EDITORIAL

Education and climate activism: Youth democratic practices and imaginations towards a common world

Educação e ativismo climático: Práticas e imaginações democráticas juvenis para um mundo comum

Éducation et militantisme en matière de climat: Pratiques et imaginaires démocratiques des jeunes pour un monde commun

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Young people around the world have become mobilized by the urgency to tackle the climate crisis. Increasingly gaining momentum, youth activist movements have been calling everyone's attention to governmental inaction regarding the climate crisis and to the shortcomings of institutional political agreements (European Youth Forum, 2019). While for some parts of the general public (mostly in the Global-North, which has been less affected by) the consequences of climate change may still seem a somewhat distant, abstract and dystopian phenomenon, as they become more widely felt, the harder it will be to reverse the problem (Giddens, 2009). Faced with the paradox of having a problem that may seem 'not quite severe enough' while aiming at triggering generalized motivation for individual and collective change, young generations have been defying 'adultist biases' and mobilizing among themselves in new ways and dimensions. From weekly strikes to street demonstrations, disobedience and performative acts, youngsters strive to forge citizenship in diverse ways, including new political repertoires and practices relying largely on visual imagery, social media, community-based initiatives, and prefigurative modes of organization. Youth has turned out to include skillful claimants, adopting new strategies, tools, and repertoires of action to get across their messages about the urgency of structural transformation (O'Brien et al., 2018). Taking many shapes and

forms, in and out of school, youngsters' practices and choices toward the creation of a new sense of urgency are unavoidably anchored on how they imagine and reclaim a common world.

Beyond environmental messages, intersectional issues of social justice (social class, global North-South disparities, ethnicity, gender, age) often root for climate justice struggles. Thus, climate change education, as pleaded by UNESCO (2015), breaks formal walls, expanding from school curricula to community projects and other public spaces (offline and online; Monroe et al., 2019). Media research accounting for the delegitimization maneuvers of climate protests (Bergmann & Ossewarde, 2020; Jacobsson, 2021) calls for an understanding of how resistance and counter-power narratives emerge. Indeed, school climate strikes seem to radically challenge the divisions between education and activism: by going on strike, youngsters repurpose their role as students towards an active role as citizens, capable of contesting the governments' priorities and unveiling the system's contradictions (Mattheis, 2020). Surely, these experiences operate in between the individual and the collective arenas, making formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts highly permeable to one another. Education on climate, democracy, politics and citizenship unfolds by learning with and teaching others (e.g., families, teachers, school authorities, and adult stakeholders), by linking real-life knowledge with school contents, and by building bridges but also managing tensions between different contexts.

Sociological approaches to the climate crisis have incorporated many issues – such as conceptualizations of precarity (Harvey, 2016), justice (Skillington, 2015), and children's rights (McGillivray, 2017) – and spurring debates towards sociological engagements with climate change that might address dimensions related to materiality, politics, knowledge and practices (Elliott, 2018). Likewise, psychological research often looks at aspects linked with the individual dimensions of the causes, consequences and responses to climate change (Swim et al., 2011), but also at the collective dimensions of climate action (Barth et al., 2021), and the empowerment processes of marginalized communities in the face of climate injustices (Barnwell et al., 2020). In the same vein, the field of education has been producing accounts of how climate change is differently framed in school curricula (Monroe et al., 2019; Slimani et al.), and also about the pedagogical processes involved in sense-making and political acting over climate crisis (Biswas & Mattheis, 2022; White et al., 2022).

This Special Issue is motivated by the importance of crossing disciplinary boundaries when approaching different contexts, groups, processes and events as part of an endeavor to understand how people negotiate and craft common grounds while dealing with the messiness of democratic processes. As Arendt (1958) emphasizes, living together is about conflictual, yet binding, dimensions that bring us together and separate us at the same time. An understanding of democracy as a shared mode of living is what is at stake also when Dewey (1916) argues that "the devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact" (p. 30) – even more than the cognitive dispositions to participate in (and thereby legitimating) representative democratic systems. A

more recent echo of these positions can be found in Thévenot's (2015) formulation that the crucial question of current societies is how we manage life together despite our irrevocable differences – how people build commonality in the plural to make social life, and democracy, possible. Ultimately, these three viewpoints form a basis for addressing the special issue's key focus on 'youth democratic practices and imaginations towards a common world'.

Democracy, citizenship and political participation are the central dimensions of the work of the three Guest-Editors and the guiding tenets of this Special Issue. Broad research efforts often require pushing epistemological boundaries and adopting plural methodological toolboxes. The articles composing this Special Issue encompass diverse research fields and methods – ranging from ethnography and biographic narratives to media analysis, photovoice and community interventions – in different countries (France, Portugal, Spain, United States and Canada).

The eight articles composing this Special Issue can be thought of according to four main thematic blocks: i) Practices and representations of the activist climate movement; ii) Rural and urban engagements towards sustainable futures; iii) Empowering children and young people to address climate change iv) Children's environmental citizenship in and out of the school community.

i) Practices and representations of the activist climate movement

In the first article, Camille Abajo-Sanchez discusses the socialization processes operating in civil disobedience training activities of the Extinction Rebellion (XR) in Paris, France. Based on ethnographic research, the training process of first-time activists is analyzed, offering valuable insights into the pathways of political involvement developed by a movement that is present in many countries and is one of the backbones of today's climate activism. The interplay between the ritualistic undertones of the training and the individual members' social origin, cultural capital and religious socialization shed light on the 'institutional rites' involved in processes that, although mainly symbolic, are instrumental in creating collective political identity. The rich descriptions of the training dynamics contribute to understanding the processes of embodiment and acculturation towards becoming a radical climate activist, resembling Goffmanian 'depersonalization' techniques and Bourdieusian 'distinction' tactics.

While Camille Abajo-Sanchez provides *inside knowledge* of the climate activist movement, in the second article, Claudia Almeida presents the media side of the climate movement: how climate activism is covered and represented in one of the most widely circulated newspapers in Portugal. Drawing on the concept of protest paradigm, articulated by the communication field, newspaper articles are quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed to assess media practices of (de)legitimization of activists and their claims. Climate activism is mostly portrayed in a good

light: activists´ voices and stands are forefronted, as well as the reasons motivating the protests, with claims related to fossil fuel exploration standing out. Contrary to what has been reported by international studies, the ´student' profile, rather than the 'nuisance', is the most prevalent representational frame, with school children emerging as political actors in the media field. Despite this, a tendency towards personalization (as the journalistic articles focus on activists' life stories) and the absence of radical profiles may signal the risk of politically emptying the public debate and overemphasizing certain narratives of what a 'good activist' means.

ii) Rural and urban engagements toward sustainable futures

The third article, by Jaqueline Carrilho, Anderson Moser and Marília Campos, presents a case study developed in a rural community in the Spanish region of Galicia, where an intervention project of environmental education was carried out to support transition pathways towards decarbonized lifestyles. Focusing on biographic narratives, the article explores how the global context of climate emergency is experienced at a local-community level by rural and poor women in a place from which men were absent due to emigration or military conscription. By narrating past memories – stories of sacrifices, but also of resistance and of creative use of natural resources – the participating women reflect on their everyday lives: stories of the community, habits and traditions, and place attachment, which are ultimately re-signified towards the projection of climate sustainable futures.

As revealed by Sandrine Simon in the fourth article, changes in individual and collective ways of living in response to climate change are also taking place in urban spaces. Here, the author examines modes of activism related to urban agriculture by mapping initiatives based on the cases of Bristol (UK) and Lisbon (Portugal), which were awarded the title of green capitals by the European Commission. While proximal experiences of food insecurity propel citizens to initiate suitable practices (e.g., urban gardens), more disruptive approaches encompass issues of justice and democracy in advocating alternative systems (e.g., circular economy projects). Interestingly, participatory approaches to urban planning and governance seem to progressively go beyond tokenistic public consultations, bridging the immediate needs of citizens and the claims made by disruptive dissenters with local political authorities. Diverse voices, languages and modes of action are, then, crucially shaping sustainable and resilient cities.

iii) Empowering children and young people to address climate change

In the fifth article, Stephanie Lam and Carlie Trott examine an after-school program named "Science, Camera, Action! (SCA)", which uses photovoice to explore children's meaning-making

processes and facilitate children-led action around climate change issues. The SCA program involved 55 children from three different settings in the Western U.S. and consisted of three core elements: educational activities, photovoice discussions, and local action projects. Drawing on a participatory action framework, this study challenges traditional top-down educational practices in developing climate change knowledge, by demonstrating how photovoice, as a bottom-up approach, can facilitate not only learning and caring about climate change but also climate action. Indeed, as discussed by the authors, photovoice has the potential to empower children to act on climate change-related issues, facilitating their engagement with transformative action in their families and local communities.

Likewise, Beth Grant and Robert Case describe a mixed-method study with undergraduate students in Southern Ontario, Canada, involving a survey focusing on eco-anxiety, a photovoice activity, and a focus group discussion. Photovoice in this article is considered as a tool for data collection and simultaneously an intervention approach with the potential to facilitate youth mental health. The authors described a set of photovoice activities involving young people's contact with nature, the representation of their climate anxiety through arts, and discussions around their feelings and experiences. Based on young people's accounts, the authors concluded that participating in photovoice activities may improve youth's mental health, well-being, and sense of empowerment. Interestingly, the article adopts a non-pathologizing approach to climate-related mental health issues, discussing the importance and the lack of responses to support undergraduates in environmentally-related programs of study.

iv) Children's environmental citizenship in and out of the school community

Drawing on the potential of participatory research methodologies, in the seventh article, Clementina Rios, Alison Neilson and Isabel Menezes use the community profiling approach to actively promote meaningful opportunities for children's engagement with climate issues. Taking a local forest as a setting of hands-on learning experiences and as a locus of action, 10-year-old school children acted as researchers of their own community, identifying local environmental problems and community resources to tackle them. Uneased by problems ranging from forest pollution to the extinction of pollinating insects, the participating children ended up making a demonstration, organizing clean-up actions and writing letters to local associations and authorities. Children's collective discussions, made on their own terms, unveiled central issues such as intergenerational justice, interspecies inequality and the dominance of anthropocentric views of sustainability. Participatory research practices not only entail methodological principles but also encompass epistemological positionings: both about knowledge co-creation and the empowerment of groups whose voices' resonance on the public sphere is often downplayed.

Both the previous and the following article open up avenues for looking closer at the agentic potential of children in practicing their environmental citizenship in and out of school. In the eighth article, Ana Moreira and Nuno Antunes depart from a critical assessment of the role of school education in addressing climate change and show that alternative – more participatory – pedagogical practices are possible. In-between the school and its broader community, grounded in an interdisciplinary approach and mixing online and offline contexts, youth-led projects were developed: an Escape Room project ('Save our planet with Math'), a Bike Club ('Bike Is Key [to] Earth') and a Blog ('Speaking of Math...'). Learning math in a didactic way was the ignition and climate change was the motivation behind the engagement of almost 90 children and early teens. Observations of the activities, questionnaires with participants and interviews with school board members show a growing recognition of the potential of community-based and youth-led schooling activities in fostering climate education.

This Special Issue as a whole showcases the creative and energetic efforts of the young to build more sustainable common futures. Their 'imaginations', involving both envisioning new worlds and instituting them (see Castoriadis, 1994) are brought to (and shape) our public spheres and, ultimately, life together. While the effects continue to be nascent in many contexts and many institutionalized features of democratic societies take more time to change than the young actors would have patience for facing the urgency of the climate crises, we can see here a glimpse of a democratic life that is and will be coordinated and lived differently from today in the future.

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