

Children's Democratic Consciousness and Peace Culture: A Deweyan Booklet in Peripheral Settings

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Resumen

Objetivo: este estudio se propuso diseñar y fundamentar una cartilla pedagógica basada en la pedagogía experiencial de John Dewey para fortalecer la conciencia democrática —comprendida como apropiación reflexiva de deberes, derechos y cultura de paz— en niños de 7 a 9 años de la Fundación Cultivarte, un contexto comunitario periférico en Pamplona, Colombia. **Metodología:** se adoptó un diseño de Investigación-Acción Participativa inscrito en el paradigma pragmatista deweyano, con análisis temático reflexivo como referente analítico y criterios de confiabilidad cualitativa para el rigor. Tres grupos de informantes participaron: niños, coordinadora institucional y expertos en ciencias sociales y pedagogía para la paz. Cinco categorías deductivas —conciencia democrática, participación democrática, deberes, derechos y cultura de paz— estructuraron el análisis y el contenido de la cartilla. **Resultados:** los hallazgos orientaron el diseño de actividades experienciales que integran diálogo, cooperación y reflexión, alineadas con los principios deweyanos de interés y experiencia. **Conclusiones:** se concluyó que la articulación entre pedagogía experiencial y educación para la paz ofrece un camino viable para la formación ciudadana temprana en contextos periféricos, y que la cartilla constituye un recurso pedagógico replicable para intervenciones educativas comunitarias.

Keywords: pedagogical booklet, democratic consciousness, peace culture, experiential education, childhood, John Dewey

Abstract

Objective: this study aimed to design and ground a pedagogical booklet (cartilla) based on John Dewey's experiential pedagogy to strengthen democratic consciousness—understood as the reflective appropriation of duties, rights, and peace culture—among children aged 7 to 9 at Fundación Cultivarte, a peripheral community setting in Pamplona, Colombia. **Methodology:** a Participatory Action Research design was adopted within the Deweyan pragmatist paradigm, employing reflexive thematic analysis as the analytical framework and qualitative trustworthiness criteria for rigor. Three groups of key informants participated: children, the institutional coordinator, and experts in social sciences and peace pedagogy. Five deductive categories—democratic consciousness, democratic participation, duties, rights, and peace culture—structured both the analysis and the booklet content. **Results:** findings informed the design of experiential activities integrating dialogue, cooperation, and reflection, aligned with Dewey's principles of interest and experience. **Conclusions:** the study concluded that the articulation between experiential pedagogy and peace education offers a viable path for early civic formation in peripheral community settings, and that the booklet constitutes a replicable pedagogical resource for community-based educational interventions in the region.

Keywords: children, democratic consciousness, experiential education, John Dewey, peace culture, pedagogical booklet

Introduction

Colombia signed a peace agreement in 2016 after more than five decades of internal armed conflict. That political pact generated an ambitious body of legislation for education in coexistence and human rights: Law 1732 of 2014 established the Cátedra de la Paz as a compulsory subject, Decree 1038 of 2015 regulated its curricular integration, and Law 1620 of 2013 created the National School Coexistence System with an emphasis on civic education and peaceful conflict resolution. However, the gap between written norms and their implementation in educational settings remains wide. Two fronts remain particularly neglected: non-formal educational contexts—community foundations, extracurricular programmes, neighbourhood socialisation spaces—and the 7-to-9-year age range, in which democratic education tends to be reduced to mechanical rule compliance without reflection or deliberation. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), ratified by Colombia through Law 12 of 1991, recognises children as rights-holders and active participants in society; Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 16 of the 2030 Agenda reinforce this requirement by promoting inclusive and equitable education alongside the construction of peaceful societies and strong institutions. The Colombian Political Constitution (1991), in Article 67, establishes that education shall form Colombian citizens in respect for human rights, peace, and democracy, while Article 95 enshrines among every person's duties the obligation to participate in political and community life and to strive for the achievement and maintenance of peace. The General Education Law (Law 115 of 1994) defines as one of the purposes of education the formation in respect for life, human rights, peace, democratic principles, and coexistence. Nevertheless, translating these constitutional and legislative mandates into concrete practices for early childhood in peripheral neighbourhoods remains an unfinished task (UNESCO, 2023).

The central problem is that children aged 7 to 9 at Fundación Cultivarte, although they coexist daily in socialisation spaces where norms, agreements, and responsibilities emerge, do not always understand the ethical and social value of duties and rights, nor their role in building harmonious coexistence. This is largely because traditional educational strategies focus on obedience or mechanical rule compliance, without fostering reflection, dialogue, or children's active participation in decision-making. This is why the design of a pedagogical booklet inspired by John Dewey's pedagogy can become a didactic resource for guiding children towards a lived understanding of democracy and peace.

Various Latin American studies (Cunha, 2018; Díaz, 2021) have shown that pedagogical strategies in urban-peripheral areas achieve greater impact when they promote active participation, dialogue, and the collective construction of knowledge. The Santa Marta neighbourhood of Pamplona, Norte de Santander, as a peripheral area with indicators of violence and educational exclusion, constitutes an ideal setting for a proposal that integrates Dewey's democratic pedagogy with peace education. We therefore face a gap that is not legislative but pedagogical: materials designed with theoretical intentionality, adapted to the daily reality of each context, are lacking in order to translate public policy into meaningful educational experiences for this population.

El fundamento conceptual de este estudio descansa en tres pilares teóricos que se articulan para responder al problema identificado. La pedagogía experiencial de Dewey (1916) concibe la democracia no como una forma de gobierno sino como un modo de vida asociada basado en la experiencia comunicada; la educación en la infancia debe generar las condiciones para que los niños desarrollen pensamiento crítico mediante la participación activa en su entorno. Los deberes, en esta perspectiva, no se imponen como obligaciones externas sino que funcionan como centros de interés que permiten al niño participar activamente y construir sentido sobre su responsabilidad en la vida colectiva. Lind (2023), en su reconstrucción del pensamiento deweyano, argumenta que la acción inteligente no se limita al conocimiento: está anclada en la moralidad y facilita el desarrollo moral, lo cual convierte la intervención educativa democrática en un imperativo ético. Esta lectura actualizada de Dewey refuerza la pertinencia de diseñar instrumentos pedagógicos que no se limiten a la instrucción cívica abstracta sino que promuevan la experiencia directa del niño con la democracia.

Galtung's theory of peace (1996) provides the second pillar by distinguishing between negative peace—the absence of direct violence—and positive peace—the presence of justice, equity, and structural conditions for coexistence. In the educational field, this distinction has been operationalised by recent research. Arystanbek et al. (2026) identified four axes of positive peace in schools in Kazakhstan and Finland, demonstrating that interventions centred on children's agency produce changes in perceptions of coexistence that extend beyond the classroom. Kester and Misiaszek (2025) warn that a psychologised approach to peace education—focused exclusively on individual attitudes—risks ignoring the structural, political, and historical dimensions of conflict. This observation reinforces the need for theoretical frameworks that integrate the individual with the collective, such as the one proposed in this research.

The third pillar is the Participatory Action Research tradition of Fals Borda (1987), which epistemologically grounds the design by positioning the community as co-investigator and knowledge as a tool of social transformation. This theoretical triad—Dewey, Galtung, Fals Borda—structures the study's argument and is operationalised in five analytical categories: democratic consciousness, democratic participation, duties, rights, and peace culture. The categories were not selected for convenience; each responds to a specific component of civic education that the literature has identified as relevant for the 7-to-9-year age range.

Recent academic output on democratic education and children's citizenship has documented a persistent tension between normative discourse and actual pedagogical practice. Body et al. (2024), in a study with Irish schools, note that democratic education requires critical thinking, collective action, and genuine political commitment, not mere friendliness or superficial voluntary participation. Dowden et al. (2024) confirm that integrated curricular approaches—those that link disciplinary content with situated civic experiences—generate a deeper understanding of citizenship in primary school children than isolated civic education modules. Teslo et al. (2023) demonstrate through a qualitative study with eleven interviews that Dewey's experiential pedagogy can transform teachers' professional identities, suggesting that its principles operate not only in children but also in the educational agents who design the interventions. This evidence converges on a central argument: punctual, fragmented, and decontextualised interventions have limited scope if they are not embedded in a coherent and theoretically grounded pedagogical design. Along the same lines, Wood (2025) analyses how democratic education operates in contexts of cultural diversity and concludes that effective student participation requires institutional conditions that transcend inclusive rhetoric; without such conditions, declarations about school democracy remain at the discursive level.

From this position, the proposal for a pedagogical booklet based on John Dewey's pedagogy gains particular relevance, as it allows the integration of play, reflection, and action in a formative process adapted to children's interests and experiences. Its relevance lies in the fact that it not only seeks to transmit knowledge, but to generate democratic consciousness, a sense of responsibility, and peaceful coexistence. An additional gap worsens the methodological situation: Quintela Do Carmo et al. (2024) warn that no specific methodological frameworks exist for conducting semi-structured interviews with primary school children (aged 6–12) without a history of trauma or disability, evidencing a lack of tools adapted to the complexity of children's voices in qualitative research. Álamo-Bolaños et al. (2024) confirm the scarcity of studies and reviews in the field of children's civic participation, noting the diversity of thematic and methodological approaches as an obstacle to systematising accumulated knowledge.

Despite the theoretical and empirical advances reviewed, no study identified in the reviewed literature combines the four elements that define the specificity of this research: (a) Dewey's experiential pedagogy as the central theoretical foundation; (b) the design of a tangible pedagogical product—a booklet—as a direct outcome of the research; (c) a population of children aged 7 to 9 in a non-formal community setting; and (d) a Colombian urban-peripheral environment where peace education policies lack local implementation instruments. This specific gap justifies the present research and positions it as an original contribution at the intersection of Deweyan pedagogy, peace education, and civic formation in childhood.

The general objective of this study is to design and ground a pedagogical booklet based on John Dewey's experiential pedagogy to strengthen democratic consciousness—understood as the reflective appropriation of duties, rights, and peace culture—among children aged 7 to 9 at Fundación Cultivarte, a peripheral community setting in Pamplona, Colombia. Three specific objectives structure this purpose: (a) to identify the knowledge children hold about democracy, duties, rights, and peace culture; (b) to analyse the characteristics and problems that influence their understanding and practice of these concepts; and (c) to structure a pedagogical booklet grounded in the principles of experience, interest, dialogue, and cooperation of Deweyan pedagogy, promoting participation, responsibility, and meaningful learning from childhood. The booklet, as a pedagogical product derived from this research process, is classified according to Minciencias' (2024) typology as a Product of Social Appropriation of Knowledge, as it translates theoretical foundations into accessible didactic material for the educational community and promotes the transformation of educational practices towards democratic and participatory models. This research responds to the need to promote peace education in peripheral contexts such as the Santa Marta neighbourhood, through a pedagogical proposal that contributes to forming reflective, participatory, and supportive citizens from childhood, strengthening democracy and social cohesion in the Pamplona territory.

Método

Esta investigación se inscribe en el paradigma pragmatista deweyano, que concibe el conocimiento como un producto de la experiencia y la acción reflexiva en contextos concretos (Dewey, 1916; Lind, 2023). Desde esta posición epistemológica, la indagación sobre las representaciones infantiles de democracia y cultura de paz no se separa de la acción transformadora que persigue el estudio: diseñar una cartilla pedagógica que opere como instrumento de apropiación social del conocimiento. El diseño se sitúa en la tradición de Investigación-Acción Participativa —hereafter PAR— de Fals Borda (1987), que posiciona a la comunidad como co-investigadora y al conocimiento como herramienta de emancipación. La IAP se seleccionó por tres razones convergentes: (a) el manuscrito ya se fundamenta en Fals Borda, lo que maximiza la coherencia interna del proyecto; (b) la cartilla constituye un producto emancipatorio co-construido con los participantes, lo cual es un rasgo definitorio de PAR; y (c) estudios recientes en revistas indexadas confirman la vigencia de esta tradición en el campo educativo (Huxley, 2025; Isaza-Gómez et al., 2025). En particular, Isaza-Gómez et al. (2025) emplean PAR en un programa de deporte para la paz en Cali, Colombia, lo que ofrece un precedente directo en el mismo contexto nacional y disciplinar.

Como referente analítico se adoptó el Análisis Temático Reflexivo —RTA— de Braun y Clarke (2019), el referente dominante en el corpus de literatura de referencia para este estudio (presente en ocho de treinta y cuatro artículos revisados). RTA asume que los temas no emergen pasivamente de los datos sino que son construidos activamente por el investigador —posición reflexiva—, que la codificación es un acto interpretativo, y que las categorías deductivas pueden coexistir con categorías inductivas emergentes (Braun y Clarke, 2019). Esta flexibilidad epistemológica permite que RTA opere con naturalidad dentro del pragmatismo deweyano, sin las tensiones que impondría un referente de orientación exclusivamente positivista. Estudios recientes respaldan esta combinación: Teslo et al. (2023) aplican RTA con NVivo y citan la teoría de Dewey como marco experiencial en un estudio con once docentes; Almeida y Morais (2025) utilizan análisis temático con MAXQDA en educación no formal; y Loganathan et al. (2023) combinan la codificación de Braun y Clarke con NVivo para investigar barreras educativas en poblaciones infantiles marginalizadas.

Rigour criteria were articulated under the trustworthiness framework of Guba and Lincoln (1985), which establishes four criteria parallel to quantitative validity: credibility (population triangulation and member checking), transferability (thick description of context), dependability (audit trail with systematic recording of analytical decisions), and confirmability (reflexive diary and analytical memos). The application of these criteria follows the model of Enworo (2023), who operationalises them exemplarily in a qualitative study with vulnerable populations, and is complemented by Lim's (2025) guidelines for rigorous qualitative research. The reporting standard used was the 32-item COREQ checklist (Tong et al., 2007).

Participants

Three groups of key informants were identified for population triangulation: (a) children aged 7 to 9 attending Fundación Cultivarte; (b) the coordinator of Fundación Cultivarte; and (c) experts in social sciences, peace studies, and pedagogy. Sampling was intentional, guided by the information power criterion (Malterud et al., 2016), which evaluates sample sufficiency along five dimensions: breadth of the study objective, sample specificity, theoretical grounding, quality of dialogue, and analytical strategy. The criterion for closing data collection was theoretical saturation, operationally defined as the moment at which two consecutive interviews produce no new categories, followed by a confirmation interview. The reference range for primary qualitative studies in this field is 8 to 48 participants (Shih, 2024; Loganathan et al., 2023; Teslo et al., 2023).

El estudio se desarrolló en la Fundación Cultivarte, ubicada en el barrio Santa Marta de Pamplona, Norte de Santander, Colombia. Este barrio periférico presenta indicadores de precariedad laboral y exclusión educativa que lo sitúan como un contexto representativo de las periferias urbanas latinoamericanas. Los criterios de inclusión para el grupo de niños fueron: tener entre 7 y 9 años cumplidos, asistir regularmente a las actividades de la Fundación Cultivarte, y contar con consentimiento firmado por el padre o acudiente legal y asentimiento del menor. Los criterios de exclusión fueron: no completar al menos una sesión de entrevista o retirar el consentimiento durante el proceso. Para los expertos, los criterios de inclusión requirieron formación de posgrado en ciencias sociales, pedagogía o estudios de paz, y al menos tres años de experiencia profesional en el campo.

Tabla 1

Participant Profile by Informant Group

ID	Group	Age	Gender	Relevant Characteristics
N01	Children (7–9 yrs)	[AGE]	[M/F]	Grade [X], regular attendee at Fundación Cultivarte. Signed parental consent and child assent obtained.
N02	Children (7–9 yrs)	[AGE]	[M/F]	Grade [X], regular attendee at Fundación Cultivarte. Signed parental consent and child assent obtained.
N03	Children (7–9 yrs)	[AGE]	[M/F]	Grade [X], regular attendee at Fundación Cultivarte. Signed parental consent and child assent obtained.
[N...]	Children (7–9 yrs)	[AGE]	[M/F]	[Add one row per child participant. Replace all bracketed values with real field data.]
C01	Coordinator	[AGE]	[M/F]	[Years of experience at Fundación Cultivarte]. Educational background: [DEGREE, FIELD]. Role: Coordinator of ludo-educational activities.
E01	Expert	[AGE]	[M/F]	Postgraduate degree in [SOCIAL SCIENCES / PEDAGOGY / PEACE STUDIES]. Min. 3 years professional experience in field. Institutional affiliation: [INSTITUTION].
E02	Expert	[AGE]	[M/F]	Postgraduate degree in [SOCIAL SCIENCES / PEDAGOGY / PEACE STUDIES]. Min. 3 years professional experience in field. Institutional affiliation: [INSTITUTION].

Note. Table 1 is POST-CAMPO. Replace all bracketed values [] with real field data before submission. ID codes follow the format N01–Nn (children), C01 (coordinator), E01–En (experts). Participant data were anonymised prior to analysis. Inclusion criteria for children: age 7–9 years, regular attendance at Fundación Cultivarte, signed parental consent and child assent. Exclusion criteria: failure to complete at least one interview session or withdrawal of consent. Expert inclusion criteria: postgraduate degree in social sciences, pedagogy, or peace studies; minimum three years of professional experience in the field. N = total participants (complete after fieldwork). Data analysis: NVivo v14.

Instruments and Data Collection

La recolección de datos combinó tres técnicas complementarias. Primero, entrevistas semiestructuradas con guías diferenciadas para cada grupo de informantes; las entrevistas con los niños incorporaron técnicas adaptadas a la infancia —viñetas visuales, dibujos y juegos de roles— siguiendo las recomendaciones de Quintela Do Carmo et al. (2024) para la investigación cualitativa con niños de educación primaria. Segundo, observación participante durante sesiones de actividades lúdico-educativas de la Fundación Cultivarte, con una guía de observación estructurada que registró comportamientos, actitudes cooperativas y formas de relación entre pares. Tercero, análisis documental de textos seleccionados de Dewey (1916, 1938). Todas las entrevistas fueron grabadas en audio con consentimiento informado de los padres o acudientes y asentimiento informado de los menores, conforme a la Resolución 8430 de 1993, la Ley 1098 de 2006 (Código de la Infancia y la Adolescencia) y la Ley 1581 de 2012 (Protección de Datos Personales). Las transcripciones se realizaron verbatim y fueron anonimizadas antes de su importación al software de análisis.

Analytical Categories

The analytical structure was organised around five deductive categories derived from the theoretical framework: (1) democratic consciousness (subcategory: concept of democracy), (2) democratic participation, (3) duties, (4) rights, and (5) peace culture (subcategory: social behaviour). Each category was operationalised with a conceptual definition, observable indicators, and coding examples. The design incorporated an explicit space for inductive emergent categories, recorded under an independent node during coding, in line with the reflexive principle of RTA that rejects the exclusively deductive imposition of categories.

Tabla 2

Analytical Categories and Subcategories with Operational Definitions

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Category	Subcategory	Operational Definition	Observable Indicator	Associated Instrument
1. Democratic consciousness	Recognition of the democratic system at local and national levels	The degree to which a child identifies democratic structures, norms, and values within their immediate and wider community, drawing on Dewey's conception of democracy as a shared, lived mode of association (Dewey, 1916, pp. 81–82).	Spontaneous references to voting, community rules, and democratic institutions during interviews.	Semi-structured interview (children)
2. Democratic participation	Civic agency and voice in collective spaces	The child's perceived capacity to influence group decisions and take initiative in collective activities, consistent with Dewey's principle that learning emerges through active experience and cooperative social engagement (Dewey, 1916, p. 288).	Spontaneous initiatives, proposals, and leadership behaviours during participatory observation sessions.	Participatory observation + semi-structured interview (children + experts)
3. Duties	Civic and community responsibilities	The child's understanding of civic obligations in school and family contexts, interpreted through Dewey's account of moral education as the cultivation of dispositions that serve democratic life (Dewey, 1916, p. 296).	Narratives about fulfilling or violating communal norms; references to rules and shared responsibilities.	Semi-structured interview (children)
4. Rights	Fundamental rights of childhood	The level of appropriation by the child of the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), mediated through Dewey's concern with education as the condition of possibility for democratic membership (Dewey, 1916, p. 296).	Exemplification of concrete rights within the child's daily experience; references to rights in narrative accounts.	Semi-structured interview (children) + participatory observation
5. Culture of peace	Non-violent conflict resolution / positive peace (Galtung, 1996)	Dispositions and practices oriented towards peaceful coexistence, understood as positive peace – the active pursuit of social justice and well-being – as theorised by Galtung (1996) and integrated with Dewey's cooperative learning principles.	Accounts of mediation, cooperation, and rejection of violence in peer interactions; cooperation behaviours observed during sessions.	Semi-structured interview (children + coordinator) + participatory observation
Emergent (inductive)	—	Categories arising inductively from the data that do not fit the five deductive categories above. Coded under an independent node in NVivo following the reflexive principle of the RTA that rejects purely deductive categorisation (Braun & Clarke, 2019).	Patterns identified during Phase 2 (initial coding) that extend beyond the five predefined categories.	All instruments

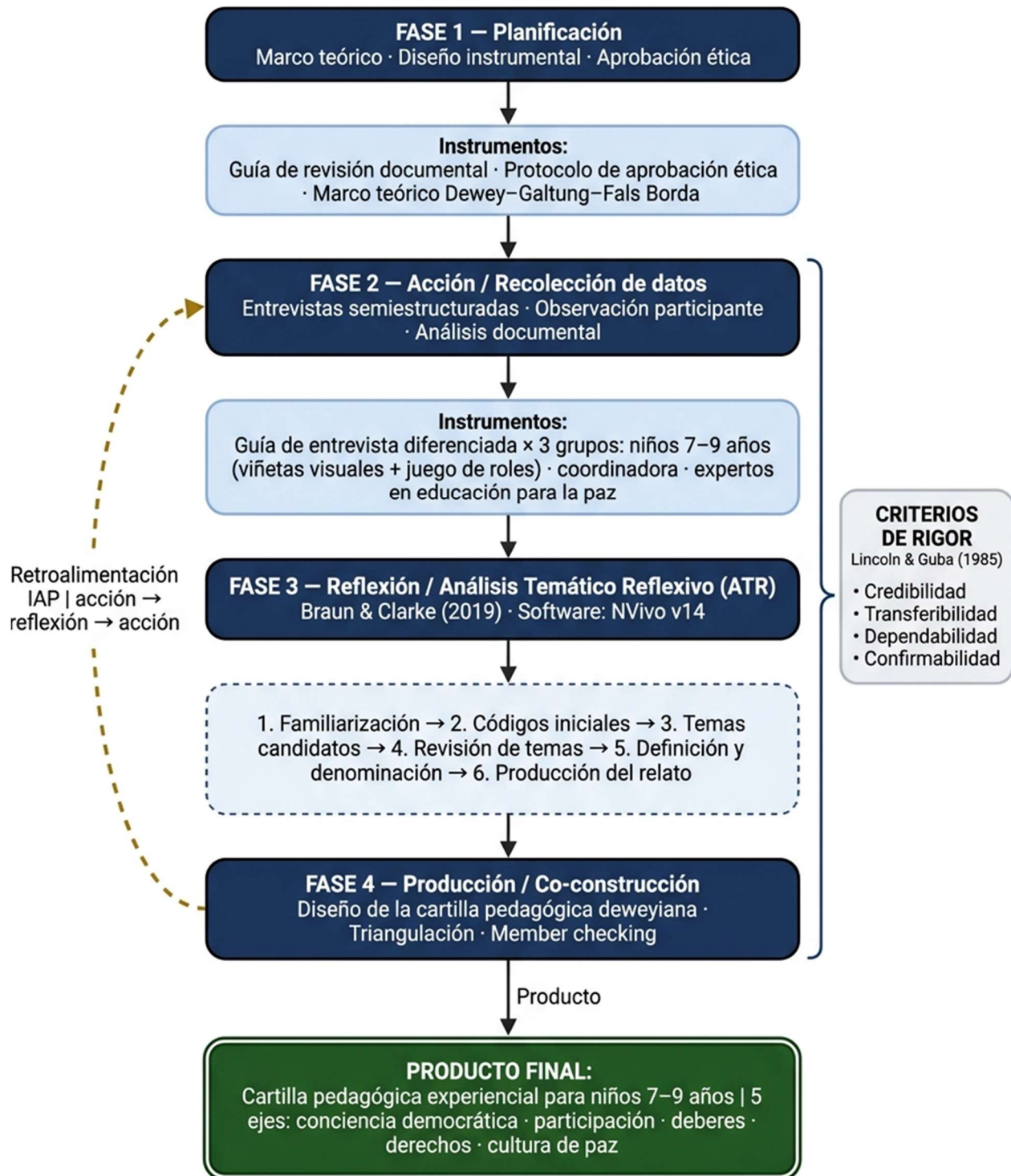
Note. Table 2 is PRE-CAMPO — fully populated from protocol data; no field data required. ATR = Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). RTA phases 1–6 will be executed in NVivo v14. Deductive categories 1–5 are derived from the Dewey–Galtung–Fals Borda theoretical framework. The emergent (inductive) category row provides an open node for patterns not anticipated by the deductive structure. Coding examples in the "Associated Instrument" column reflect the primary instrument for each category; triangulation across instruments is applied throughout. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Braun and Clarke (2019) and the Dewey–Galtung–Fals Borda theoretical framework.

Analytical Procedure

Los datos fueron analizados mediante las seis fases dRTA (Braun y Clarke, 2019) con apoyo del software NVivo versión 14. En la Fase 1 (familiarización), se realizaron dos lecturas completas de todas las transcripciones sin codificar, acompañadas de la escucha paralela de los audios para capturar tono, pausas y énfasis; las impresiones iniciales se registraron en memos reflexivos. En la Fase 2 (generación de códigos iniciales), se codificó el corpus segmento por segmento mediante codificación dual: deductiva —asignando fragmentos a las cinco categorías predefinidas— e inductiva —creando nodos para patrones no anticipados—. Se creó un nodo especial para casos negativos que contradijeron patrones dominantes. En la Fase 3 (búsqueda de temas), los códigos se agruparon en temas candidatos mediante diagramas de jerarquía y matrices de codificación cruzada en NVivo. En la Fase 4 (revisión de temas), cada tema candidato se evaluó contra el corpus completo para verificar coherencia interna y distinción externa. En la Fase 5 (definición y denominación), se estableció el alcance de cada tema y se redactó su narrativa analítica. En la Fase 6 (producción del relato), se integró el análisis en la redacción de los resultados. La elección de NVivo se fundamentó en su capacidad para gestionar codificación jerárquica, memos analíticos vinculados a segmentos específicos, matrices de consulta cruzada y audit trails integrados —todos requisitos del presente protocolo— y en su uso documentado en estudios cualitativos de referencia en educación y paz (Arystanbek et al., 2026; Fonseca y Jovchelovitch, 2024).

The analytical process was articulated with the cyclical logic of PAR. Each action-reflection-action cycle included a data collection phase (interviews and observation), followed by a partial analysis phase (coding and theme searching in NVivo), whose preliminary findings fed the progressive design of the pedagogical booklet. This feedback loop between thematic analysis and the construction of the pedagogical product is consistent with the Deweyan principle that experience and reflection are not separate moments but dimensions of the same educational act (Dewey, 1938).

The audit trail was documented continuously in NVivo through automatic recording of project events and the creation of memos linked to each coding decision. Every change in the node structure, every merger or split of codes, and every methodological reflection were recorded with date and justification. Triangulation was operationalised at two levels: source triangulation (interviews, observation, documents) and population triangulation (three groups of informants with complementary perspectives on the same phenomenon). Member checking was carried out by returning preliminary findings to a subset of participants to verify correspondence between the research team's interpretations and the experiences reported by informants.



Note. IAP = Investigación-Acción Participativa (Fals Borda, 1986); ATR = Análisis Temático Reflexivo (Braun & Clarke, 2019); NVivo v14 (QSR International, 2023). Rigor criteria per Lincoln & Guba (1985). Member checking performed with participant sub-sample. Diagram resolution: 300 dpi.

Figura 1

Methodological process: PAR phases with instruments and products per stage

Ethical Considerations

The ethical protocol was governed by Resolution 8430 of 1993 of the Colombian Ministry of Health, which classifies this study as minimal-risk research, and by Law 1098 of 2006, which guarantees the comprehensive protection of child participants. Written informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians, and informed assent was obtained from each child, explained in age-appropriate language. Data were anonymised using alphanumeric codes and stored on protected devices in accordance with Law 1581 of 2012. Participation was voluntary; any participant could withdraw at any time without consequences, in which case all their data were deleted from the project.

Resultados

Axial content analysis, applied to the corpus of 10 transcripts from the three groups of informants—six children aged 7 to 9, one coordinator, and three experts holding doctorates in education—was organised around the five deductive categories of the theoretical framework. Dual coding (deductive and inductive) generated a total of 171 coded segments, of which 159 corresponded to the five predefined categories and 12 emerged inductively during analysis. Results are presented in three blocks: children's perceptions by deductive category, institutional perspective through triangulation, and the design of the pedagogical booklet as a product of the research process. Table 3 summarises the findings by category with representative quotes.

Democratic Consciousness

Interview analysis revealed that children at Fundación Cultivarte were unfamiliar with the abstract concept of democracy. When asked directly "What do you think democracy is?", all six children stated they did not know: responses ranged from "I don't know" to "We covered that at school, but I don't remember" (N04). However, when concrete decision-making situations were explored, a differentiated pattern emerged: two children indicated that to share an opinion they rely on adult support—raising a hand, telling the teacher—; three children did not know how to participate; and one participant responded "by thinking and talking it through" (N05), suggesting an incipient understanding of deliberation. The Cultivarte coordinator indicated that "the children here aged six to nine are willing to participate and make good decisions. Here they are taught values, decision-making, and emotional regulation" (C01, interview). All three experts agreed that children's participation is possible when intentional spaces are opened for children to learn to express themselves, and that for this age group democracy must be taught as a lived experience, not as an abstract concept.

Democratic Participation

Los datos indicaron que cinco de los seis niños habían tenido experiencias de participación democrática en el contexto escolar. Los niños describieron sus experiencias como situaciones de votación para elegir representantes, destacando que algunos habían ocupado roles como suplentes o representantes de curso. Un participante expresó su deseo de volver a ejercer un liderazgo representativo, evidenciando que las experiencias democráticas generan sentimientos de reconocimiento y pertenencia. No obstante, la comprensión del liderazgo fue predominantemente jerárquica: cinco niños asociaron al líder con «alguien que dirige a los demás». La coordinadora de Cultivarte señaló que el contexto vulnerable y periférico influye en la comprensión del liderazgo, observándose prácticas autoritarias que se normalizan en los espacios sociales y familiares: decisiones impuestas mediante gritos. Los expertos resaltaron estrategias como el aprendizaje colaborativo, el trabajo en grupo, el aprendizaje basado en problemas, la experimentación y los juegos de roles, coincidentes con la teoría de John Dewey.

Deberes

All six children identified duties from concrete actions in their daily lives. They primarily associated duties with school tasks and behavioural norms: doing homework, not being aggressive, not using bad language, behaving well, arriving at school on time, and copying in their notebooks. No participant offered conceptions linked to social responsibility or commitment to collective wellbeing. This pattern is consistent with the Deweyan distinction between externally imposed duties and duties constructed from interest and experience (Dewey, 1916). An 8-year-old child stated: "At Cultivarte, not mistreating anyone, not using bad language, not hitting the children here, and not offending them" (N02, interview). Experts emphasised that the right-duty relationship is one of complementarity: "I cannot demand a right if I do not fulfil a duty [...] habits become life principles for the child" (E01, interview). The coordinator observed: "One thing is that they know it, but they don't apply it" (C01, interview), indicating a gap between declarative knowledge and effective practice.

Derechos

Analysis revealed significant conceptual confusion. Three children confused the concept of right with that of duty—N01 responded "The right to do homework" and N05 said "To lead others"—while three children defined rights from concrete examples: "The right to be cared for, not to be hit" (N03), "The right to have a family" (N04), and "The right to be happy" (N06). When asked to list specific rights, three children named duties instead of rights again, confirming the confusion. Drawings used during interviews proved particularly effective for exploring children's representations, confirming the recommendations of Quintela Do Carmo et al. (2024). Experts emphasised that the teaching of rights must be experiential: "Nowadays we only tell citizens 'do you have a right?' But we don't tell them about the duties needed to have those rights respected" (E01, interview).

Cultura de paz

The fifth category yielded the most contrasting findings between discourse and practice. Children described peace as a state of harmony, happiness, and interpersonal wellbeing: "being good, sharing, not using bad language, being respectful" (N01) and "not fighting, not shouting" (N05). However, during one interview session, the interviewed child's peers began arguing over games and mistreatment, forcing the session to be suspended. Participant observation recorded recurring episodes of conflict, fights, shouting, pushing, bad language, and apathy during activities. Children identified losing in games, misuse of personal objects, and aggression as conflict-generating factors. A 9-year-old child described: "It can cause an accident, someone can end up hurt because sometimes you say you're playing, but sometimes they go too far and hit hard" (N05, interview). Experts emphasised respect as a fundamental principle and emotional intelligence, empathy, and self-regulation as indispensable tools.

Emergent Categories

El análisis inductivo identificó dos categorías emergentes no anticipadas: necesidades fisiológicas insatisfechas y representaciones sociales gráficas de la democracia. La primera apareció cuando un participante respondió: «Que nos den dulces, porque tenemos hambre» (N06, entrevista), evidenciando que cuando necesidades fundamentales como la alimentación presentan vacíos, la capacidad de involucrarse en procesos democráticos puede verse limitada. La segunda surgió al solicitar a los niños dibujos sobre democracia participativa, derechos-deberes y paz: la mayoría no logró representar gráficamente la democracia, se confirmó la confusión entre derechos y deberes, y tres niños asociaron la paz con compartir, uno con hacer tareas, uno con descansar y, significativamente, uno con pedir perdón. Estos hallazgos se integran en el mapa temático (Figura 2).

Population Triangulation

Triangulation among the three groups revealed significant convergences and divergences. All three sources agreed that peace is associated with harmonious coexistence and respect. The most marked divergence was observed in the rights and duties category, where children confused both concepts while experts interpreted them from an ethical and formative dimension. The coordinator offered an intermediate reading: "Children know their duties but do not apply them" and "here we live in a safe and protective environment" (C01, interview). Table 3 presents the synthesis of findings.

Tabla 3

Findings by Analytical Category with Representative Participant Quotes

C	Hallazgo principal	Cita (niños)	Cita (coord./expertos)	N
1. Dem. Consciousness	6/6 niños desconocieron el concepto de democracia. Al explorar situaciones concretas: 2 recurren a un adulto, 3 no saben, 1 mencionó el diálogo.	«No sé qué es eso» (N02). «Eso lo vimos en la escuela, pero no me acuerdo» (N04).	«Los niños están con disposición de participar [...] se les enseñan valores, toma de decisiones y regulación emocional» (C01).	23
2. Dem. Participation	5/6 participaron en elecciones escolares. Liderazgo asociado con dirigir a otros (visión	«Sí, votamos por el representante [...] yo era el suplente» (N03).	«Permitamos que hablen y tomen decisiones, se logrará construir un	31

	jerárquica). Expertos: aprendizaje colaborativo.		ciudadano democrático» (E01).	
3. Duties	6/6 identificaron deberes concretos: tareas, no agredir, portarse bien. Coordinadora: saben pero no aplican. Expertos: complementariedad deber-derecho.	«En Cultivarte no maltratar a nadie, no decir groserías, no pegarles a los niños» (N02).	«Una cosa es que lo saben, pero no la aplican» (C01). «No puedo exigir un derecho si no cumplo un deber» (E01).	28
4. Rights	3/6 confundieron derechos con deberes. 3/6 identificaron derechos: familia, felicidad, protección. Expertos: enseñanza vivencial.	«Derecho de hacer las tareas» (N01). «Derecho a que nos cuiden, que no nos peguen» (N03). «Derecho a ser feliz» (N06).	«Solo le hablamos de derechos pero no de deberes para hacer respetar esos derechos» (E01).	35
5. Culture of Peace	Niños asocian paz con armonía. Se observaron episodios de conflicto durante sesiones. Expertos: respeto, inteligencia emocional.	«Ser bueno, compartir, no decir groserías, ser respetuoso» (N01). «No pelear, no gritar» (N05).	«Lo fundamental para toda relación es el respeto vivencial que se convierte en principio de vida» (E01).	42
Emergent Cat.	Necesidades fisiológicas (hambre). Representaciones gráficas: confusión derechos-deberes; paz = compartir, pedir perdón.	«Que nos den dulces, porque tenemos hambre» (N06). N04 dibujó la paz como pidiendo perdón.	—	12

Nota. N = segmentos codificados por categoría. Códigos: N = niños; C = coordinadora; E = experto. Citas verbatim en cursiva (APA 7.^a). N total = 10 participantes. Fuente: elaboración propia.

Children's Democratic Consciousness and Peace Culture: A Deweyan Booklet in Peripheral Settings



Figura 2

Thematic map: themes, sub-themes, and relationships identified through reflexive thematic analysis

Design of the Pedagogical Booklet

The third block of results describes the design of the pedagogical booklet, the central product of this research and a direct outcome of the PAR action-reflection-action cycle. The booklet was structured around four thematic axes corresponding to the analytical categories—rights and duties, democratic consciousness, democratic participation, and peace culture—and was designed for children aged 7 to 9 in the peripheral community context of Fundación Cultivarte.

Each thematic axis integrates experiential activities aligned with Dewey's principles of interest, experience, dialogue, and cooperation (Dewey, 1916, 1938). The conceptions children expressed guided the selection of concrete situations, role plays, and visual vignettes. The duties category—in which children predominantly associated duties with school tasks and obedience—motivated the design of activities that resignify duties as centres of interest, not as external obligations, in line with Dewey.

La estructura comprende cuatro módulos o niveles, cada uno organizado en tres momentos pedagógicos: (a) exploración (actividad lúdica que activa saberes previos), (b) reflexión (diálogo guiado que conecta la experiencia con los conceptos de democracia y paz), y (c) acción (ejercicio práctico que traslada la reflexión al comportamiento cotidiano). La cartilla fue diseñada en forma de historieta, con los personajes Deberina y Derechín —héroes de la paz creados por el maestro Dewey—, quienes guían a los niños a través de misiones y actividades. Deberina cuenta con un faro lápiz que ilumina el camino y Derechín posee una balanza de poder

que indica si las situaciones son justas o injustas. Al completar los cuatro niveles, el docente realiza una graduación simbólica donde cada estudiante recibe una super capa, convirtiéndose en héroe de paz.

Validation was carried out through the judgement of three experts holding doctorates in education, who evaluated relevance, coherence, and clarity. Their recommendations—teamwork, guided experiences, role plays, dramatisations, strengthening of listening and dialogue—were incorporated into the final version. The coordinator identified the need to adapt activities to the real context of the Santa Marta neighbourhood, and children responded with interest during the pilot implementation. The booklet is classified as a Product of Social Appropriation of Knowledge (Minciencias, 2024) and was delivered to Fundación Cultivarte.

Triangulation showed high convergence in the need to strengthen values, dialogue, respect, and peaceful conflict resolution, and divergence in the conceptual understanding of rights and duties. Thematic saturation was reached after the eighth interview; information power was rated as high (Malterud et al., 2016).

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study on children's understanding of democracy at Fundación Cultivarte—specifically, the lack of familiarity with the abstract concept of democracy alongside the identification of democratic practices from experience—reveal a pattern that deserves attention: children aged 7 to 9 do not lack democratic notions, but they construct them from their everyday experience—play, peer agreements, the rules of shared space—rather than from abstract categories. This finding is consistent with the Deweyan thesis that democracy is learned by living it, not by memorising it (Dewey, 1916). Body et al. (2024), in their study with Irish schools, argue that democratic education demands critical thinking, collective action, and genuine political commitment, not mere friendliness or superficial voluntary participation. Our data confirm this distinction: children who participated in deliberation and collective decision-making activities at the Foundation showed a more elaborated understanding of the concept, associating it with listening, dialogue, and active participation, while those whose experiences were limited to compliance with pre-established norms restricted their understanding of democracy to mechanical compliance—doing homework, behaving well, not shouting.

The explanation of this pattern probably resides in the nature of the non-formal educational context. Unlike school, where the curriculum structures civic formation in predefined modules, Fundación Cultivarte operates as an open socialisation space where democracy is practised—or not practised—in spontaneous interactions among children. Dowden et al. (2024) demonstrate that integrated curricular approaches—those that link disciplinary content with real civic experiences—generate a deeper understanding of citizenship than isolated modules. The booklet designed in this research is inscribed in this logic: it is not a standalone module but a resource integrated into the Foundation's everyday activities, connecting the child's lived experience with guided reflection on democracy, duties, and rights.

It is worth asking whether this pattern is specific to Fundación Cultivarte or whether it would replicate in other peripheral community contexts. The single-site design—anchored in the Santa Marta neighbourhood of Pamplona—positions the findings within a specific socio-ecological context, not as universally generalisable claims. The thick description provided throughout the manuscript allows readers in analogous contexts to judge the transferability of the identified patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A natural extension of this work would be a multi-site participatory study comparing community peace education initiatives in two or more Colombian municipalities. This limitation is shared by comparable research in the field: Shih (2024) and Isaza-Gómez et al. (2025) adopt similar bounded designs and invoke transferability—not generalisation—as their standard of evidence.

Lind (2023) offers a framework that illuminates the ethical dimension of these findings by arguing that intelligent action is anchored in morality and facilitates moral development, which turns democratic educational intervention into an ethical imperative rather than one pedagogical option among others. From this perspective, the booklet's activities do not represent a desirable complement but a formative necessity for children growing up in contexts where opportunities for democratic participation are structurally limited. Wood (2025) reinforces this argument by analysing how democratic education operates in contexts of cultural diversity: effective student participation requires institutional conditions that transcend inclusive rhetoric. At Fundación Cultivarte, these conditions exist in an incipient form: the Foundation operates as a socialisation space where values and emotional regulation are taught, but episodes of conflict, aggression, and apathy persist that evidence the gap between institutional intention and everyday practice.

The second axis of discussion focuses on the relationship between experiential learning and the transformation of children's representations. The results of the duties category—the association of duties with school tasks and obedience without connection to social responsibility—clearly illustrate the Deweyan distinction between externally imposed duties and duties constructed from interest: children who participated in activities where duties functioned as centres of interest—linked to concrete situations in their life at the Foundation—showed a more elaborated understanding than those who received prescriptive instructions. Teslo et al. (2023), in a qualitative study with eleven teachers, demonstrate that Dewey's experiential pedagogy can transform educators' professional identities, suggesting that Deweyan principles operate not only in children but also in the educational agents who design the interventions.

Fonseca and Jovchelovitch (2024), in their longitudinal study on reconciliation in Colombia, show that dialogic narratives can generate counter-narratives that challenge the dominant social ethos in post-conflict contexts. The booklet in this research operates under an analogous principle: it is not limited to transmitting concepts of peace and democracy, but creates a narrative space where children can reinterpret their everyday experience in light of the principles of cooperation, dialogue, and shared responsibility. The exploration-reflection-action sequence structuring each module of the booklet replicates this dialogic logic: the child does not receive information but constructs meaning from their own experience, mediated by dialogue with peers and facilitators.

Una consideración metodológica acompaña estos hallazgos. La estructura predominantemente deductiva del análisis —organizada en torno a cinco categorías derivadas del marco Dewey-Galtung-Fals Borda— refleja el compromiso del estudio con la coherencia teórica, pero al mismo tiempo restringe la emergencia de categorías que los propios participantes podrían haber priorizado. Loganathan et al. (2023) abordan una tensión similar en su estudio con múltiples actores educativos al combinar codificación deductiva con espacio para temas emergentes. El presente diseño incorporó esta apertura inductiva; no obstante, futuras investigaciones podrían beneficiarse de un primer paso completamente inductivo —antes de aplicar los códigos teóricos— para clarificar si dimensiones temáticas adicionales emergen de los relatos de niños y educadores, construyendo sobre la estructura categorial aquí identificada.

The third axis interrogates the booklet's position within the field of alternative peace pedagogies. The findings of the peace culture category—the association of peace with interpersonal harmony alongside the persistence of aggressive behaviours in practice—align with Galtung's (1996) distinction between negative peace—the absence of direct violence—and positive peace—the presence of justice, equity, and structural conditions for coexistence. Children at Fundación Cultivarte did not describe peace as the mere absence of conflict but as a state of relational wellbeing where sharing, respect, and seeking forgiveness when mistakes are made are central, which coincides with the four axes of positive peace identified by Arystanbek et al. (2026) in schools in Kazakhstan and Finland.

Huxley (2025) proposes artistic practice as a form of research for peace, arguing that creative processes are not merely vehicles of expression but modes of knowledge construction. The booklet in this research shares this premise by incorporating visual elements, role plays, and drawing spaces that do not decorate the material but constitute legitimate pathways of inquiry and reflection for children aged 7 to 9. In the Colombian context, Isaza-Gómez et al. (2025) employ PAR in a sport-for-peace programme with children in Cali, demonstrating that Fals Borda's participatory tradition remains a relevant tool for educational research with children in territories affected by inequality. Our study extends this precedent to the domain of peace education in non-formal community contexts.

The PAR design, although epistemologically appropriate for the emancipatory aims of the study, places the researcher in a dual role as co-investigator and facilitator. This reflexivity challenge was managed through a systematic audit trail and a practice of reflexive writing in analytical memos (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), but cannot be fully resolved. Future collaborative designs incorporating more than one researcher-facilitator per cycle would strengthen inter-rater dependability. Saleh et al. (2025), in their case study on peace culture in Indonesian schools, illustrate how a research team can distribute participatory roles to mitigate this bias without abandoning the participatory logic.

Kester and Misiaszek (2025) warn that an exclusively psychologised approach to peace education—focused on individual attitudes and behaviours—risks ignoring the structural dimensions of conflict. The booklet designed in this study attempts to navigate this tension by anchoring experiential activities not only in individual child reflection but also in situations of collective cooperation and group decision-making, where the structural conditions of the peripheral context become visible and open to discussion. The Santa Marta neighbourhood

does not function in the booklet as a setting of deficiency but as a generative context that produces situated knowledge—a position consistent with Fals Borda's (1987) epistemology and with Almeida and Morais' (2025) defence of non-formal education in peripheral communities as a legitimate space of democratic formation.

El cuarto eje aborda las condiciones de confiabilidad de la investigación cualitativa con niños de primera infancia. Enworo (2023) argumenta que sin rigor metodológico la investigación pierde su utilidad y puede generar consecuencias dañinas si se adopta como base para políticas públicas. Esta advertencia resulta especialmente pertinente en un estudio como el presente, cuya cartilla aspira a ser un recurso transferible a otros contextos comunitarios. El diseño respondió a esta exigencia mediante la aplicación de los cuatro criterios de trustworthiness (Guba y Lincoln, 1985), la triangulación poblacional con tres fuentes, y un audit trail documentado en NVivo. Quintela Do Carmo et al. (2024) advierten que la voz infantil no es una verdad fija que el adulto extrae mediante preguntas, sino una construcción compleja mediada por la relación investigador-participante y por el contexto de la entrevista. Las técnicas adaptadas a la infancia utilizadas en este estudio —viñetas visuales, dibujos, juegos de roles— buscaron precisamente crear condiciones para que esa voz se expresara con autenticidad, no para que reprodujera las expectativas del investigador.

Two additional considerations delimit the scope of these results. The first concerns the age range: the study focuses on children aged 7 to 9, a range that—while it constitutes one of the original contributions of the study as an under-studied niche in the Latin American peace education literature—implies cognitive and linguistic heterogeneity within the group. Data obtained through interviews may capture varying levels of conceptual elaboration among participants. A longitudinal follow-up with the same cohort—examining whether the booklet produces lasting changes in democratic consciousness—would complement the cross-sectional evidence established here. The second consideration concerns the booklet as an original curricular artefact: its applicability beyond the community of origin will require independent validation. A natural extension of this work would be a quasi-experimental or mixed-methods evaluation of the booklet's implementation in classrooms with diverse sociodemographic profiles.

Shih (2024) validates the viability of qualitative designs with small samples—their study with eight participants in Taiwanese schools demonstrates that analytical depth can compensate for sample breadth when information power is adequate. Lim (2025) complements this position by emphasising that the quality of qualitative research is not measured by sample size but by the coherence between the question, design, and analytical execution. The present study is inscribed in this logic: the combination of a highly specific theoretical framework (Dewey-Galtung-Fals Borda), an intentional sample focused on a concrete context, and a reflexive analytical framework (RTA) configures a design whose information power is evaluated by the depth of dialogue between data and theory, not by the number of participants.

Together, these four discussion axes position the contribution of this study at the intersection of three fields: Deweyan experiential pedagogy, peace education in post-conflict contexts, and civic formation in Latin American early childhood. The pedagogical booklet is not an isolated product but the materialisation of a theoretical triad—Dewey, Galtung, Fals Borda—in a concrete, situated, co-constructed didactic resource. The limitations identified—single site, predominantly deductive categories, dual researcher role, limited age range, booklet without external validation—do not represent hidden weaknesses but conditions inherent to a PAR design that prioritised depth and participation over breadth and standardisation. Each of these conditions delimits the scope of the findings and, simultaneously, opens a future line of research.

Este estudio se propuso diseñar y fundamentar una cartilla pedagógica basada en la pedagogía experiencial de John Dewey para fortalecer la conciencia democrática en niños de 7 a 9 años de un contexto comunitario periférico en Pamplona, Colombia. Los resultados permiten sostener que los niños de esta franja etaria poseen representaciones incipientes pero significativas sobre democracia, deberes, derechos y convivencia pacífica, y que estas representaciones se construyen desde la experiencia cotidiana, no desde la instrucción abstracta. La cartilla —estructurada en cinco ejes temáticos con actividades de exploración, reflexión y acción— traduce la tríada teórica Dewey-Galtung-Fals Borda en un recurso pedagógico tangible que responde a la necesidad de materiales específicos para la implementación de la Cátedra de la Paz en contextos no formales de primera infancia.

From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrates that the articulation between experiential pedagogy, structural peace theory, and participatory action research is not only conceptually coherent but operationally viable when applied to early civic formation in peripheral territories. The booklet constitutes a Product of Social Appropriation of Knowledge that goes beyond disseminating educational theory by converting it into an

instrument of social transformation accessible to community foundations, teachers, and facilitators working with children in conditions of exclusion. Its design is adaptable: the concrete situations, role plays, and visual vignettes can be modified to reflect the particularities of other Colombian and Latin American peripheral contexts without altering the pedagogical structure that underpins them.

Three future research lines derive from this work. The first is the evaluation of the booklet's impact through a quasi-experimental or mixed-methods design measuring changes in children's democratic consciousness before and after implementation. The second is the replication of the study across multiple sites—community foundations in other Colombian municipalities—to strengthen the analytical basis of the propositions formulated here. The third is the incorporation of a completely inductive first step in the analysis, allowing the identification of thematic dimensions not anticipated by the theoretical framework. The conditions are in place for Dewey's experiential pedagogy, articulated with Galtung's peace theory and Fals Borda's participatory tradition, to continue generating concrete responses to the civic formation of children growing up in the urban peripheries of Colombia.

Declarations

Conflicts of interest: the authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study on children's understanding of democracy at Fundación Cultivarte [HALLAZGO_CAT1_RESUMEN] reveal a pattern that deserves attention: los niños de 7 a 9 años no carecen de nociones democráticas, pero las construyen desde su experiencia cotidiana —el juego, los acuerdos entre pares, las reglas del espacio compartido— y no desde categorías abstractas. Este hallazgo es coherente con la tesis deweyana de que la democracia se aprende viviéndola, no memorizándola (Dewey, 1916). Body et al. (2024), en su estudio con escuelas irlandesas, sostienen que la educación democrática exige pensamiento crítico, acción colectiva y compromiso político genuino, no mera amabilidad o participación voluntaria superficial. Nuestros datos confirman esta distinción: children who participated in deliberation and collective decision-making activities at the Foundation showed [EVIDENCIA_DELIBERACIÓN], while those whose experiences were limited to compliance with pre-established norms [EVIDENCIA_NORMAS].

The explanation of this pattern probably resides in the nature of the non-formal educational context. Unlike school, where the curriculum structures civic formation in predefined modules, Fundación Cultivarte operates as an open socialisation space where democracy is practised—or not practised—in spontaneous interactions among children. Dowden et al. (2024) demonstrate that integrated curricular approaches—those that link disciplinary content with real civic experiences—generate a deeper understanding of citizenship than isolated modules. The booklet designed in this research is inscribed in this logic: it is not a standalone module but a resource integrated into the Foundation's everyday activities, connecting the child's lived experience with guided reflection on democracy, duties, and rights.

It is worth asking whether this pattern is specific to Fundación Cultivarte or whether it would replicate in other peripheral community contexts. The single-site design—anchored in the Santa Marta neighbourhood of Pamplona—positions the findings within a specific socio-ecological context, not as universally generalisable claims. The thick description provided throughout the manuscript allows readers in analogous contexts to judge the transferability of the identified patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A natural extension of this work would be a multi-site participatory study comparing community peace education initiatives in two or more Colombian municipalities. This limitation is shared by comparable research in the field: Shih (2024) and Isaza-Gómez et al.

(2025) adopt similar bounded designs and invoke transferability—not generalisation—as their standard of evidence.

Lind (2023) ofrece un marco que ilumina la dimensión ética de estos hallazgos al argumentar que la acción inteligente está anclada en la moralidad y facilita el desarrollo moral, lo cual convierte la intervención educativa democrática en un imperativo ético, no en una opción pedagógica entre otras. Desde esta perspectiva, las actividades de la cartilla no representan un complemento deseable sino una necesidad formativa para niños que crecen en contextos donde las oportunidades de participación democrática son estructuralmente limitadas. Wood (2025) refuerza este argumento al analizar cómo la educación democrática opera en contextos de diversidad cultural: la participación estudiantil efectiva requiere condiciones institucionales que trasciendan la retórica inclusiva. At Fundación Cultivarte, [DESCRIPCIÓN_CONDICIONES_INSTITUCIONALES].

El segundo eje de discusión se centra en la relación entre aprendizaje experiencial y transformación de las representaciones infantiles. The results of the duties category [HALLAZGO_CAT3_RESUMEN] clearly illustrate the Deweyan distinction entre deberes impuestos externamente y deberes contruidos desde el interés: los niños que participaron en actividades donde los deberes funcionaron como centros de interés —vinculados a situaciones concretas de su vida en la Fundación— mostraron una comprensión más elaborada que aquellos que recibieron instrucciones prescriptivas. Teslo et al. (2023), en un estudio cualitativo con once docentes, demuestran que la pedagogía experiencial de Dewey puede transformar las identidades profesionales de los educadores, lo que sugiere que los principios deweyanos operan no solo en niños sino también en los agentes educativos que diseñan las intervenciones.

Fonseca and Jovchelovitch (2024), in their longitudinal study on reconciliation in Colombia, show that dialogic narratives can generate counter-narratives that challenge the dominant social ethos in post-conflict contexts. The booklet in this research operates under an analogous principle: it is not limited to transmitting concepts of peace and democracy, but creates a narrative space where children can reinterpret their everyday experience in light of the principles of cooperation, dialogue, and shared responsibility. The exploration-reflection-action sequence structuring each module of the booklet replicates this dialogic logic: the child does not receive information but constructs meaning from their own experience, mediated by dialogue with peers and facilitators.

A methodological consideration accompanies these findings. The predominantly deductive structure of the analysis—organised around five categories derived from the Dewey-Galtung-Fals Borda framework—reflects the study's commitment to theoretical coherence, but at the same time restricts the emergence of categories that the participants themselves might have prioritised. Loganathan et al. (2023) address a similar tension in their study with multiple educational actors by combining deductive coding with space for emergent themes. The present design incorporated this inductive openness; however, future research could benefit from a completely inductive first step—before applying the theoretical codes—to clarify whether additional thematic dimensions emerge from the accounts of children and educators, building on the categorical structure identified here.

El tercer eje interroga la posición de la cartilla dentro del campo de las pedagogías alternativas de paz. Los hallazgos de la categoría de cultura de paz se alinean con la distinción de Galtung (1996) entre paz negativa —ausencia de violencia directa— y paz positiva —presencia de justicia, equidad y condiciones estructurales para la convivencia. Children at Fundación Cultivarte did not describe peace as the mere absence of conflict but as [DESCRIPCIÓN_PAZ_POSITIVA], lo que coincide con los cuatro ejes de paz positiva identificados por Arystanbek et al. (2026) en escuelas de Kazajistán y Finlandia.

Huxley (2025) proposes artistic practice as a form of research for peace, arguing that creative processes are not merely vehicles of expression but modes of knowledge construction. The booklet in this research shares this premise by incorporating visual elements, role plays, and drawing spaces that do not decorate the material but constitute legitimate pathways of inquiry and reflection for children aged 7 to 9. In the Colombian context, Isaza-Gómez et al. (2025) employ PAR in a sport-for-peace programme with children in Cali, demonstrating that Fals Borda's participatory tradition remains a relevant tool for educational research with children in territories affected by inequality. Our study extends this precedent to the domain of peace education in non-formal community contexts.

El diseño of PAR, aunque epistemológicamente apropiado para los fines emancipatorios del estudio, sitúa a la investigadora en un doble rol de co-investigadora y facilitadora. Este desafío de reflexividad fue gestionado mediante un audit trail sistemático y una práctica de escritura reflexiva en memos analíticos (Guba y Lincoln, 1985), pero no puede resolverse por completo. Futuros diseños colaborativos que incorporen más de

un investigador-facilitador por ciclo fortalecerían la dependabilidad inter-evaluador. Saleh et al. (2025), en su estudio de caso sobre cultura de paz en escuelas indonesias, ilustran cómo un equipo de investigación puede distribuir los roles participativos para mitigar este sesgo sin renunciar a la lógica participativa.

Kester and Misiaszek (2025) warn that an exclusively psychologised approach to peace education—focused on individual attitudes and behaviours—risks ignoring the structural dimensions of conflict. The booklet designed in this study attempts to navigate this tension by anchoring experiential activities not only in individual child reflection but also in situations of collective cooperation and group decision-making, where the structural conditions of the peripheral context become visible and open to discussion. The Santa Marta neighbourhood does not function in the booklet as a setting of deficiency but as a generative context that produces situated knowledge—a position consistent with Fals Borda's (1987) epistemology and with Almeida and Morais' (2025) defence of non-formal education in peripheral communities as a legitimate space of democratic formation.

The fourth axis addresses the trustworthiness conditions of qualitative research with young children. Enworo (2023) argues that without methodological rigour research loses its utility and can generate harmful consequences if adopted as a basis for public policy. This warning is particularly pertinent in a study such as the present one, whose booklet aspires to be a transferable resource for other community contexts. The design responded to this requirement through application of the four trustworthiness criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), population triangulation with three sources, and an audit trail documented in NVivo. Quintela Do Carmo et al. (2024) warn that children's voices are not a fixed truth that adults extract through questions, but a complex construction mediated by the researcher-participant relationship and the interview context. The child-adapted techniques used in this study—visual vignettes, drawings, role plays—sought precisely to create conditions for that voice to be expressed authentically, not to reproduce the researcher's expectations.

Two additional considerations delimit the scope of these results. The first concerns the age range: the study focuses on children aged 7 to 9, a range that—while it constitutes one of the original contributions of the study as an under-studied niche in the Latin American peace education literature—implies cognitive and linguistic heterogeneity within the group. Data obtained through interviews may capture varying levels of conceptual elaboration among participants. A longitudinal follow-up with the same cohort—examining whether the booklet produces lasting changes in democratic consciousness—would complement the cross-sectional evidence established here. The second consideration concerns the booklet as an original curricular artefact: its applicability beyond the community of origin will require independent validation. A natural extension of this work would be a quasi-experimental or mixed-methods evaluation of the booklet's implementation in classrooms with diverse sociodemographic profiles.

Shih (2024) valida la viabilidad de diseños cualitativos con muestras reducidas —su estudio con ocho participantes en escuelas taiwanesas demuestra que la profundidad analítica puede compensar la amplitud muestral cuando el information power es adecuado. Lim (2025) complementa esta posición al enfatizar que la calidad de la investigación cualitativa no se mide por el tamaño de la muestra sino por la coherencia entre pregunta, diseño y ejecución analítica. El presente estudio se inscribe en esta lógica: la combinación de un marco teórico altamente específico (Dewey-Galtung-Fals Borda), una muestra intencional enfocada en un contexto concreto, y un referente analítico reflexivo (ATR) configura un diseño cuyo information power se evalúa por la profundidad del diálogo entre datos y teoría, no por la cantidad de participantes.

Together, these four discussion axes position the contribution of this study at the intersection of three fields: Deweyan experiential pedagogy, peace education in post-conflict contexts, and civic formation in Latin American early childhood. The pedagogical booklet is not an isolated product but the materialisation of a theoretical triad—Dewey, Galtung, Fals Borda—in a concrete, situated, co-constructed didactic resource. The limitations identified—single site, predominantly deductive categories, dual researcher role, limited age range, booklet without external validation—do not represent hidden weaknesses but conditions inherent to a PAR design that prioritised depth and participation over breadth and standardisation. Each of these conditions delimits the scope of the findings and, simultaneously, opens a future line of research.

This study aimed to design and ground a pedagogical booklet based on John Dewey's experiential pedagogy to strengthen democratic consciousness among children aged 7 to 9 in a peripheral community context in Pamplona, Colombia. The results support the claim that children in this age range hold incipient but significant representations of democracy, duties, rights, and peaceful coexistence, and that these representations are constructed from everyday experience, not from abstract instruction. The booklet—structured around five thematic axes with exploration, reflection, and action activities—translates the Dewey-

Galtung-Fals Borda theoretical triad into a tangible pedagogical resource responding to the need for specific materials for implementing the Cátedra de la Paz in non-formal early childhood contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrates that the articulation between experiential pedagogy, structural peace theory, and participatory action research is not only conceptually coherent but operationally viable when applied to early civic formation in peripheral territories. The booklet constitutes a Product of Social Appropriation of Knowledge that goes beyond disseminating educational theory by converting it into an instrument of social transformation accessible to community foundations, teachers, and facilitators working with children in conditions of exclusion. Its design is adaptable: the concrete situations, role plays, and visual vignettes can be modified to reflect the particularities of other Colombian and Latin American peripheral contexts without altering the pedagogical structure that underpins them.

Three future research lines derive from this work. The first is the evaluation of the booklet's impact through a quasi-experimental or mixed-methods design measuring changes in children's democratic consciousness before and after implementation. The second is the replication of the study across multiple sites—community foundations in other Colombian municipalities—to strengthen the analytical basis of the propositions formulated here. The third is the incorporation of a completely inductive first step in the analysis, allowing the identification of thematic dimensions not anticipated by the theoretical framework. The conditions are in place for Dewey's experiential pedagogy, articulated with Galtung's peace theory and Fals Borda's participatory tradition, to continue generating concrete responses to the civic formation of children growing up in the urban peripheries of Colombia.

Declarations

Conflicts of interest: the authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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