

# Design and validation of a rubric to evaluate educational actions and projects on youth empowerment\*

## *Diseño y validación de una rúbrica para evaluar acciones y proyectos educativos de empoderamiento juvenil*

Laura CORBELLA MOLINA. Pre-doctoral Researcher. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona ([Laura.corbella@uab.cat](mailto:Laura.corbella@uab.cat)).

Carme TRULL OLIVA, PhD. Associate Professor. Universitat de Girona ([Carme.trull@udg.edu](mailto:Carme.trull@udg.edu)).

María PILAR RODRIGO-MORICHE, PhD. Associate Professor. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid ([Pilar.rodrigo@uam.es](mailto:Pilar.rodrigo@uam.es)).

Xavier ÚCAR MARTÍNEZ, PhD. Professor. Autonomus Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona ([Xavier.ucar@uab.cat](mailto:Xavier.ucar@uab.cat)).

### Abstract:

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in international debates, research and socio-educational programmes focusing on youth empowerment. One of the main issues with this concept is related to how it is measured and evaluated. Evaluating socio-educational actions and projects is crucial in order to design, implement and improve educational practices that help young people to empower themselves. This article presents the process of building and validating a ru-

bric, within the framework of the HEBE Project, for the evaluation of youth empowerment actions and projects. The methodological process consists of three phases: (1) Design of the rubric; (2) Expert validation by 17 practitioners from different fields, 3 experts in evaluation and 5 young people; (3) And a comparison by means of a pilot test with 20 projects or socio-educational services aimed at youth empowerment, in which 63 professionals participate. The results show evidence of validity and reliability of the rubric in order to evalu-

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ate the quality of socio-educational practices, and also to design and implement actions that focus on youth empowerment. It is noted for being a validated and useful instrument for making educational assessments related to youth empowerment, and for its usefulness in generating processes of reflection that become the basis for rethinking and improving pedagogical practices.

**Keywords:** youth, empowerment, programme evaluation, social pedagogy, educational assessment, reflection on practice.

## Resumen:

En los últimos años ha habido un aumento significativo de los debates internacionales, las investigaciones y los programas socioeducativos centrados en el empoderamiento juvenil. Uno de los principales problemas de este concepto está relacionado con las formas de medirlo y evaluarlo. Evaluar las acciones y proyectos socioeducativos es clave para el diseño, la implementación y la mejora de prácticas educativas que ayuden a la juventud a empoderarse. Este artículo presenta el proceso de

construcción y validación de una rúbrica para la evaluación de acciones y proyectos educativos de empoderamiento juvenil desarrollada en el marco del Proyecto HEBE. El proceso metodológico consta de tres fases: (1) el diseño del instrumento; (2) la validación por juicio de expertos de 17 profesionales de diferentes ámbitos, 3 expertos en evaluación y 5 jóvenes; (3) y el contraste que se realiza a través de una prueba piloto con 20 proyectos o servicios socioeducativos de empoderamiento juvenil en los que participan 63 profesionales. Los resultados denotan la validez y fiabilidad de la rúbrica para evaluar la calidad de las prácticas socioeducativas y para diseñar e implementar acciones que apuesten por el empoderamiento juvenil. Destaca por ser un instrumento validado y útil para la realización de diagnósticos educativos relacionados con el empoderamiento juvenil y por su utilidad para generar procesos reflexivos que se convierten en puntos de partida para repensar y mejorar la práctica pedagógica.

**Descriptorios:** juventud, empoderamiento, evaluación de programas, pedagogía social, diagnóstico educativo, reflexión de la práctica.

## 1. Introduction

In the 1970s, the concept of empowerment began to be used within the social sciences. Since then, it has gradually permeated the language of everyday life and that of the different sciences.

Despite the versatility and popularity of the term, empowerment today remains a complex, ambiguous and ill-

defined concept that is applied to very different situations and processes in very different ways (Soler, 2017; Úcar et al., 2016a; Morton and Montgomery, 2013). The range and diversity of perspectives when analysing it, the fact that it can be applied in very different fields (psychological, educational, political, economic, social, cultural, etc.) and, finally, the difficulties posed by its translation into

other languages (Bacqué and Biewener, 2016; Richez et al., 2012; Luttrell et al., 2009), undoubtedly do not make it easy to find a homogeneous and consensual definition of empowerment.

Over the years, research has mostly focused on adult empowerment processes. In recent decades, however, it has also started to be used in education with young people, especially with those who are at risk or socially vulnerable. Recent years show that there has been a significant increase in international debates relating to youth policies and youth empowerment (Soler, 2017). And also in research on youth empowerment and in the number of intervention programmes with youth empowerment as their goal (Zimmerman et al., 2018).

One of the main problems of empowerment, to a large extent stemming from the aforementioned imprecision, is related to the ways of measuring or evaluating it. At present, there are still very few research papers that have specifically addressed this issue. This is likely to be because, as Wagaman (2011) notes, there are few studies that present operational definitions of youth empowerment that allow for a logical and clear interpretation of the results obtained.

Over the course of three consecutive Spanish research projects (2010-2020), the HEBE Project has led to new knowledge on youth empowerment. Firstly, among other products, we created a set of personal and community empowerment indicators (Soler et al., 2014).

Secondly, we carried out a *systematic review* of the research published on youth empowerment since the beginning of this millennium (Úcar et al., 2016b) and, based on this systematic review of the academic literature, we constructed a pedagogical model of youth empowerment (Soler et al., 2017). Within the framework of the same project, we adapted the initial set of personal and community empowerment indicators, specifically for youth empowerment (Planas et al., 2016a; Planas et al., 2016b; Cevallos and Paladines, 2016).

Once adapted, we wanted to test the extent to which the set of indicators was valid for analysing and evaluating youth empowerment. For this purpose, a validation process was designed in three phases: an academic validation through a systematic review of the literature (Úcar et al., 2016a), a validation by experts in the field of youth work and a validation of practice with young people (Llena-Berñe et al., 2017; Úcar et al., 2016b). The set resulting from the three phases of the validation process is made up of 9 dimensions and 27 indicators of youth empowerment (Planas et al., 2016a; Soler-Masó, 2020).

We have arranged the text into four sections. The first section shows the theoretical foundations of the set of youth empowerment dimensions and indicators and their applicability to the design of the evaluation rubric. The second section develops the methodology followed in the design and validation of the youth empowerment evaluation rubric. The third section presents the results obtained in the validation. Finally, the fourth section contains the conclusions of the process.

### 1.1. Youth empowerment, empowerment indicators and evaluation rubrics

It should be noted that the theoretical perspective that frames the research work of our team is that of social pedagogy (Soler, 2017). It is well known that the field of social pedagogy is diverse, heterogeneous and very wide-ranging. And also that there is no general consensus on its specific areas of action and professional development, which is why it has developed differently in different countries around the world (Janer and Úcar 2019). In the context of this research, we will understand social pedagogy as referring to education in a broad sense (Petrie, 2005). Following the classifications that have been developed in our country, we chose to operationalise the field of action of social pedagogy in socio-educational work with young people, in four specific subfields of social action, which we use instrumentally for this study. They are: socio-cultural animation, specialised education, formal education and occupational training (Froufe, 1997).

The concept of empowerment underpinning this paper is that developed by Soler et al. (2017). According to these authors,

empowerment is a process that increases the possibilities for a person to decide and act consistently on everything affecting his or her own life, participate in decision-making and intervene in a shared and responsible way regarding anything affecting the community of which he or she forms part. This requires two conditions: that the person acquires and develops a series of personal

skills (knowledge, attitudes, aptitudes, abilities, etc.) and that the environment facilitates the effective exercise of these skills (p. 22).

Empowerment, as a process or result, is always the effect or consequence of a more or less intentional interaction between the skills that a person possesses and the possibilities offered by the environment in which he or she lives to develop or put them into practice.

Úcar et al. (2016a) note that there is unanimity that the term generally refers to the efficient growth of the young person by means of overcoming certain situations through the acquisition of skills. These same authors set out the main elements that make up or are associated with the concept of empowerment with regards to young people. They are: a) growth and well-being; b) relationships; c) training; d) politics; e) transformation; and finally d) emancipation. Based on these ideas, we understand youth empowerment as a process that increases the possibilities for a young person to decide and act consistently on everything affecting his or her own life; and, in addition, to participate and intervene in a shared and responsible way regarding anything affecting the community of which he or she forms part.

Based on all of these studies, in Table 1 we present the validated set of dimensions and indicators. This set of dimensions and indicators is the basis on which the evaluation rubric for youth empowerment actions and projects is designed.

TABLE 1. Set of youth empowerment dimensions and indicators.

Dimensions	Indicators
1. Self-esteem	1.1- Being able to cope with difficult or adverse situations. 1.2- Knowing one's own capabilities and recognising one's limits. 1.3- Being satisfied with oneself. 1.4- Feeling self-confident. 1.5- Being able to express oneself to others. 1.6- Feeling recognised by others.
2. Responsibility	2.1- Undertaking commitments and tasks voluntarily and in a realistic manner. 2.2- Taking responsibility for the consequences of one's decisions and actions.
3. Efficacy	3.1- Being able to make decisions to achieve objectives. 3.2- Being methodical and consistent in the performance of tasks. 3.3- Achieving the objectives set.
4. Critical capacity	4.1- Being able to analyse problems or situations. 4.2- Having one's own viewpoint in relation to problems or situations.
5. Autonomy	5.1- Showing initiative. 5.2- Ability to choose and act according to one's own convictions.
6. Teamwork	6.1- Getting involved in teamwork. 6.2- Being able to exercise leadership roles when working in a team. 6.3- Being able to communicate. 6.4- Being able to negotiate and reach a consensus.
7. Community identity	7.1- Sharing the socio-cultural heritage of the community. 7.2- Actively identifying with the civic and associative processes that take place in the community. 7.3- Identifying public space as one's own and making use of it.
8. Meta-learning	8.1- Being aware of having acquired or improved one's knowledge and skills. 8.2- Having developed the ability to learn how to learn. 8.3- Being aware of the power acquired to act.
9. Participation	9.1- Getting involved in collective actions or projects. 9.2- Being able to influence your environment.

Source: Adapted from Planas et al. (2016a), and Soler-Masó (2020).

The decision to transform the set into an evaluation rubric is justified by the versatility, ease of use and formative usefulness of this tool (Cubillos-Veja and Ferrán-Aranaz, 2018). In fact, it is these characteristics that have led to the widespread use of evaluation rubrics in recent decades, especially in education.

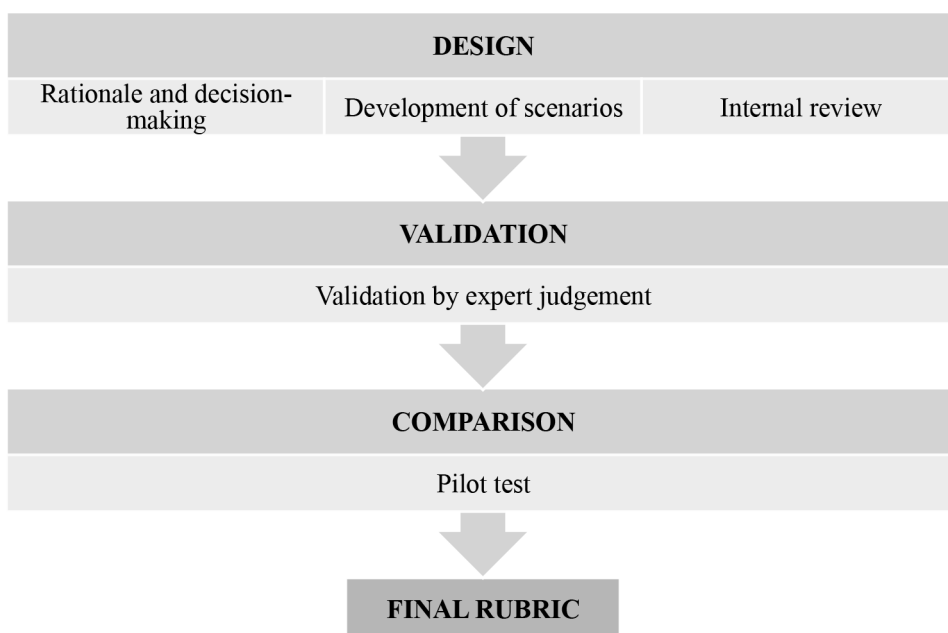
The concept of rubric has been used in education to describe instruments where criteria and standards are defined that correspond to progressive levels of task performance (Gil, 2007). A rubric could be said to be a standardised guide for the assessment or self-assessment of certain behaviours, actions or situations. The great formative

potential of rubrics lies in the fact that they can generate processes of reflection regarding self-analysis in the people who answer them; processes that have a high educational and personal transformation value. In this sense, Panadero and Jonsson (2013) state that rubrics are a type of formative assessment, which have an effect on performance as they provide information on the ways to achieve the objective set, meet expectations and obtain the desired results. Using the rubric not only assesses the performance of the empowerment action or programme, but also trains and makes educators reflect on youth empowerment.

## 2. Method

Graph 1 shows the methodological process followed for the design and validation of the evaluation rubric for youth empowerment actions and projects. From now on, the term rubric is used to refer to the “evaluation rubric for youth empowerment actions and projects”. The process has been divided into three phases: 1) design phase; 2) validation phase and 3) comparison phase. In all phases, informed consent is obtained from all participating individuals and institutions and ethical criteria regarding data protection and confidentiality are ensured.

GRAPH 1. Rubric design and validation process.



Source: Own elaboration.

### 2.1. Design of the evaluation rubric for youth empowerment programmes

The design process has three aspects: a) rationale and decision-making, b) de-

velopment of scenarios, and c) review of the rubric by HEBE project researchers who were not involved in designing the instrument.

a) A search is conducted on academic literature to provide the foundation for the format, design and layout of the rubric. It is established that the objective of the rubric is to evaluate actions and projects that promote youth empowerment at both individual and group level and it is constructed based on the set of 9 dimensions and 27 indicators, previously validated. A self-applicable analytic rubric is chosen.

Three criteria are taken into account to ensure the quality of the rubric: specific definitions of each dimension, definition of the indicators and definition of the scoring and graded-category strategies (Doğan and Uluman, 2017; Gatica-Lara and Uribarren-Berrueta, 2012; Reddy and Andrade, 2010). In order to meet these criteria, a clear and unambiguous definition for each dimension is first produced and an application guide added to the rubric where the project, the youth empowerment dimensions and indicators, the objective of the rubric, its usefulness and the instructions for application are contextualised.

b) The content of the scenarios is produced. A graded-category scale according to performance is established with four scenarios of actions or behaviours of increasing complexity. Performance, in this case, refers to the level, in relation to youth empowerment, on which the action of the educators or the project being evaluated is found.

For each scenario, the signs “-, =, +” are added in order to more precisely

understand the extent to which the educators or the project are placed in the chosen scenario. If a given scenario is not fulfilled, but does not fit into the previous scenario either, this can be indicated by placing a “-” sign. If the assessed behaviours or project exactly match a scenario, this can be indicated by placing “=”. And finally, if the given scenario is exceeded, but the next is not quite reached, this can be indicated with a “+” sign.

Finally, below each indicator there is a space to add any evidence that explains and justifies the reasons for being placed in one scenario or another, as well as any observations that one wishes to add.

c) The initial version of the instrument is sent to the members of the HEBE project (professionals and academics in the field of social pedagogy) who did not participate in the instrument design process. The aim is to conduct a first review of the rubric and receive feedback from the team before starting the validation phase.

## 2.2. Validation of the instrument through expert judgement

Validation of the rubric is done through expert judgement. As can be seen in Table 2, 25 intentionally selected validators took part. Their profiles range from educators of youth projects and services, in which work is carried out on youth empowerment in the four defined subfields of social action, to evaluation experts and young people.

TABLE 2. Profile of validators.

Professional field	No.
Socio-cultural animation	4
Specialised education	4
Formal education	6
Occupational training	3
Evaluation experts	3
Young people	5
Total	25

Source: Own elaboration.

They are asked via an electronic form to evaluate the indicator scenarios of the rubric using a Likert scale (not at all, a little, to some extent, very much) according to the following criteria:

- 1) Comprehensibility: it is a clear and intelligible definition that allows for easy interpretation.
- 2) Relevance: it is sound information about the indicator; it captures or represents key aspects and is important.
- 3) Progression: this refers to the graded categories of the scenarios, that is, whether or not they follow a good sequence and are appropriate.

In addition, it is requested that they make comments or observations on the instrument and the indicators in the rubric.

The analysis strategy is as follows: Following the procedure shown in other studies for the validation of instruments (León and Fernández, 2019; Miranda et

al., 2019), the validity (Aiken's V) and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of the rubric are calculated. The means and the percentage rating of the scenarios are also calculated to detect the existence of conflicting scenarios (rating between "to some extent" and "very much" below 90%). Finally, the comments and observations made are analysed.

### 2.3. Pilot testing of youth empowerment projects or services

In this phase, a pilot test of the rubric, already validated by judges, is carried out in socio-educational projects and services working on youth empowerment. The pilot test process is carried out in three stages:

a) Initial contact, by a facilitator from the research team, with the professional/team that is going to carry out the application, in order to present them with the rubric and the application guide.

b) Self-application of the rubric. Each participating professional/team self-applies the rubric without the presence of the facilitator.

c) A cognitive interview (Beatty y Willis, 2007; Hilton, 2015; Neuert y Lenzner, 2015), conducted by the research team facilitator with the professional/team after the rubric application process has been completed.

As shown in Table 3, the rubric was piloted in 20 projects falling within the four subfields of social action set out, with a total of 63 professionals participating.



TABLE 3. Profile of projects and services participating in the comparison phase.

Professional field	No. of pilot projects and services	No. of professionals participating
Socio-cultural animation	5	17
Specialised education	5	17
Formal education	5	15
Occupational training	5	14
Total	20	63

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the profile of the participants, there is a majority participation of youth workers or counsellors, social educators and teachers. The other profiles relate to project or pilot service managers or coordinators; youth specialists; leisure time managers or monitors; social workers; psychologists; occupational therapists; and pedagogues.

### 3. Results

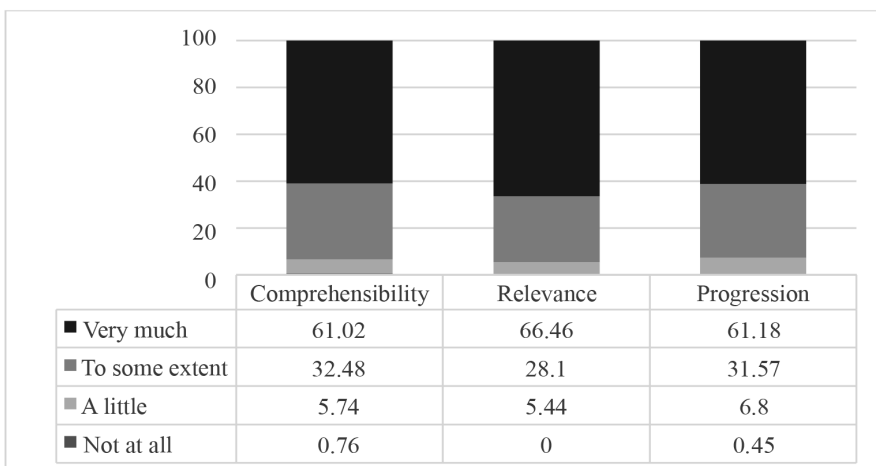
This section presents the results of the validation phase and comparison phase.

#### 3.1. Results of the rubric validation phase

As can be seen in Graph 2, the validators consider the indicator scenarios in the rubric to be comprehensible, relevant and progressive. Most of the answers given to the three criteria in the indicators are above 90% in “to some extent” or “very much” (comprehensible, 93.5%; relevant, 94.6%; and progressive, 92.7%).

We analysed Aiken’s V by criterion in order to establish the validity of the rubric by means of the level of agreement among validators and the result is positive, with a total Aiken’s V of .85, which shows a high

GRAPH 2. Percentage rating regarding comprehensibility, relevance and progression.



Source: Own elaboration.

level of agreement among validators in relation to comprehension (.85), relevance (.84) and progression of the indicators (.87), specifically.

We observed positive results when measuring the reliability of the instrument by applying Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for the criteria of comprehensibility, relevance

and progression, and for all of the criteria, as shown in Table 4. Based on the same coefficient, the reliability of the instrument is further examined if one item is removed, however the results are similar, which indicates agreement among the validators and that all variables are important for the reliability of the instrument.

TABLE 4. Cronbach's alpha according to the criteria of comprehensibility, relevance, progression and total.

Exclusion	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Comprehensibility	0.915
Relevance	0.944
Progression	0.942
Total	0.973

Source: Own elaboration.

If we take a closer look at the statistical data on the ratings given by the validators, the means are all above 3 ("to some extent"). For most of the indicators, the percentage ratings between 3 and 4 ("to some extent" and "very much") are above 90% for all three criteria evaluated, and none of them fall below 75%.

Table 5 shows the mean, standard deviation and percentage ratings between 3 and 4 ("to some extent" and "very much") for all indicators. Eleven of them are below 90%. Criteria with a percentage rating between 3 and 4 below 90% are marked in grey and are, therefore, considered to be conflicting.

TABLE 5. Statistical data on ratings by indicator and evaluation criterion. Dimension (dim), Indicator (ind), Standard deviation (SD), Percentage ratings between 3 and 4 (%3-4)

Dim/ind	Comprehensibility			Relevance			Progression		
	Mean	SD	%3-4	Mean	SD	%3-4	Mean	SD	%3-4
1.1	3.3	.676	87.5 %	3.5	.588	95.8 %	3.5	.721	87.5 %
1.2	3.5	.511	100.0 %	3.7	.565	95.8 %	3.6	.576	95.8 %
1.3	3.4	.647	91.7 %	3.5	.659	91.7 %	3.5	.722	87.5 %
1.4	3.7	.464	100.0 %	3.7	.637	91.7 %	3.5	.722	87.5 %

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1.5	3.5	.511	100.0 %	3.6	.495	100.0 %	3.4	.504	100.0 %
1.6	3.2	.779	79.2 %	3.5	.658	91.7 %	3.3	.751	83.3 %
2.1	3.7	.637	91.7 %	3.6	.576	95.8 %	3.7	.482	100.0 %
2.2	3.8	.442	100.0 %	3.8	.415	100.0 %	3.6	.654	91.7 %
3.1	3.7	.565	95.8 %	3.8	.415	100.0 %	3.6	.584	95.8 %
3.2	3.6	.654	91.7 %	3.4	.654	91.7 %	3.5	.509	100.0 %
3.3	3.5	.659	91.7 %	3.4	.711	87.5 %	3.6	.576	95.8 %
4.1	3.7	.482	100.0 %	3.8	.532	95.8 %	3.8	.532	95.8 %
4.2	3.5	.590	95.8 %	3.6	.584	95.8 %	3.5	.658	91.7 %
5.1	3.5	.823	88.0 %	3.7	.476	100.0 %	3.6	.638	92.0 %
5.2	3.2	.926	76.0 %	3.4	.757	84.0 %	3.1	.971	76.0 %
6.1	3.6	.707	96.0 %	3.8	.436	100.0 %	3.6	.569	96.0 %
6.2	3.6	.583	96.0 %	3.5	.510	100.0 %	3.5	.586	96.0 %
6.3	3.6	.645	92.0 %	3.7	.542	96.0 %	3.6	.645	92.0 %
6.4	3.6	.569	96.0 %	3.7	.542	96.0 %	3.6	.569	96.0 %
7.1	3.6	.577	96.0 %	3.6	.651	92.0 %	3.6	.569	96.0 %
7.2	3.6	.638	92.0 %	3.7	.557	96.0 %	3.6	.569	96.0 %
7.3	3.7	.458	100.0 %	3.6	.707	88.0 %	3.6	.583	96.0 %
8.1	3.6	.577	96.0 %	3.7	.557	96.0 %	3.5	.586	96.0 %
8.2	3.5	.714	88.0 %	3.6	.577	96.0 %	3.4	.707	88.0 %
8.3	3.4	.764	92.0 %	3.4	.768	84.0 %	3.4	.707	88.0 %
9.1	3.7	.557	96.0 %	3.8	.374	100.0 %	3.7	.557	96.0 %
9.2	3.4	.707	96.0 %	3.6	.651	92.0 %	3.4	.821	88.0 %

Source: Own elaboration.

Based on the comments and observations made by the validators and taking into account the statistical information presented, changes are made to thirteen indicators of the rubric. The greatest difficulty is identified with regard to the “comprehensibility” criterion. 73% of their comments point out the difficulties in understanding the use of the term “spaces” in the indicators. The semantic versatility of the concept creates problems of clarity. We decided to replace it with the term “activities” as this inclu-

des the previous term, provides greater clarity and is more accurately aligned with the wording of the scenarios.

“Scenario” is also replaced with “activities”. Other wording is also replaced, for example, in scenarios 1, 2 and 3 of indicator 1.3. *Being able to express oneself to others* where “express oneself to others” is replaced with “express one’s emotions, feelings and ideas to others” equating these scenarios to the expression in scenario 4.

Another proposed improvement is resolved by adding a specific term such as “viable” to clarify scenario 4 of indicator 4.1. *Being able to analyse problems or situations*; and “other settings” in scenario 4 of indicator 6.4. *Being able to negotiate and reach a consensus*. In other cases, confusing wording is removed, such as “or is allowed when it occurs spontaneously” in scenario 1 of indicator 6.1. *Getting involved in teamwork* to promote comprehensibility of the other scenarios.

Regarding the relevance criterion, there were no comments or observations made necessitating any change in the relevance of the scenarios. However, the ratings analysed in these indicators lead to the interpretation that there was confusion regarding rating the relevance of the indicator as opposed to the relevance of the scenario.

In terms of improving the progression of the indicators, the four scenarios of the following indicators are completely modified: 3.3. *Achieving the objectives set* and 5.2. *Ability to choose and act according to one’s own convictions*. Terms such as “take responsibility for” are replaced by “reflect and assess” in scenario 2 of indicator 2.2. *Take responsibility for the consequences of one’s own decisions and actions*; “can carry out” by “carry out” in scenario 3 of indicator 8.2. *Having developed the ability to learn how to learn*.

The addition of terms such as “voluntarily” is also used in scenario 4 of indicator 2.1. *Undertaking commit-*

*ments and tasks voluntarily and in a realistic manner*; “accompanied by the educational team” in scenario 2 of indicator 8.2. *Having developed the ability to learn how to learn*; or adjusting the scale between scenarios, such as adding “it is the educational team who” in scenario 2 of indicator 3.2. *Being methodical and consistent in the performance of tasks* to clarify who monitors the completion of tasks.

Furthermore, in order to improve the progression of the scenarios, the expressions “occasionally” in scenario 2, or “specifically” in scenario 3 of the following indicators have been removed: 8.2 *Having developed the ability to learn how to learn*, 8.3. *Being aware of the power acquired to act* and 9.1. *Getting involved in collective actions or projects*.

### 3.2. Pilot testing of youth empowerment projects or services

100% of participants consider the tool to be useful in the present and in the future, especially due to the fact that it is useful for reflecting on professional practice. 90% say that the rubric is the right length and goes into sufficient detail regarding empowerment work. It is easy for 85% to apply.

The comments, moreover, confirm their interest in the rubric for their work as educators. They value it as a tool for self-assessment and reflection that creates awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of their socio-educational actions. It enables learning to be equipped with functionality and changes and pro-

posals for improvement to be created in interventions and programmes focused on youth empowerment.

80% of professionals say that they had no problems filling in the rubric. 85% of professionals understand all scenarios and 70% provide evidence for all indicators. Even so, 45% consider that some aspects need to be added to the rubric or simplified. In order to streamline the use of the instrument, they generally recommend simplifying dimensions such as “self-esteem” and grouping together indicators or dimensions such as “participation” and “community identity”. Although the research team analyses these comments, it decides not to make any changes to the instrument, as the set of dimensions and indicators has been previously validated and is not subject to assessment in the pilot test.

However, 70% of professionals find it difficult to respond to one or more dimensions or indicators. The difficulty regarding the “self-esteem” dimension is particularly noteworthy, as it is considered too vast and complex to be the first variable in the instrument to be answered. They also express difficulties in responding to indicators that are not explicitly being worked on in the project or service that self-applies the rubric. This is mainly the case for indicators related to the dimensions of “efficacy” and “meta-learning”.

In order to compensate for these difficulties and to facilitate the reading and application of the rubric, the order

of the dimensions was changed. The more complex dimensions (“self-esteem”, “efficacy” and “meta-learning”) are moved to the middle of the rubric, while the simpler ones (“participation”, “responsibility”, “community identity” and “teamwork”) are placed at the beginning and end. In addition, the application guide adds that scenario 1 includes the possibility of not working specifically on the indicator in question.

The final contributions highlight the usefulness and necessity of this instrument and make proposals for improvement. Along these lines, two changes are implemented.

Firstly, it was recommended to add a heading in the rubric where the identifying characteristics of the project can be detailed. Many services carry out several projects at the same time or implement the same project for several consecutive years. This improvement makes it possible to identify in which project or period the rubric has been applied and to compare its results over time. From this point onwards, a new section was added at the beginning of the rubric, where data are requested on the name of the project/programme; the entity/institution; the educational field; and, finally, the duration of the project.

Secondly, different professionals point out that it is the very process of filling in the rubric that increases awareness regarding the degree of compliance with the proposed objectives and the

need to redirect actions. For all of these reasons, a section was included so as to be able to add thoughts and proposals for improvement, during the process of applying the rubric, that are useful for learning and improving decision-making regarding planning and developing actions that help to empower young people.

#### 4. Discussion

Despite the rapid popularisation of empowerment in everyday language, in politics and in a good deal of the social sciences, it is a very complex concept that requires further research and application in specific situations and processes. Over recent years, the research conducted as part of the HEBE project has generated a whole series of reflections and instruments specifically in relation to youth empowerment, from a socio-educational approach and taking into account social pedagogy (Soler, 2017). This article has shown how the transformation of a set of youth empowerment indicators into a rubric is a process characterised by its richness, but also by its complexity (Cubillos-Veja & Ferrán-Aranaz, 2018; García-Sanz, 2014).

The process followed made it possible for us to present the rubric as a valid and reliable tool for evaluating the quality of socio-educational practices and for designing and implementing new actions committed to youth empowerment (Soler et al., 2019). In line with Wagaman (2011), it aids the evaluation of empowerment based on a concept that is operationalised

in dimensions, indicators and scenarios, which allow for a logical and clear interpretation of the expected results. It is also a tool for learning, capable of providing feedback that helps socio-educational action professionals to self-assess and refine their practices (Bharuthram & Patel, 2017).

The validity and reliability of the content of the instrument is ensured by confirming the comprehensibility, relevance and progression of the indicator scenarios in the rubric. As Fernández-Cruz et al. (2018) correctly point out, paying attention to the validity and reliability of the instrument designed contributes to the development of the scientific field of study. It is a process that provides sufficient evidence to prove the quality of the tool obtained (Tourón et al., 2018).

As is shown in Murphy and Ermeling's (2016) study, structured instruments that guide educators' responses in order to assess their practice, such as the evaluation rubric presented, facilitate reflection and feedback so as to improve educational processes. In addition to evaluating the empowerment action or programme, the rubric also creates a process of reflection that helps educators think thoroughly and critically about how they work on the dimensions of youth empowerment and, moreover, sets expectations and standards regarding how to put them into practice. It is an instrument to verify the efficacy of socio-educational actions, which can be used to evaluate the objectives of youth services or projects, and also the empowerment

needs of young people (Andueza, 2019). The rubric can serve as a basis for reflection on pedagogical practice, which is grounded in experience and oriented towards change (Dimova and Loughran, 2009). Based on this practice, it is possible to design and develop new quality educational processes that focus on the empowerment of young people. The fact that the rubric can be used by the team of educators as a group produces dialogical conversations that enhance the richness of the reflections and increase their potential to create change (Tinsley and Sheats, 2020).

Some of the difficulties encountered both in the process of developing the rubric and in its subsequent validation should be noted. Firstly, working with a concept as elusive and under-researched as youth empowerment. An example of this is the criticism of the relevance of some dimensions characterising youth empowerment, both in the expert judgement and in the pilot test. However, the fact that all dimensions of youth empowerment are included in the rubric, even those less known or recognised, such as *efficacy* or *meta-learning*, provides a space for reflection for educators that can direct them towards other lines of youth empowerment that have not been as explored in socio-educational work, but which are just as necessary. Therefore, we understand that further research is needed, either separately or collectively, on each of the indicators of youth empowerment making up the current rubric.

Secondly, the difficulty of constructing qualitative evaluation processes using rubrics was proven throughout the validation process. The denotative and connotative properties of language and their connection to local contexts often make it difficult to equate the scenario constructed in the rubric with the characteristic feature of the behaviours or projects to be evaluated.

By way of conclusion, the rubric is not only a tool aimed at encouraging reflection and improvement of socio-educational practices as mentioned above, rather it also becomes an open access instrument<sup>1</sup> that is validated (HEBE Project, 2019), capable of collecting reliable data on the kind of socio-educational practices aimed at empowering young people and educators' thoughts on said practices. In this way, new areas of research come to light, aimed at performing educational assessments, analysing the evolution of youth-related practices or the perspectives and reflections of educators on their own practice. Possible future areas of interest in the field of study of youth empowerment from the perspective of socio-educational action.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Link to the rubric: <http://rubrica.proyecteheber.com/es>

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## Authors' biographies

**Laura Corbella Molina** is a Pre-doctoral Researcher forming part of the PhD Programme in Education in the Department of Theories of Education and Social Pedagogy at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) and collaborating lecturer at Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. She is a social educator and holds a Master's Degree in Educational Research from the UAB. Her research activity focuses on social pedagogy and, specifically, the ethical dimension of socio-educational relations.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2151-089X>

**Carme Trull Oliva** is Associate Professor of the Area of Theory and History of Education and Specialized Research Technician of the Area of Studies of Education and Psychology at the University of Girona (UdG). She is a social educator and holds an

Inter-university Master's Degree in Youth and Society, and the Doctorate in Education. Her research activity focuses on social pedagogy and, specifically, the socio-educational interventions of the juvenile justice system.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2777-0315>

**M<sup>a</sup> Pilar Rodrigo-Moriche** is Associate Professor in the Department of Pedagogy at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM) and Collaborating Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED). She has worked in early childhood education centres, youth areas, organisations for the social and labour inclusion of socially disadvantaged people and organisations for people with intellectual disabilities. She is a member of the EMIPE Research Group and the TABA International Research Group.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6513-0899>

**Xavier Úcar Martínez** is Professor of Social Pedagogy at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. He specialises in Social Education and in the Design and Evaluation of Community Development Programmes and Socio-cultural Animation Programmes. President of the “*Sociedad Iberoamericana de Pedagogía Social*” [Ibero-American Society of Social Pedagogy] (SIPS) (2012-2018). President of the “*Coordinadora per l'Animació Sociocultural de Catalunya*” [Coordinating Committee for Socio-Cultural Animation of Catalonia] (CASC\_CAT) (2009-2014). Member of the GIPE research group on Education Policy and of the GPSEJ group “*Pedagogía Social y Empoderamiento Juvenil*” [Social Pedagogy and Youth Empowerment].

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3678-8277>

