrent, Planas-Lladó, Soler-Masó & Gómez, 2022; Powell et al. 2021; Owen & Irion-Groth, 2020). This lack of clarity is further exacerbated by the translation of the term “empowerment” into other

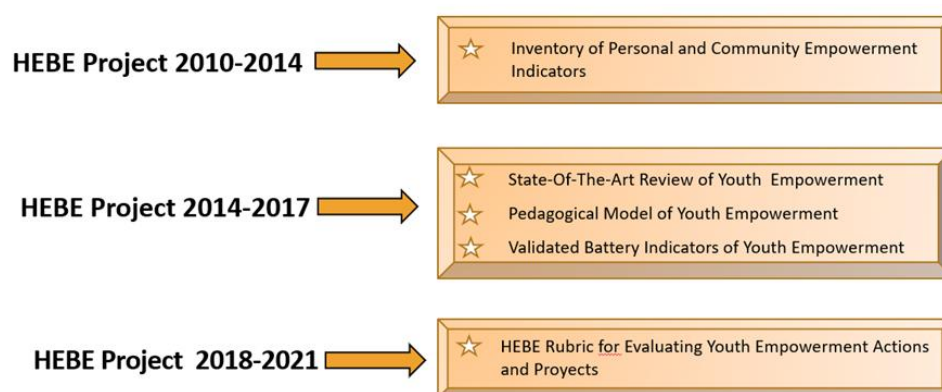
languages (Bacqué & Biewener, 2016; Lutrell et al., 2009; Richez et al., 2012; Garriga Tella, 2014). In the absence of an exact literal translation it has been equated to more or less equivalent terms in each language that have added nuances to its original connotations. Although, historically, it has mostly referred to adults (Úcar et al., 2017; Rojas, 2014; Russell et al., 2009), in recent decades the concept has begun to be applied specifically to young people.

These issues prompted our research group, more than ten years ago, to take an interest in this concept and its use and application in the area of education, and particularly in youth educational work. The research questions we have been trying to answer through successive study projects funded in competitive calls at a national level are as follows: What is empowerment? What is youth empowerment? How is empowerment related to education? What are the main dimensions and indicators of youth empowerment?

What moments, spaces and processes foster youth empowerment? What factors may enhance or inhibit youth empowerment and how can we evaluate it? And, finally: What role do educators and the community play in youth empowerment?

Given that we are a research group specializing in the area of social pedagogy and education, not only have we generated new knowledge about youth empowerment, we have also gone further in our work. Over the course of three consecutive national research projects (2010-2021) and built upon the knowledge obtained, we have created practical tools to improve the socio-educational actions of educators involved in processes and projects that pursue greater youth empowerment (fig. 1).

Figure 1. Products obtained from each of the research projects



In the first of these research projects, entitled “*Participatory evaluation of community actions as a learning methodology for personal and community empowerment: case studies and empowerment processes*” (EDU2010-15122. EDUC Subprogramme. Ministry of Science and Innovation, Government of Spain) and conducted between 2010 and 2014, we developed, among other products, an inventory of personal and community empowerment indicators (Soler et al., 2014).

In the second study, entitled *“Hebe Project. Empowering young people: Analysis of the times, places and processes that contribute to youth empowerment.”*<sup>1</sup>. (MINECO – National RDI programme aimed at society’s challenges 2013. Ref.: EDU2013-42979-R) and carried out between 2014 and 2017, we developed several products. First, we produced a state-of-the-art review of the research on youth empowerment published since the start of the current millennium (Úcar et al., 2017) and, from this systematic analysis of the academic literature, we constructed a pedagogical model of youth empowerment (Soler et al., 2017).

In the framework of this same project, we also adapted the initial inventory of indicators of personal and community empowerment and youth empowerment (Planas et al., 2016a; Planas et al., 2016b). Once modified, we validated this inventory of indicators in a two-phase process: validation by youth-work experts (Planas-Lladó & Úcar, 2022) and another conducted through practice with young people (Llena-Berñe et al., 2017).

The third project, named *“Hebe Project. Identification of factors that enhance and inhibit youth empowerment: analysis of educators’ discourse and practice”* (EDU2017-83249-R), finalized in mid-2021. In this new project, the previously validated inventory of indicators has been used to produce the *HEBE Rubric* for evaluating youth empowerment actions and projects.

This paper presents some of the advances and outputs produced from the research carried out. Particular attention is paid to the pedagogical model of youth empowerment, which is considered one of the most useful theoretical-practical products that can be applied as a heuristic tool to both research and socio-educational intervention. Furthermore, this model provides the backbone and gives meaning to the entire body of research that we have conducted over the past decade.

We have structured this work in three parts. The first presents a state-of-the-art analysis of research on youth empowerment over the past two decades. The second part sets out the pedagogical model of youth empowerment, built from that analysis, and its implications in the spaces, moments and processes through which this is produced. The third part presents the nine dimensions and twenty-seven indicators that make up youth empowerment, specifying the pedagogical model provided. These dimensions and indicators, obtained from state-of-the-art analysis and validated through various processes that involved academics, educators, and young people (Planas-Lladó & Úcar, 2022), have given rise to a pedagogical tool: the Rubric. HEBE. And finally, we bring this contribution to a close with some reflections gleaned over the course of our research.

## **1. YOUTH EMPOWERMENT BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FROM THE PAST TWO DECADES**

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<sup>1</sup> This and subsequent projects can be consulted at: <https://www.proyecteheber.com/es/>. At this moment we are developing a new national research project call “HEBE PROJECT. Empowerment of youth in the community. Case studies from three communities (HEBE-III)” Ref.: PID2020-119939RB-I00.

The first step when embarking on any new investigation consists in learning about what has already been published in the international academic literature in relation to the topic of study. In our case, we sought to gather information about a rather ambiguous concept which, at the time when we launched this research programme, was still relatively understudied and rarely analysed: empowerment and, above all, its applications and uses in the youth area. The aim was to discover how empowerment has been analysed and characterized in research involving young people. This systematic analysis of the academic literature was conducted in two phases. The first was concluded at the end of 2015 and the second in mid-2019.

### **1.1. First phase in the analysis of the scientific documentation on youth empowerment**

We began with 3,262 post-2000 bibliographical references which contained the term “youth empowerment” or “empowerment indicators”. All this material was reviewed in order to select those documents that specifically dealt with the subject of youth empowerment from a socio-educational perspective. Contributions linked to the fields of health, medicine, economics and other perspectives unrelated to our area of interest were rejected. Thus, the original selection was whittled down to a total of 297 bibliographical references.

### **1.2. Second phase in the analysis of the scientific documentation on youth empowerment**

In this second phase, the systematic analysis of research on youth empowerment maintained the same criteria and parameters applied in the first phase. However, the keywords used this time were “youth” and “empowerment”. Searches were carried out on the Web of Science (WOS) and SCOPUS. Two filters were applied to the searches:

- Documents that included both keywords (in substantive or verbal form)
- Documents published between 2015 and 2019

In WOS, 744 records were found, of which 139 were selected. In SCOPUS there were 570 records, of which 123 were selected. After eliminating the records that did not directly address the subject of youth empowerment from a socio-educational perspective, we were left with 28 records.

### **1.3. The analysis of the results of the two phases**

Both searches revealed unanimity among authors regarding the current ambiguity and lack of precision in defining the concept, demonstrating the term’s previously mentioned versatility in the many disciplines in which it is used and the various ways it is applied. The authors also coincide in pointing out that empowerment is related to change and transformation in individuals, groups and communities, but also to a shift from a situation of powerlessness to one in which people gain control and authority over their lives in their own personal contexts. There are three concepts that most often appear to be linked to empowerment in the investigations analysed: power, participation and education (Úcar et al., 2017).

Empowerment, as a process or a result, is always the effect or consequence of an interaction, negotiated to a greater or lesser degree, between an individual, group or

community's capacity for action and the options provided by the physical or sociocultural environment in which they live.

In terms of youth empowerment, the scant specification of the general concept suggests a need for more in-depth and detailed study that compares the ways in which it occurs in young people. To fully understand it, it would seem necessary, first of all, to emphasize the unique nature of this type of empowerment which, given young people's special characteristics, presents its own distinctive features different to those produced in the adult world. Also in this case, the authors agree that the term generally refers to young people's effective personal growth, achieved by acquiring competences to overcome certain difficult situations.

The extensive academic literature devoted to the positive development of young people leads one to think that empirical research conducted with groups of youngsters has served not only to understand the concept itself, but, above all, to specify it in the context of youth. In this research, empowerment has always formed part of ideas such as leadership, self-efficacy, personal wellbeing and participation. In addition, and as a defining trait when compared to the global understanding of empowerment, the importance of youth empowerment has been highlighted as a response to the dynamics generated by *adultism*.

The main dimensions that shape or are associated with empowerment in the context of youth have also been identified: a) growth and wellbeing; b) relational; c) educational; d) political; e) transformative; and, finally, f) emancipative. The convergence of these dimensions at a particular point in young people's lives, when they are no longer children but not yet adults, means that they are all expressed in a special way in the literature analysed. Thus, these dimensions acquire greater importance and add value to the definition of the concept of youth empowerment.

Finally, it is particularly descriptive of youth empowerment to note the broad range of proposals connected with the political meaning of the term. Much academic literature has aimed to characterize it from this standpoint: the many ways in which young people can access power; the training dynamics that are specifically developed to help them gain such access; and, finally, the ways in which they relate to adults, given that it is adults who are responsible for the emotional, educational and participatory enablement of young people. It is this political facet that sets in motion the flow of relationships between young people and adults and, consequently, ensures that processes of adult empowerment are intertwined with those of youth empowerment.

Extending the first analysis until May 2019 confirmed this data. It also highlighted a significant increase in the research on youth empowerment in fields such as health and social networks and in the development and application of programmes aimed at empowering young people.

It should be noted that the preponderance of the academic literature on empowerment analysed continues to cite as a theoretical starting point Zimmerman's seminal definition (1995, 2000; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) which states that empowering

experiences are those that permit people to make connections between their goals and the actions necessary to achieve them, and thus gain greater access and control over resources, and influence decisions that affect their lives.

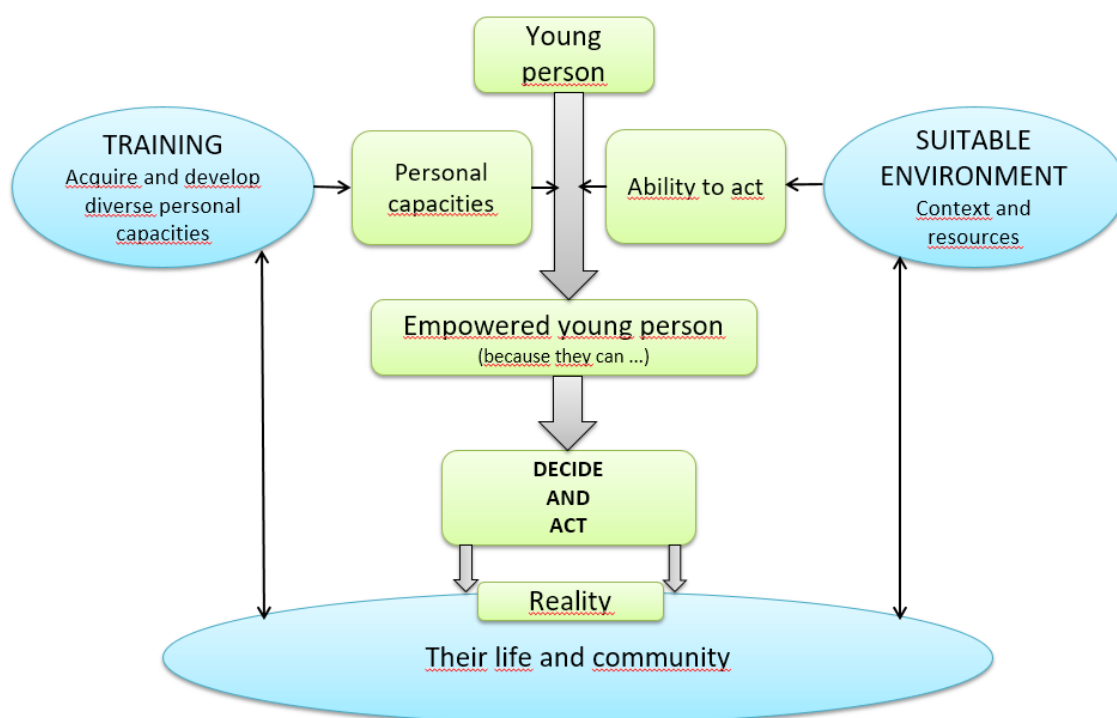
## 2. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT MODEL

One of the first results yielded by the documentary review and analysis was the revision and conceptualization of the term “empowerment” from an educational perspective. Our proposal was to develop a pedagogical model of youth empowerment (Soler et al., 2017). It was felt that this model should focus educators’ reflection and practice on the spaces, moments and processes in which young people become empowered. The model was based on data gathered from the documentary analysis carried out and on Nussbaum’s capability approach (2012). The definition we produced as the basis for the pedagogical model considers empowerment as:

*“...the process that increases the opportunities for individuals to decide and act consistently on everything that affects their lives, to participate in decision-making and to intervene in a shared and responsible way in the issues affecting the community to which they belong. To achieve this, two conditions must be met: the person must acquire and develop a set of personal capacities (knowledge, attitudes, skills, abilities...) and have an enabling environment that can facilitate the effective exercise of such abilities.” (Soler et al., 2017, p.22)*

This definition encompasses aspects of education and the acquisition and development of the personal capacities that are fundamental to being able to function in society, as well as those conditions that the context in particular demands, permits and encourages, as these determine the possibilities for action, development and the exercise of the abovementioned personal capacities. In order to truly decide (or participate in decision-making) and act accordingly, we understand that at least two equally necessary conditions must be fulfilled. If they are not both met, decision-making and, above all, the consequent action, are not feasible. In this regard, the young person must possess *internal, personal or psychological* capacities (knowledge, attitudes, aptitudes, values, skills...) which are developed through education and their environment, the context, should allow them to decide and act accordingly. For a decision to become an action, the political, economic, legal, material, etc. conditions, as well as the social norms, stereotypes, trends, etc., must permit and facilitate this (see figure 1).

*Fig. 2. The concept of youth empowerment*



Source: Soler et al., 2017, p. 22.

A distinction should be made between that which serves to autonomously control and manage one's own life, and that which enables individuals to participate in public affairs (social, civic, political...). We believe that empowerment should embrace both dimensions *together*. By focusing only on an individual's ability to decide on their own life, one runs the risk of slipping into a solipsistic, individualistic and meritocratic notion of empowerment; a concept consistent with certain approaches of neoliberalism. Thus, we believe that to make a decision and act on it, both the *internal* and *external* conditions must be met. Real empowerment, from this conception, is always the result of a dialectical relationship between both conditions.

The documentary analysis and field work conducted over the past few years has allowed progress to be made in some aspects that shape and build this initial proposal of pedagogical models of youth empowerment, based on a cartographic essay on the spaces, moments and processes of this empowerment. Next, we will see some of the progress and results obtained.

## 2.1. The spaces of youth empowerment

The documentary analysis enabled the data to be systematized in such a way that an initial proposal of spaces of youth empowerment could be constructed (see table 1) and conveniently referenced and supported (Soler et al., 2017).

*Table 1. Spaces of youth empowerment*

Specifically youth spaces / Intergenerational spaces

Institutional spaces / Non-institutional spaces

- **Formal educational institutions:** universities, secondary schools...



- **Non-formal educational and social education institutions:** leisure time education organizations and centres, specialized social education institutions and services...
- **Political, civic and religious associations:** political parties, social movements, non-governmental organizations, religious denominations, etc.
- **Other cultural, social, civic and sports institutions and facilities, etc.:** museums, libraries, civic centres, youth clubs, sports clubs...
- **Shopping and recreation centres and venues:** bars, pubs, nightclubs...
- **Public areas for citizens:** streets, parks, open-air sports facilities...
- **The family environment**
- **The work environment**
- **Virtual space, ICT and the media.**

Source: Developed by the authors based on Soler et al., 2017

This first general classification of spaces of youth empowerment seeks to reflect the wide range of places where empowerment occurs that young people may experience during their processes of growth and acquiring agency. Among the spaces presented some are specifically or predominantly intended for young people, while others are intergenerational. Among the former, two subtypes can be distinguished: *institutional youth spaces* which are designated for members or users who belong to this age group (youth centres, secondary schools, youth information points, youth shelters ...) and *informal youth spaces*, which are predominantly 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 largely for young people (skateparks, certain urban areas and commercial and leisure venues...). Finally, we have also considered other equally important places for youth empowerment, *intergenerational spaces*: family, workplace, many institutions and cultural facilities, etc.

In general, *informal youth spaces* can be considered as settings in which young people can enjoy a degree of autonomy — and personal power — greater than they may have in other areas. In these informal spaces intended for horizontal socialization without adult supervision and censure, young people can genuinely express their individuality. *Institutionalized youth spaces*, from a positive perspective, are the most favourable in promoting transferable empowerment. In fact, the vast majority of these spaces are explicitly and primarily designed to have an educational role (educational institutions, socio-educational and sociocultural organizations...). It is precisely this educational function that makes these institutions particularly empowering spaces, as they provide opportunities for the acquisition of competences that can be transferred to other areas. This is, of course, as long as they start by turning themselves into spaces where young people can truly exercise their share of power.

Corralling young people into their own specific spaces — even if they do seem to be artificial paradises — is not, in many cases, the best way to empower them, instead it is a form of paternalism that very effectively excludes them from the decisions affecting the community they belong to. For this reason, *intergenerational spaces* should be considered the norm rather than an exception and 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 those that impact the whole community they are part of.

On the theme of youth empowerment spaces, we also carried out a study based on a quantitative analysis of a cohort of 890 young people (Agud-Morell, Ciraso-Calí, Pineda-Herrero & Soler-Masó, 2017) with the aim of learning more about how the different everyday spaces frequented by these young people contribute towards the development of capacities and how these contexts allow them to be applied. We found that the closest contexts, such as family of origin and friendships, were the most highly valued by young people, as indicated by Mc Hale, Dotterer and Kim (2009) and Masa (2009). In turn, young people who have the opportunity to spend time in spaces such as leisure-time associations, attribute them with having an important impact on their empowerment; almost as much, in fact, as their own families. We also identified spaces that favour certain dimensions of empowerment much more than others. It is particularly noteworthy, for example, that participation in NGOs and other types of civic, solidary and environmental associations contributes to a greater extent towards the application of capacities for acting autonomously, as does involvement with unions and other labour or professional organizations.

Thus, the research seems to indicate the value of relational, labour and participation spaces in empowerment processes, above those of a strictly formal education type, and the importance of strengthening participation in leisure spaces, such as sports associations, free-time educational groups and NGOs, to encourage young people to make their own informed decisions.

The capacities developed and the competences acquired in social and political participation spaces are highly valued by young people, both for their educational dimension (not forgetting the potential for civic and political training that these contexts offer), as well as for the opportunity to carry out specific projects that allow these young people to make their own decisions, practice and apply these capacities. These informal frameworks in this case become authentic citizenship schools and laboratories of social responsibility.

## 2.2. Moments of youth empowerment

The pedagogical model of youth empowerment also proposes a systematization of the moments for youth empowerment. The documentary analysis carried out allowed us to construct a first classification (see table 2).

*Table 2. The moments of youth empowerment*

<p><b>Life stages and substages (if present) within each period.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood (up to 12 years)</li> <li>• Adolescence (12 – 16 years)</li> <li>• Youth (16-20, 20 -25 and 26-30)</li> </ul> <p><b>Regular moments or periods in everyday life that may be particularly significant in relation to youth empowerment.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Night time</li> </ul>
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- Home time for adolescents
- Autonomy at the weekends and during holiday periods

**Exceptional or specific moments, situations, periods or personal experiences that may be particularly significant in relation to a young person's empowerment.**

- Existential crisis, depressive or euphoric states, feelings of failure
- Periods of illness and convalescence
- Being unemployed
- First girlfriend/boyfriend
- The moment of financial independence and moving out of the family home
- Other critical events

**Social eras, moments or periods that may be particularly relevant to youth empowerment.**

- Periods of economic or health crisis
- Revolutionary eras or periods of social and political upheaval.

Source: Developed by the authors based on Soler et al., 2017

In the previously cited work by Agud-Morell et al. (2017) we may conclude that, according to young people themselves, becoming emancipated (starting to live alone, with friends or as a couple) or spending time abroad are considered the most empowering experiences. In contrast, among the least-valued experiences we find professional, sporting, cultural and artistic failures, being unemployed, suffering a serious illness or making one's sexual orientation public, suggesting the need to take a closer look at studies into young people's resilience and their ability to overcome difficult situations as an empowering factor (Omar et al., 2011).

We have observed a progressive, albeit not always linear, evolution between the ages of 19 and 25. The most significant increase in the training and development of capacities occurs in the life stage at age 24. In contrast, the application of these capacities to act autonomously does not vary notably according to life stage after the age of 19. All this leads us to conclude, in agreement with the pedagogical model, that training alone is not enough to guarantee empowerment; it is also necessary for the context to permit and facilitate the application of the acquired capacities.

### **2.3. Processes of youth empowerment**

As regards the processes for youth empowerment, the work carried out is more complicated to define. Nevertheless, we have drawn up an initial classification of the usual processes that come into play when fostering young people's empowerment (see table 3).

*Table 3. Processes of youth empowerment*

**Processes at the macro level: Empowerment through youth policies.**

- The educational approach as a key element in youth policies
- Enabling the real exercise of recognized rights
- Enabling autonomy and independence. Principle of subsidiarity

**Processes at the meso level: Empowerment through groups and institutions.**

- Open programmes that encourage creativity and freedom

- Programmes that help raise awareness
- Specific techniques for empowerment

**Processes at the micro level: Ways of behaving in personal relationships.**

- Relationships based on trust
- Learning by doing / taking action
- Presence / absence of adults
- Etc.

Source: Developed by the authors based on Soler et al., 2017

This contribution is complemented by results obtained from a review of the methodologies that educators report using when establishing a relationship with young people. The methodologies that emerged from this documentary review have enriched our knowledge of the strategies and resources that educators apply when promoting contexts and relationships that facilitate youth empowerment (see table 4).

*Table 4. List of methodologies that educators working with young people apply to their educational relationship*

- Support young people through the learning process
- Teach them how to manage their emotions
- Help them to build a positive personal image
- Create scenarios in which they can take their own decisions and assume the relevant responsibilities
- Deliver the planned educational actions flexibly
- Adapt educational activities to young people's personal characteristics
- Use active and participative methodologies
- Integrate the internet and social networks into educational activities
- Develop the educational process together with young people
- Manage difficult situations
- Train resilience
- Strengthen the development of communication and negotiation skills
- Provide spaces for them to reflect on the results of their actions
- Foster collaborative work
- Leverage the community as an educational resource
- Promote reflection on one's own learning process
- Regulate the educator's presence depending on educational needs

Source: Developed by the authors based on Soler et al., 2017

### **3. HEBE RUBRIC FOR EVALUATING YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ACTIONS AND PROYECTS DERIVED FROM THE PEDAGOGICAL MODEL OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT**

In parallel with the construction of the pedagogical model of youth empowerment and derived also of the results of the state-of-the-art review, the researchers also worked towards systematizing the dimensions that shape this process and the indicators that each of these dimensions may comprise.

In the framework of the first research project, and based on the results of the first phase of the systematic review of the academic literature on youth empowerment (2000-2015), we assembled a inventory of indicators of personal and community empowerment. In the second project we particularized these indicators for youth empowerment (Planas et al., 2016a; Planas et al., 2016b; Ceballos et al., 2016).

Once adapted, we sought to verify how well the inventory of indicators was able to analyse and evaluate youth empowerment. To do this, a three-step validation process was designed to provide an academic validation, an expert validation and a practical validation. The first phase linked the dimensions and indicators in the inventory with the results of the systematic analysis of the academic literature carried out. The second phase involved applying an expert validation with the participation of six academics and six professionals in the field of youth work. The third and final step was broken down into two sub-phases. In the first, four groups of young people (22 girls and 20 boys aged between 14 and 25) assessed the inventory of indicators in a participative evaluation process. In the second sub-phase, we connected the indicators with the life stories produced by six young people aged between 25 and 29. The inventory of indicators yielded by the three phases of the validation process comprises nine dimensions and 27 indicators of youth empowerment (Planas-Lladó & Úcar, 2022) (See table 5).

*Table 5. Dimensions and indicators of youth empowerment*

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
1. <i>Self-esteem</i>	1.1 Being able to deal with difficult or adverse situations 1.2 Recognizing one's own capabilities and limitations 1.3 Being satisfied with oneself 1.4 Feeling self-confident 1.5 Being able to open up to others 1.6 Feeling recognized by others
2. <i>Responsibility</i>	2.1 Assuming responsibilities and tasks voluntarily and realistically 2.2 Accepting the consequences of one's own decisions and actions
3. <i>Efficacy</i>	3.1 Being able to take decisions to achieve objectives 3.2 Being methodical and consistent when carrying out tasks 3.3 Achieving the planned objectives
4. <i>Critical capacity</i>	4.1 Being able to analyse problems and situations 4.2 Having one's own opinion regarding specific problems and situations
5. <i>Autonomy</i>	5.1 Showing initiative 5.2 Being able to decide and act according to one's own convictions
6. <i>Teamwork</i>	6.1 Being involved in teamwork 6.2 Being able to take a leadership role in teamwork 6.3 Being able to express oneself 6.4 Having the ability to negotiate and reach agreements
7. <i>Community identity</i>	7.1 Sharing community sociocultural heritage

	7.2 Actively identifying with the civic and voluntary processes carried out in the community
	7.3 Recognizing one's ownership of the public space and making use of it
8. <i>Meta-learning</i>	8.1 Being aware of having acquired or improved one's knowledge and skills
	8.2 Having developed the capacity of learning to learn
	8.3 Being aware of the power to act that has been acquired
9. <i>Participation</i>	9.1 Being involved in group actions and projects
	9.2 Having the ability to influence one's environment

Source: HEBE team (2019)

The definition and systematization of these dimensions and indicators led to the construction of the HEBE Rubric for evaluating socio-educational actions and projects for youth empowerment (HEBE team, 2019) and its design as a computer application that can be used and applied by educational teams.

The HEBE rubric was built in three phases: (1) design, (2) validation and (3) contrast. In all of the phases, informed consent was obtained from all of the participating individuals and institutions and ethical criteria of data protection and confidentiality were observed. The design process consisted of three stages: (A) rationale and decision-making, (B) creation of scenarios to facilitate comprehension and use with the aim of providing a self-applicable analytical rubric, and (C) review of the rubric by HEBE Project researchers not involved in the design of the instrument.

To ensure the quality of the rubric, three criteria were taken into account: specific definitions of each dimension, definition of the indicators and definition of the scoring and grading strategies (Doğan & Uluman, 2017; Gatica-Lara & Uribarren-Berrueta, 2012; Reddy & Andrade, 2010). To fulfil these criteria, first of all a clear and unambiguous definition was provided for each dimension and an application guide was added to the rubric to contextualize the project, the dimensions and indicators of youth empowerment, the aim of the rubric, its utility and instructions on how to apply it.

The initial version of the instrument was reviewed by the members of the HEBE project (professionals and academics in the field of social pedagogy) who did not participate in the rubric design process. The objective was to conduct a preliminary review of the rubric and obtain feedback from the team before starting the validation phase. The rubric was validated through the expert opinion of 25 specifically chosen validators. All of them are either educators in projects and services aimed at young people in the four fields of socio-educational action previously defined (formal education, specialized education, sociocultural activity and occupational training) or experts in evaluation and young people. The rubric was validated using criteria of understandability, relevance and progression. The validity (Aiken's V) and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of the rubric were calculated. We also calculated the means and the percentages of the scenario ratings to identify the possible existence of conflictive scenarios (scores between "quite" and "very" below 90%).

Once validated, the rubric was piloted in 20 socio-educational projects being conducted in different sectors, with a total of 63 professionals with diverse profiles, although most of them are youth facilitators and counsellors, social educators or teachers. The other profiles include project and service directors and coordinators; youth experts; leisure activity directors and monitors; social workers; psychologists; occupational therapists; and educationalists.

This process was carried out in three stages. The initial contact, made by a facilitator from the research team, was to introduce the HEBE Rubric and application guide to the professional or team that would be using it. The second stage involved each participating professional or team applying the rubric on their own without the presence of the facilitator. Finally, in the third stage the research team's facilitator conducted a cognitive interview (Beatty & Willis, 2007; Hilton, 2015; Neuert & Lenzner, 2015) with the professional or team once the process of applying the rubric was complete.

The resource is currently ready to be disseminated and utilized (<http://www.rubrica.projecteheber.com/es/>), providing educational teams with a useful tool to facilitate reflection and self-evaluation of socio-educational programmes and services from a youth empowerment perspective.

#### **4. FINAL REFLECTIONS**

The complexity of the term “empowerment” and the versatility of its use in diverse disciplinary contexts as well as in daily life, makes putting it into practice in socio-educational work and evaluating its results among young people both extremely problematic. The proposal of models, resources and instruments is fundamental to helping and guiding education professionals in their work of supporting young people. These resources can foster reflection on practice, contribute towards refining socio-educational projects and practices and, at the same time, help to transform and improve individuals, groups, and communities.

Youth empowerment requires empowered socio-educational action professionals who are aware of the limitations and possibilities of the political, economic, and social system, and of their own responsibilities and roles. This means that spaces and moments for reflection on practice and action are also needed; spaces for dialogue, creation and a comparison of the discourses and practices that construct youth programmes and services. From this standpoint, the pedagogical model of youth empowerment we present seeks to form part of an education of choice that accompanies young people during their growth and offers them the tools and environment that enable each of them, in the context of the community, to make decisions and act according to their own wishes (Úcar, Soler & Planas, 2020).

We reject the instrumentalization of youth work that aims to socialize young people in liberal visions of the world and renounce a critical analysis of the community. This implies avoiding certain conceptions of empowerment that are based on control and evaluation using decontextualized indicators that may cast doubt on professionals'

autonomy and their role of supporting young people as agents of change and social transformation (Siurala, 2017). Social pedagogy seeks to contribute to this reflection, stimulate and assist decision-making in order to improve the social, cultural and educational environments which, in many cases, are precisely what limit, condition or hinder youth empowerment.

To understand the processes followed by educators and social educationalists undertaking actions aimed at empowering young people, it is necessary to understand how the knowledge they possess is connected with their practices. However, this connection is often rather opaque or even automatic, and the reflection that exists between knowledge and practice is rarely visible. For this reason, the resources provided by the present pedagogical model encourage observation, description, reflection and analysis of one's daily practice and the meaning this has for young people. We have presented a systematic, rigorous, and exhaustive investigation, albeit with certain limitations. Firstly, while the study includes an extensive international documentary analysis, the fieldwork conducted in some phases of the research is limited to a specific geographical area, Catalonia (Spain). It would be interesting to broaden this scope by incorporating diverse samples from various territorial contexts.

Secondly, the absence of similar pedagogical models has made a comparative analysis and the identification of possible weaknesses inherent in the presented model impossible. Finally, the authors acknowledge that this is an initial model that can assist in systematizing educational work, planning, and revision.

For future research endeavours, it is recommended to extend the application of the model to different domains and realities, thereby facilitating an evaluation of results and reinforcing its validity. Additionally, conducting transfer assessments will enable the evaluation of the contribution of young individuals to societal improvement and transformation for the common good.

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