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DEVELOPING A SENSE OF HUMAN AGENCY IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE THROUGH PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCES: ENABLING CONTEXTS AND AGENTIC QUALITIES

Desarrollo del sentido de agencia humana en la infancia y la adolescencia mediante experiencias participativas: contextos posibilitadores y cualidades agénticas

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INTRODUCTION. Girls, boys and adolescents are entitled to participation rights and citizenship status. To this should be added the recognition of their human agency, given that it is from their condition as agents that they will be able to exercise their rights autonomously. This study aims to identify the elements that enable children and adolescents to develop a sense of human agency, comparing their accounts of their participatory experiences in educational centres, leisure time and youth centres, family environments, digital environments and Childhood and Adolescence Councils. **METHOD.** Using a qualitative meta-synthesis analysis design (QMS), the data collected in three studies with a common research focus are analysed to reinterpret them and generate new knowledge. The QMS integrates the accounts of 150 children and adolescents between the ages of 8 and 18 collected in 17 group discussions. The analysis is carried out in four phases: familiarisation, establishment of relationships, translation and synthesis of units and categories, and synthesis of results through narrative descriptions. **RESULTS.** Two thematic units are identified, the enabling context and the agentic qualities, together with their corresponding categories. Enabling contexts favour the development of a sense of agency and the exercise of human agency by children and adolescents. Agentic qualities are the attributes that children and adolescents express with respect to their sense of agency. **DISCUSSION.** There are significant differences in the development of children's and adolescents' sense of agency depending on the context and the roles in which the participatory experiences unfold, with those that take place as democratic citizenship being the ones that genuinely favour it. The identified elements provide a framework for creating enabling contexts that allow the recognition and development of children and adolescents sense of human agency through genuine democratic participation.

Keywords: Human agency, Children's rights, Qualitative research, Citizen participation
Childhood participation.

Introduction

Childhood has been conceptualised from either privative or enabling positions. The first conceives children as becomings, or as a means to an end in Kantian terms, and children are defined for what they are not yet (Alanen, 1988). The second conceives children as beings, that is, as ends in themselves and capable subjects (Alanen, 1988) who must be included “as persons in the public domain” (Wall, 2008, p. 535). In this sense, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) represents a milestone and the start of a paradigm shift since it recognises persons under 18 years of age as subjects of rights, granting them participation rights as set out in Articles 12-15 and 17. However, the exercise of their rights remains subject to the development of their evolving capacities.

According to Lansdown (2005), evolving capacities should not be considered a continuum of universal developmental stages but a developmental process contingent on “the nature of their experiences, the expectations of adults around them and their access to adult support” (p. 11). This is consistent with Article 5 of the CRC, which urges adults to provide children with “appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognised in the present Convention” (United Nations, 1989). Lansdown (2005) argues that this article implies an obligation to support children in the progressive exercise of their rights.

Recognising children as beings and as subjects of rights entails the demand to include them as citizens and members of society (Roche, 1999). From the representation as becomings, children gain citizenship status on coming of age. In contrast, the representation as beings conveys the recognition of their citizenship “in the here and now” (Lister, 2007, p. 697), a citizenship-as-practice rather than a citizenship-as-achievement (Lowy & Biesta, 2006). Thus, children are entitled to exercise democratic participation, understood as the “process of sharing decisions which affect one’s own life and the life of the community [...] the means by which democracy is built [...] the fundamental right of citizenship” (Hart, 1992, p. 5). In this sense, the Council of Europe asserts that children “are citizens of the present and future, with rights and capacities to influence decisions about their lives and concerns” (Crowley *et al.*, 2021, p. 13).

Rights and capacity to influence: Children’s Human Agency

In this article, we aim to contribute to the topic of children’s human agency. Authors such as Dailey and Rosenbury (2018) and Liebel (2018, 2021) have highlighted that children’s human rights should be regarded primarily as agency rights. Liebel (2018) argues that “children will only become full subjects of rights when their human rights are also seen as agency rights and when their interests as persons capable of acting are recognised” (p. 24). Dailey and Rosenbury (2018) consider that granting agency rights to children will enable them to exercise their rights autonomously. This would involve recognising and confirming children’s knowledge, capabilities, and experiences (Esteban, 2022).

There are more forums for an exhaustive theoretical analysis of the issue of human agency. Therefore, we will briefly outline it. From a basic perspective, agency is defined as the “capacity to do things” (Oswell, 2012, p. 53). According to the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness

(Low *et al.*, 2012), humans share this capacity with all other cerebral vertebrates; however, “human agency has more far-reaching consequences than the agency of any other species” (Lindstrøm, 2015, p. 224).

For Giddens (1982), human agency implies power, influence and control, the capability to change the course of things — to make a difference —, knowledge, and the capacity for reflection. Griffin (2002) identifies four conditions: autonomy, education and information, resources and capabilities, and freedom. Bandura (2006, 2018) outlines three types of human agency, individual, proxy, and collective, and proposes four properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactivity, and self-reflection. Sen (1985) states that human agency is the capacity to achieve self-proposed goals under conditions of freedom, provided that the quantity and quality of options are sufficient to grant that the individual’s choices are truly genuine.

Knowledge and self-knowledge are also crucial. Alkire (2008) considers that agentic decisions relate to the ability to pursue what one deems valuable. Cauce and Gordon (2012) argue that human agency is characterised by the ability to recognise one’s and others’ interests and to exercise personal volition. Several authors argue that human agency can only be exercised when the subject is acknowledged as an agent (Erstad *et al.*, 2021; Sutterlüty & Tisdall, 2019; Thomas, 2007). Accordingly, Edmonds (2019) notes that agency is not possessed but exercised in decision-making and action processes, provided that the necessary circumstances and recognition are present.

Some authors (Mayall, 2002; Valentine, 2011) point out that children are social actors whose agency has not been recognised because of their historically oppressed, subordinated, and marginalised status as a social group. Valentine (2011) suggests that the solution lies in their recognition as agents and the “reorganisation of social structures” (p. 531). Other authors such as Brighouse (2002) and Griffin (2002) consider children as potential agents for their condition of dependence and vulnerability, which is not so much due to the fact that they are a minority group oppressed by socially unjust institutions, but to a “natural characteristic of their biological condition” (Brighouse, 2002, p. 35).

Under the Aristotelian premise that virtue is in the happy medium, we argue that it is necessary to recognise children as agents so that they can identify themselves as such and develop their agentic potential. It is also equally necessary to provide children with the opportunities, means, and resources (Brighouse, 2002; Dixon & Nusbaum, 2012; Liebel, 2021) that will allow them to gradually develop their sense of agency and exercise their rights and citizenship in the first person.

We regard the term sense of agency as the “meaning, motivation and purpose” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438) that incorporates the intentional action carried out by individuals, as well as “the ability to refer to oneself as the actor of one’s actions” (Zavala & Castañeda, 2014, p. 100). As Foley (2011) points out, the development of a sense of agency is necessary for children and adolescents to dialogue and negotiate with the political, social, and economic arrangements in which their lives are circumscribed. Furthermore, a sense of agency is central to the self-perception of children and adolescents as social actors and members of their communities (Edmonds, 2019) and to the development of a citizen identity (Wood, 2015).

This study aims, on the one hand, to determine the impact of participatory experiences on the development of children's and adolescents' sense of human agency and, on the other hand, to pinpoint the features that characterise their agentic identities. To this end, we compare the accounts of children and adolescents participating in settings as diverse as schools, leisure and youth centres, households, digital environments, and Child and Adolescence Councils.

Method

This study integrates the findings of three investigations on child and adolescent participation and is grounded in a qualitative meta-synthesis design (QMD). According to Dawson (2019), this approach involves selecting and combining the findings of different studies to address specific goals through critical-reflexive reinterpretation, leading to refinement and extension of the original findings. Sandelowski *et al.* (1996) consider these synthesis models to be “essential for achieving higher analytic goals” (p. 367), and Jensen and Allen (1994) note that this type of analysis “provides a powerful approach to theory development” (p. 553), defining it as the assembly of pieces of the same puzzle. In this regard, several authors warn of the risk that isolated studies are not sufficiently influential in articulating policies, strategies for action, and practices (Fingeld, 2003; Sandelowski, 2004). The aim is not to replace or add to the original findings but to offer new knowledge by reinterpreting them (Jensen & Allen, 1996; Pinela Morán, 2018).

Selected and integrated studies

The selected studies constitute the same research line in different contexts. They have been screened according to Jensen and Allen's (1996) criteria:

1. Degree of relevance to the phenomenon under study and the aims.
2. Similarity of method and data collection strategies.
3. Comparability of the findings.

The degree of relevance derives from analysing children's and adolescents' participatory experiences in different contexts, perspectives, and roles. The studies are similar in that they are qualitative and share discussion groups (DG) as the data collection strategy. The comparability is confirmed by the subject matter of the study, shared by all three.

The Ibero-American Union of Universities funded the first research. It was a collaboration of the Complutense University of Madrid, the University of Barcelona, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the University of Buenos Aires, and the University of Sao Paolo. It is titled Smart Citizens for Participatory Cities (E1) and was carried out in 2017-2020. The second is a UNICEF collaboration with the University of Barcelona with the title Participatory Experiences of Children and Adolescents at the Local Level (E2) and carried out in 2019-2021. The third is the R&D project Childhood and Participation. Diagnosis and proposals for an active and inclusive citizenship in the community, institutions and governance (E3) with reference RTI2018-098821-B-I0, and results of the collaboration of the University of Barcelona, the University of A Coruña, the University of Seville, and the National University of Distance Education. It was developed in the period 2019-2022. Table 1 shows their main characteristics.

TABLE 1. Integrated studies

	E1	E2	E3
Goals	To study the gap between young people's civic experience in formal educational settings and their life in the community	To analyse meaningful and inclusive participatory experiences of children and adolescents	To advance children's participation in their municipalities and their inclusion as active citizens
Context	Secondary schools in Barcelona, Spain	Child or Adolescence Councils of seven Spanish municipalities	Ad hoc spaces in three Catalan municipalities
Strategies	5 DG	7 DG	5 DG
Informants	65 adolescents aged 14-17	46 children and adolescents aged 8-18	39 children and adolescents aged between 8 and 16, 23 of them members or former members of Child or Adolescence Councils

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding ethical aspects, all children and adolescents were informed first-hand of the aims of the studies, and informed consent was obtained from them and their legal guardians. They were informed of the possibility of withdrawing from the research at any time. Respecting their rights and well-being and creating spaces for democratic participatory processes between researchers and children received particular attention (Esteban *et al.*, 2021).

Procedure

The QMD was developed in four stages (Finfgeld, 2003; Reis *et al.*, 2017). In the first stage, the phenomenon under study and the research questions and aims were defined. In the second stage, the integrated studies were selected following Jensen and Allen's (1996) eligibility criteria and the approach of integrating results from multiple analytical avenues of the same line of research by the same researcher (Sandelowski *et al.*, 1996). During the third stage, data were analysed following Levitt's premises (2018) and Jensen's and Allen's stages (1996), as seen in the following section. Finally, the fourth stage involved the synthesis of findings and the drawing of conclusions.

Data analysis

Data analysis was developed during the third stage and according to the phases proposed by Jensen and Allen (1996). The first phase, familiarisation, consisted of addressing the original findings by focusing on the individual accounts and their relationship to the object of study. During the second phase, the relationships between the results were established, allowing the generation of two central thematic units and the establishment of categories for each (Levitt, 2018). The third phase involved translating and synthesising units and categories across the integrated studies. The fourth phase resulted in the synthesis of translations through narrative descriptions of each category, the reporting of findings, and the drawing of conclusions. Table 2 shows the emerging units and categories.

TABLE 2. Thematic units and categories

Thematic unit	Category
Enabling context	Safe and respectful space
	Recognition as social actors
	Real and meaningful participation
	Spaces and time for reflection and meta-participation
Agentic qualities	Voluntariness and intentionality
	Transparent and intelligibly informed
	Knowledge and know-how
	Decision-making
	Individual or group self-organisation
	Achievement of goals

Source: Own elaboration.

Results

Two main thematic units emerge. The first, enabling contexts, integrates the elements of the analysed participatory practices which favour the development of children's and adolescents' sense of agency. The second, agentic qualities, identifies children's and adolescents' attributes concerning their self-perception as agents. The findings reveal significant differences between children and adolescents who participate in organic structures or non-formal educational settings, such as Child and Adolescence Councils, leisure or youth centres, and children and young people whose participation occurs in other scenarios. These differences are drawn in the presentation of the findings.

The Enabling Context

Some participatory experiences are more conducive to the development of a sense of agency than others. Those that foster such development are what we call enabling contexts. The voices of children and adolescents allow us to pinpoint four elements that characterise them.

Safe and respectful space. An enabling context is a space where "respect" and "trust" are present and where one "feels comfortable" (E3_2). Relational and environmental factors condition this context. Relational factors are linked to the importance of respect and acceptance among peers. It should be a safe environment where "they accept you as one more, as a peer, and as a friend" (E1_2). It also relates to group trust because, otherwise, "you cannot honestly give your opinion and then there is no participation, and things don't flow" (E3_2). It is necessary not to feel judged or left out and to be able to "speak without being criticised" (E2_4). Regarding environmental factors, the space must be felt as "safe ground" (E3_2). In this sense, agentic action is more accessible in smaller towns than in large cities; for example, "in Barcelona, you are limited because your parents tell you that you can't go out because it's a big city and so on, and anything can happen to you" (E1_2).

Recognition as social actors. There are differences between the recognition perceived by children and adolescents who participate in Child and Adolescence Councils or leisure and youth centres and those who do so in other settings. The former feel “listened to [...] and that they are worth” (E3_1), “they can, they have a choice” (E3_2), that “they are considered” (E2_1), and that they receive a response to their proposals as they are “told whether it is feasible or not” (E2_1). The latter perceive that this recognition is gradual, that as a child, one takes part as a “spectator”, and that “as you get older, the options to participate in different things expand” (E1_4). Furthermore, they note that “there is like a barrier between adults and young people” (E1_4), that “adults don’t trust” and, therefore, “they are not given the opportunity” (E1_1). This relates to the fact that they are minors and adults do not “take them seriously” (E1_3), leading them to consider that people under 18 do not have many rights: “I don’t go to vote, and I don’t decide who the mayor is. I mean rights, minors don’t have many rights either” (E1_5).

Real and meaningful participation. The definition of real and meaningful participation is bound up with the demand to “participate in something that really involves us” and that not everything is “all done for us” (E1_1). Participation must be “important” and based on trust. There is a need for awareness “that they [adults] trust us” (E1_1). It should not be forced and be useful, “that really when we do something it serves a purpose” (E1_4), and associated with close issues and decision-making, “for example, we are going to build a park, so they don’t ask the children’s opinion to see what they want in the park” (E1_3). Those who show signs of exercising real and meaningful participation are mostly children and adolescents who take part in the Child or Adolescence Councils, leisure and youth centres. This participation is, to a greater extent, projective and results in distinct improvements and transformations in their environment. What is significant is that they are capable of designing and implementing their projects. To this end, “you set an objective, which can be small, like a craft, or larger, like trying to make the council understand that we do not agree with something” (E3_2).

Class representatives and the school council are potential figures and bodies for real and meaningful participation in schools. In one DG, representatives were defined as “the intermediary between teachers and students” and “the voice of the people” (E1_3). Participation in strikes and protests is also a mechanism for real and meaningful participation. Despite the above, formal education settings reveal themselves to be rather non-agentic. For example, “in many school projects, they already give you the basis” as opposed to those projects “that you start from scratch” (E3_1). Similarly, chances for making autonomous decisions are constrained because they are “not given a choice on the options” (E1_3). They also acknowledge that their participation in schools is sometimes tokenistic, “they use us more as an advertisement than actually letting us do things ourselves” (E1_4).

Spaces and time for reflection and meta-participation. These spaces allow for introspective, retrospective, and prospective dialogue and for thinking, assessing, and accounting for the actions carried out and their impact. These spaces and times are relatively scarce. This category arises in two particular cases revealing its relevance. In one of them, a girl reflects on an initiative that she promoted together with two other people, the constitution of a student council at the district level, which could have gone better since “I didn’t spread the message too much” (E1_4). In the second case, it is argued that, in the leisure centre, “we evaluate that excursion, and they [the counsellors] always listen to our opinion” (E3_2).

Despite all of the above, a sign that these spaces are necessary to configure an enabling context is the feedback on the DG. They noted, for example, that the space for dialogue and reflection led them to realise that they were subjects of rights, affirming that they recognised them “right from now” (E1_2). They offered space and time to reflect on the role of formal education, noting that “[in schools] they do not make people” but rather “prepare them to study and work” (E1_2). On the other hand, in another DG, they valued the opportunity to

Reflect on all the work we have done over the years, what we have been able to give to the city, what we have been able to help with. I think that we have shared a time of reflection, and this has helped us to have clearer ideas about what we are doing here at the Youth Council (E3_1).

Agentic qualities

Agentic qualities are those attributes that characterise the sense of agency of children and adolescents. These qualities have an individual or group character; in some cases, they are expressed as fulfilled and, in others, as demands addressed to adults. Once again, the participatory scenarios in which these qualities manifest as accomplished are those of the Child or Adolescence Councils and youth or leisure time centres. Seven attributes are identified in the case of the studies analysed.

Voluntariness and intentionality. This is one quality since the latter entails the former. In this respect, it is echoed in most DG that participation must be voluntary and not mandatory, “that you say, I want to do it because I like it [...] not that you have to do it because you have to do it” (E1_3). The agent should feel that what they are engaged in “is something close to them, something of their own; they should not feel like they are going to a place where they are being told what to do” (E3_1). Additionally, the agent must have interest and act based on their likes and preferences. At school, where voluntariness is confined, they recognise that doing projects or workshops allows them “to choose, usually, what you like the most or what is closest to your hobbies” (E1_1). However, there is less voluntariness and intentionality in schools. Opportunities for decision-making are limited, thus conditioning “the degree of involvement you can have” (E1_4). Another voluntary and intentional action scenario is social media, where they post, give their opinions, and discuss whatever they “feel like” (E1_1). The municipality appears in the case of Child and Adolescence Councils members or former members. Their participation in these spaces is due to “the desire to collaborate with the city” (E3_1).

Transparent and intelligibly informed. Information leads to knowing and trusting: “[the activity] must be organised by a group about which I can really know everything, so there is total transparency” (E1_4). They also consider information essential to make decisions:

Because you go face-to-face with the child or young person, you explain to their face what will be done with that activity or project, so the boy or girl receives valuable information and can decide by knowing what opportunities he or she has (E3_1).

In this respect, there are cases in which, thanks to this accessible, straightforward, and transparent information, children and adolescents decided, voluntarily and autonomously, to participate in the activity: “I didn’t know them until they came to the school” (E2_1), and this even led them

to share the information themselves “so that more people could go” (E2_1). Furthermore, “without information, there is no reason, and there are no opinions” (E3_2).

Knowledge and know-how. Intricately linked to the previous quality are knowledge and know-how. Both are acquired progressively as long as opportunities exist to participate genuinely in an enabling context. This could explain why they are most often detected in children and adolescents who participate or have participated in Child or Adolescence Councils. Due to being in an enabling context, they signify participation in a very particular way and differentiate between genuine participation and non-participation. They know what they are engaging in and where to find the information. They have experience developing projects autonomously, pursuing their own goals, and having the means and resources to implement them: “You can do anything, whatever you want” (E3_3). They know how to raise their voices because their participatory trajectories have shown them that, first, they have a voice and, second, they can make it heard and heeded.

If you join as a child, you demand that voice because you have been given it, but if you grow up without realising it, they [children] think they will not be given it anywhere. I've been told that no one will listen to us; people who don't participate don't know (E2_4).

Decision-making. In this category, the difference between fully enabling contexts and contexts that provide space for semi-agency or potential agency is most evident. Secondary school, for example, is depicted as a context without complete voluntariness and intentionality. Decision-making is partial, having the possibility to choose between the options given, “you have like the option to choose” (E1_1). Sometimes, they can make decisions that they consider as exercising a right, such as taking part in the playground rehabilitation, “so we all have the right to participate in changing the playground” (E1_1). Despite this, they recognise that “in class, they tell you what you can and cannot say” (E1_4), and that “much better things could be done, much more original and innovative, if the students had a say” (E1_4) because “in the end, it affects us and we are the ones who have to say whether or not we like it, what we think, how we would do it” (E3_1).

In contrast, children and adolescents participating in Child and Adolescence Councils do make autonomous decisions that are not always determined by what adults offer. As mentioned above, they can design and implement their own projects. As an example, in one case, at their request, they succeeded in developing the Municipal Children's Plan since the first one “was drawn up by the adults, it was a drawn-out mess, and the second one, we did it our own way” (E2_1) or they have named a park “in honour of the elderly [...] so that they remember what the village used to be like” (E2_2).

Individual or group self-organisation. Self-organisation is an inherent quality of the agent. Examples are found in all the profiles of children and adolescents that informed the integrated studies, with varying degrees of success. As we have seen, self-organisation occurs when developing projects, planning and remodelling public spaces, shaping Municipal Children's Plans, or setting up an inter-school student assembly “I realised and thought that here we need a place where we can all talk [...] at the district level, we wanted to create a student assembly” (E1_4). In these cases, adults either step aside to give support without being directive or absent, since the initiatives are led exclusively by young people.

Self-organisation includes all the qualities mentioned above. When any of these qualities fail, the self-organised action does not succeed as expected. This is the case of two experiences shared by adolescents who autonomously tried to self-organise in their school settings. In one of them, “we, our class, organised ourselves to do something [...] but in the end, we didn’t do it because we didn’t know how to organise ourselves”. On the one hand, “people were getting more and more lazy” and, further, due to lack of knowledge and interest in the topic about which “we didn’t have much of an idea” (E1_1). In another case, they tried to organise themselves to raise funds through a proposal of their own, “like making a kind of disco, like a musical where we would charge for tickets”, but “it got stuck” (E1_3).

Achievement of goals. Achieving at least part of the self-proposed goals is indispensable for the constitution of agentic sense and identity. Children and adolescents, not in vain, emphasise that “when we do something, it has to serve a purpose” (E1_4). In agentic contexts, the perception of self-efficacy is unequivocal. In these spaces, goals are achieved, “thanks to us, they have placed some coloured footprints on the pedestrian crossings near schools”, which “is exciting because you think I’m behind this” (E3_2). In these spaces, the self-image in terms of goal-achievement is so positive that they even exclaim “I think the question would be what kind of activities we don’t do [...] we have done everything” (E2_1). They are also confident that “our proposals are slow to be seen because it takes time, but at some point, we will see them” (E2_6). In short,

If we are here, it is because we have felt throughout our participation experience that we are taken seriously, and that’s why we are here; we have felt that our voice contributes to an improvement in society or that it is reflected in some way (E2_4).

Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed to determine the impact of participatory experiences on the development of children’s and adolescents’ sense of human agency and to pinpoint the features that characterise their agentic identities by comparing their accounts of their participatory experience in everyday life settings. The QMD has made it possible to frame two main thematic units, enabling contexts and agentic qualities. As Levitt (2008) states, the method used has helped to shed light on a complex domain, that of children’s and adolescents’ sense of agency, and in generating what we consider to be a significant contribution with potential for further development.

It is revealed that an enabling context favours the development of children’s and adolescents’ sense of agency. Enabling contexts are safe and respectful in their configuration, a fundamental characteristic in the case of children and adolescents. They are spaces in which children and adolescents feel recognised as social actors, confirming the importance of the relational element (Edmonds, 2019; Erstad *et al.*, 2021; Sutterlüty & Tisdall, 2019; Thomas, 2007). Participation in these scenarios is real and meaningful, especially when participation is exercised as citizens and influential members of society (Crowley *et al.*, 2021; Lister, 2007; Lowy & Biesta, 2006) in Child or Adolescence Councils and leisure and youth centres, in contrast to participation as students in schools. The need for what Giddens (1982) expresses in terms of capacity for reflection and Bandura (2006, 2018) as self-reflection is highlighted. An enabling context is one in which there

are spaces and times for reflection and meta-participation (Trilla & Novella, 2001) and to assess actions and their impact on the individual, the group, and the environment.

Agentic qualities are the attributes children and adolescents manifest or demand in developing their sense of agency. In light of their accounts, intentionality (Bandura, 2006, 2018; Cauce & Gordon, 2012) and the need to freely choose the course of action (Alkire, 2008; Griffin, 2002; Sen, 1985) are confirmed. Information, knowledge, and capabilities also emerge as essential qualities (Bandura, 2006, 2018; Giddens, 1982; Griffin, 2002). Similarly, the ability to make autonomous decisions based on individual or group interests (Alkire, 2002; Cauce & Gordon, 2012) appears, provided that the choices are sufficient and not always defined by adults. Self-organisation is crucial, and even more crucial is knowing how to self-organise. This illustrates the need for adults to provide children and adolescents with opportunities, means, and resources (Brighouse, 2002; Dixon & Nussbaum, 2012; Liebel, 2021). Adults also need to learn to step aside so that children and adolescents can gradually develop and exercise their agency in conditions of freedom and autonomy, aware that they can always count on adults' support. Finally, achieving goals (Giddens, 1982; Sen, 1985) is fundamental to what Bandura (2018) calls perceived self-efficacy and is linked to the agent's self-concept.

The study finds significant differences in the accounts of children and adolescents about their self-perception as agents. Those who are members of Child or Adolescence Councils and leisure and youth centres manifest all the identified qualities and exercise participation in terms of citizenship-as-practice (Lowy & Biesta, 2006). This may be because these contexts are certainly enabling, agentic, and democratic. They engage voluntarily and intentionally, and adults support them by recognising their capabilities for autonomous and self-directed action in the here and now (Lister, 2007). They can develop projects they feel as their own and influence their communities (Crowley *et al.*, 2021). This affects their identities, as illustrated in a valuable contribution by a girl who claimed that "it [participating in the Child Council] has changed me; it shapes you as a citizen, as a person". Instead, the school is revealed as a context for potential agency (Brighouse, 2002; Griffin, 2002). Children and adolescents are generally considered learners, not agents or citizens. The options to choose from are, more often than not, predetermined and agentic action, that is, action aimed at achieving self-proposed goals, either does not receive the necessary support or is not allowed. Another consideration is the compulsory nature of schools, which hinders voluntariness and intentionality.

We agree with Mayall (2002) and Valentine (2011) in considering that children are historically marginalised groups whose voices, experiences, and knowledge are not sufficiently valued or heeded. We agree with Liebel (2021) and Dailey and Rosenbury (2018) that children's human rights should be regarded as rights of agency. Only then will they be able to take their rightful place as citizens and full members of society.

There are some limitations to the study, namely not having the opportunity to reach out to all participants to receive their impressions on the results and validate them jointly. A future course of action is to build a toolkit for configuring enabling contexts and assessing the development of children's and adolescents' sense of agency. The study's strength lies in finding some of the characteristic elements of an enabling context and those qualities that manifest the sense of agency of children and adolescents. We consider this to be an opportunity for further research along these lines.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Resumen

Desarrollo del sentido de agencia humana en la infancia y la adolescencia mediante experiencias participativas: contextos posibilitadores y cualidades agénticas

INTRODUCCIÓN. Niñas, niños y adolescentes tienen reconocidos derechos de participación y estatus de ciudadanía. A esto habría de sumarse el reconocimiento de su agencia humana dado que es desde la condición de agentes que podrán ejercer sus derechos de manera autónoma. Este estudio tiene como finalidad identificar los elementos que posibilitan el desarrollo del sentido de agencia de niños y adolescentes, comparando sus relatos en torno a sus experiencias participativas en centros educativos, entidades de tiempo libre, centros juveniles, entorno familiar, entornos digitales y Consejos de Infancia y Adolescencia. **MÉTODO.** Mediante un diseño de análisis cualitativo de meta-síntesis (ACM), se analizan los datos recogidos en tres estudios que comparten foco de investigación con el fin de

reinterpretarlos y generar nuevo conocimiento. El ACM integra los relatos de 150 niños y adolescentes de entre 8 y 18 años recogidos en 17 grupos de discusión. El análisis se desarrolla en cuatro fases: familiarización, establecimiento de relaciones, traslación y síntesis de unidades y categorías, y síntesis de resultados mediante descripciones narrativas. **RESULTADOS.** Se identifican dos unidades temáticas, el contexto posibilitador y las cualidades agénticas, con sus categorías correspondientes. El contexto posibilitador favorece el desarrollo del sentido de agencia y del ejercicio de agencia humana por parte de niños y adolescentes. Las cualidades agénticas son los atributos que expresan niños y adolescentes en cuanto a su sentido de agencia. **DISCUSIÓN.** Se detectan notables diferencias en la construcción del sentido de agencia dependiendo del contexto y bajo los roles en que se desarrollan las experiencias participativas, siendo aquellas que se dan en clave de ciudadanía democrática las que lo favorecen genuinamente. Los elementos identificados proporcionan un marco para la creación de contextos posibilitadores para reconocimiento y desarrollo del sentido de agencia humana de niños y adolescentes desde el ejercicio de una participación democráticamente genuina.

Palabras clave: *Agencia humana, Derechos de la infancia, Investigación cualitativa, Participación ciudadana, Participación de la infancia.*

Résumé

Développer le sens de l'agentivité humaine dans l'enfance et l'adolescence par le biais d'expériences participatives : contextes favorables et qualités agéntiques

INTRODUCTION. Les enfants et les adolescents ont des droits de participation et disposent d'un statut de citoyen. À cela, s'ajoute la reconnaissance de leur agentivité humaine, car c'est à partir de leur condition d'agents qu'ils pourront exercer leurs droits de manière autonome. Cette étude vise à identifier les éléments qui permettent aux enfants et aux adolescents de développer un sens de l'agentivité humaine, en comparant les récits de leurs expériences participatives dans les centres éducatifs, les centres de loisirs et de jeunesse, les environnements familiaux, les environnements numériques et les Conseils de l'enfance et de l'adolescence. **MÉTHODE.** À l'aide d'un modèle d'analyse qualitative de méta-synthèse (AQM), les données recueillies dans trois études ayant un objectif de recherche commun sont analysées afin de les réinterpréter et de générer de nouvelles connaissances. L'AQM intègre les récits de 150 enfants et adolescents âgés de 8 à 18 ans, recueillis dans le cadre de 17 groupes de discussion. L'analyse se déroule en quatre phases : familiarisation, établissement de relations, traduction et synthèse des unités et des catégories, et synthèse des résultats par le biais de descriptions narratives. **RÉSULTATS.** Deux unités thématiques sont identifiées, le contexte habilitant et les qualités agéntiques, ainsi que les catégories correspondantes. Les contextes habilitants favorisent le développement et l'exercice de l'agentivité humaine par les enfants et les adolescents. Les qualités agéntiques sont les attributs que les enfants et les adolescents expriment par rapport à leur sens de l'agentivité humaine. **DISCUSSION.** Il existe des différences significatives dans le développement du sens de l'agentivité humaine des enfants et des adolescents en fonction du contexte et des rôles dans lesquels se déroulent les expériences participatives, celles qui se déroulent dans le cadre de la citoyenneté démocratique étant celles qui le favorisent véritablement. Les éléments identifiés fournissent un cadre pour la création de contextes

habitants qui permettent la reconnaissance et le développement du sens de l'agentivité humaine des enfants et des adolescents par le biais d'une véritable participation démocratique.

Mots-clés : *Droits de l'enfant, Participation des enfants, Participation des citoyens, Agentivité humaine, Recherche qualitative.*

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