

breaking boundaries: children activist as epistemic agents within contours of epistemic marginalisation

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abstract

The article delves into the realm of child environmental activism, portraying it as a concerted response aimed at challenging the prevailing social and political *status quo*, which systematically underestimates the role of children in decision-making within political and social spheres. It highlights the paramount importance of the epistemological framework that encompasses children's experiences, emphasising how their exclusion from political and social discourse leads to epistemic marginalisation. This exclusion not only prevents children from assuming the role of epistemic agents but also deprives them of agency and perpetuates existing inequalities. From a philosophical perspective, the article proposes a thorough analysis of children's epistemic agency, introducing the concept of 'epistemic capability'. It argues that, despite their social marginalisation, knowledgeable children can equip themselves with epistemic resources to interpret their reality and effect change. Furthermore, it posits that environmental activism plays a crucial role as an epistemic resource for children, facilitating the expression of their ideas, challenging dominant narratives, and addressing environmental and social issues head-on. The article emphasises the transformative potential of activism as an epistemic resource, enabling substantive participation and empowering children to navigate and transcend such marginalised circumstances. In conclusion, it highlights how child environmental activism not only challenges the *status quo* but also provides children with crucial tools for their development as epistemic and social agents, promoting significant change in power dynamics and in the fight for social and environmental justice.

keywords: environmental activism; children; epistemic agency; epistemic marginalisation; epistemic capability.

rompiendo fronteras: infancias activistas como agentes epistémicos dentro de los límites de la marginación epistémica

resumen:

El artículo profundiza en el ámbito del activismo ambiental infantil, tratándolo como una respuesta concertada destinada a desafiar el *status quo* social y político predominante, que sistemáticamente subestima el papel de los niños y las niñas en la toma de decisiones dentro de las esferas política y social. Se destaca la importancia primordial del marco epistemológico que engloba las experiencias de los niños y las niñas, resaltando cómo su exclusión del discurso político y social conduce a la marginación epistémica. Esta exclusión no solo impide que los niños y las niñas asuman el papel de agentes epistémicos, sino que también les priva de agencia y perpetúa las desigualdades existentes. Desde un punto de vista filosófico, el artículo propone un análisis exhaustivo de la agencia epistémica de los niños y las niñas, introduciendo el concepto de «capacidad epistémica». Plantea que, a pesar de su marginación social, los niños y las niñas que poseen conocimientos pueden equiparse con recursos epistémicos para interpretar su realidad y efectuar cambios. Además, sostiene que el activismo ambiental desempeña un papel crucial como recurso

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epistémico para los niños y las niñas, facilitando la expresión de sus ideas, cuestionen las narrativas dominantes y aborden de frente los problemas ambientales y sociales. Se hace hincapié en el potencial transformador del activismo como recurso epistémico, que permite una participación sustantiva y empodera a los niños y las niñas para navegar y trascender tales circunstancias marginadas. En conclusión, se resalta cómo el activismo ambiental infantil no solo desafía el *status quo*, sino que también ofrece a los niños y las niñas herramientas cruciales para su desarrollo como agentes epistémicos y sociales, promoviendo un cambio significativo en las dinámicas de poder y en la lucha por la justicia social y ambiental.

palabras clave: activismo ambiental; niños; agencia epistémica; marginación epistémica; capacidad epistémica.

rompendo fronteiras: crianças ativistas como agentes epistêmicos dentro dos contornos da marginalização epistêmica

resumo

Este artigo se aprofunda no campo do ativismo ambiental infantil, retratando-o como uma resposta conjunta que visa desafiar o *status quo* social e político predominante, o qual sistematicamente subestima o papel das crianças na tomada de decisões nas esferas políticas e sociais. Logo, destaca-se a importância primordial do marco epistemológico que engloba as experiências das crianças, enfatizando como excluí-las do discurso político e social conduz à marginalização epistêmica. Essa exclusão não só as impede que assumam o papel de agentes epistêmicos, como também as priva de agência e perpetua as desigualdades existentes. De um ponto de vista filosófico, o artigo propõe uma análise minuciosa da agência epistêmica das crianças, introduzindo o conceito de “capacidade epistêmica”. Afirma-se que, apesar da marginalização social, crianças que possuem conhecimentos podem se equipar com recursos epistêmicos para interpretar suas realidades e realizar mudanças. Além disso, considera-se que o ativismo ambiental desempenha um papel fundamental como recurso epistémico para elas, facilitando a expressão de suas ideias, o questionamento das narrativas dominantes e o enfrentamento direto aos problemas ambientais e sociais. Nesse sentido, enfatiza-se o potencial transformador do ativismo como recurso epistémico, permitindo uma participação substantiva e empoderando as crianças para navegar e transcender tais circunstâncias marginalizadas. Em conclusão, destaca-se como o ativismo ambiental infantil não apenas desafia o *status quo*, mas também oferece às crianças ferramentas fundamentais para seu desenvolvimento como agentes epistêmicos e sociais, promovendo mudanças significativas nas dinâmicas de poder e na luta pela justiça social e ambiental.

palavras-chave: ativismo ambiental; crianças; agência epistêmica; marginalização epistêmica; capacidade epistêmica.



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introduction

Children's² environmental activism represents a form of counterculture, aiming to surpass the current social model that fails to acknowledge the significance of children actively participating in decision-making processes. The epistemological framework, grounded in the integration of their lived experiences, backgrounds, and unique narratives, commonly referred to as 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1988), holds particular significance in the internal dynamics of decision-making. Its exclusion from political and social discourse results in a form of epistemic marginalisation (Simpson, 2021). This marginalisation entails a deliberate lack of understanding of the intricacies of the experiences of marginalised groups, such as children, compounded by the absence of conceptual frameworks elucidating the meaning of these experiences. Additionally, it encompasses a lack of recognition or refusal to acknowledge the concepts utilised by these groups to comprehend their reality. When individuals in positions of power (e.g., adults) possess an unfair advantage in shaping interpretations of children and seek to make them comprehensible using inappropriate meanings, they contribute to what Miranda Fricker (2007) terms epistemic injustice. This denies children the ability to be epistemic agents, perpetuating disempowerment rather than empowerment, impeding their capacity to make informed decisions, actively engage in civic life, and grasp the complexities of the challenges they confront. Furthermore, it perpetuates inequality and reinforces preconceived notions and stereotypes (Carel & Györfy, 2014; Kosko et al., 2022).

Within this context, this article emphasises the importance of examining, from a philosophical standpoint, the recognition of the epistemic agency of children activism. Through the lens of the 'capability approach' posited by Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000), it is introduced the category of 'epistemic capability' proposed by Miranda Fricker (2015). This premise is grounded in the

² This paper broadly refers to children as young people under the age of 18, following the definition in Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

notion that marginally situated knowers, though unable to immediately escape their social position, can acquire epistemic resources – i.e., tools, concepts, and methods utilised by knowers to comprehend their experiences and develop knowledge – that reveal aspects not apparent from that position. To acquire robust knowledge, knowers must utilise their epistemic resources to interpret their world and utilise their experiences to enrich those resources. When tension arises between lived experience and the resources employed to understand it, it becomes necessary to recalibrate or devise new resources until the tension is resolved. This process can foster new avenues of knowledge and furnish new tools for organising and making sense of experience. Within this framework, I situate the concept of activism, which, as various studies suggest, serves as a mechanism for learning (Kapit, 2023; Majumdar & Mooij, 2016) and possesses significant potential to encourage substantive participation by children (Tisdall & Cuevas-Parra, 2022). I regard activism as an epistemic resource capable of providing marginalised groups or collectives, such as children-led environmental movements, with tools to comprehend the experience of being unable to make sense of certain aspects of the world due to exclusion or marginalisation, while also furnishing avenues for children to articulate their ideas, interrogate, and effect change (Tisdall & Cuevas-Parra, 2022).

a conceptual framework on children activism

Activism often stems from the desire to challenge entrenched traditional political and social structures that marginalised groups such as women, people of colour, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and those who are disadvantaged. Consequently, activism has demonstrated its capacity to tackle marginalisation, denounce oppression, and bolster minorities and underrepresented groups in asserting their presence, questioning, or rejecting prevailing viewpoints, and offering more inclusive perspectives (Tisdall & Cuevas-Parra, 2022). According to Jessica Taft and Claire O’Kane (2023), prior to 2018, few academic or grey literature discussions on child participation referred to ‘activism’ or ‘activists’ when describing children’s political engagement, preferring terms like advocacy or active citizenship. However, with increased media coverage, child activism has come to be recognised

as a form of participation (Taft & O’Kane, 2023), and the term ‘activism’ is now embraced by a widening array of children, child-focused organisations, and other media and political bodies (Tisdall & Cuevas-Parra, 2022).

In recent years, there has been a surge in research aimed at understanding and conceptualising children activism³, although there remains no single or definitive definition of what children activism entails. Nonetheless, through a robust body of studies, we can begin to craft a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. We can begin by situating activism based on its motivation. According to researchers Jerusha Conner and Sonia Rosen (2016, p. 2), activism encompasses acts that not only challenge prevailing norms and values but also strive to reconstruct existing power dynamics that often perpetuate inequality and marginalisation. Their conceptualisation of activism emphasises the transformative potential of these initiatives and highlights the intention to disrupt and reshape the social fabric towards a more equitable and just society. Similarly, Kay M. Tisdall and Patricio Cuevas-Parra (2022, p. 793) offer a nuanced perspective on the label of activism, defining it as a manifestation that transcends the realm of conventional or routine actions, rooted in a noble cause that not only captures the imagination but also compels people to act for positive change. Furthermore, they underscore the inherently social and collective nature of activism, driven by unwavering passion and commitment that challenges social norms and existing power structures governing decision-making processes. Building on this discourse, Judith Bessant et al., (2021, p. 25) shed light on the intricate emotional landscape that propels individuals towards activism. They argue that activists are often motivated by a complex interplay of moral emotions such as disgust, empathy, and solidarity with oppressed and marginalised groups. These emotions serve as a moral compass, guiding their actions and inspiring them to challenge the status quo in favour of a more inclusive and just society. To this regard, the authors highlight the profound

³ It’s noteworthy that child activism remains largely unexplored in Latin America and the Caribbean. As noted by Sally Neas, Ann Ward, and Benjamin Bowman (2022), an examination of the current gap in climate activism literature reveals a lack of attention towards the Global South and marginalised communities worldwide. This oversight not only underscores the prevalence of data and theories centred around the Global North and more privileged communities but also signifies a limitation in research on youth activism and marginalisation.

role emotions play in driving people to action, transforming them from passive observers to active agents of change.

Building upon these conceptualisations, Kay M. Tisdall and Christina McMellon (2020) present a different perspective on activism, emphasising its spatial dimension. They argue that activists do not passively wait to be granted spaces but actively occupy and seize them, asserting their presence and demanding their voices to be heard. This assertion of agency and resistance against marginalisation is a defining feature of activism, reflecting a refusal to be silenced or relegated to the periphery. To this regard, research by Stacy Kosko et al. (2022) provides valuable insight by identifying the primary barriers faced by child activists worldwide. These barriers, including age-based hierarchies⁴, weak communication between different generational groups, the criminalisation of youth activism, and discrimination, diminish activists' power and silence their message by undermining their ability to influence the dominant narrative.

To this regard, viewing activism as a source of participation is pertinent. Jessica Taft and Claire O'Kane (2023) provide valuable insights into the ways children engage in collective action to pursue their shared vision of a better world. They compellingly argue that children's activism transcends traditional age boundaries and challenges the prevailing notion that children are passive recipients of adult decisions. On the contrary, child activists employ innovative strategies and tactics that defy societal expectations, harness their collective power, and work to dismantle oppressive systems that disproportionately affect them. Their activism not only challenges existing power structures but also seeks to empower children, amplify their voices, and ensure their genuine participation in shaping their own

⁴ According to Manfred Liebel (2014a, pp. 127–132) age discrimination, whether implicit or justified by the notion of minority status, reflects a view of childhood where children are inherently considered inferior to adults, resulting in lower social status and competencies. This phenomenon, though not always conscious, is used to maintain adult superiority and postpone equality with children. While the need to protect children is recognised, the idea of 'civilising' them through education or behavioural norms is also upheld. Age discrimination is known as 'adulthoodism', which entails the abuse of power by adults over young people, based on the premise of adult superiority and their right to act upon young people without their consent. This term is also used to describe the oppression exerted by adults over children and young people, comparing it to racism and sexism. Other terms such as 'adult privilege', 'adulthoodarchy' and 'adult centrism' have been proposed to describe this type of discrimination.



lives and communities. In this regard, Tanu Biswas and Nikolas Mattheis (2022) argue that such activism and participation invite a reimagining of what is political, highlighting how this transforms relationships between adults and children and intergenerational orders, enabling children to become originators and authors of knowledge.

To contribute to enriching this conceptual framework of activism, my intention is to focus attention on the latter aspect: the recognition of child activists as epistemic agents. This entails viewing them as conscious and reflective actors in the process of knowing and producing knowledge. The intersection between agency and epistemic involves acknowledging these children's capacity not only to act intentionally but also to actively participate in forming beliefs, judgments and perspectives, thereby advocating for their voice and position in society. Therefore, understanding children as epistemic agents implies recognising their ability to act within their environment with an awareness of their potential to effect significant changes.

children activist as epistemic agents

The term 'epistemic' denotes a connection with knowledge (*episteme*), while 'agency' denotes the capacity to act and regulate one's actions. In the common conception of agency, a subject is deemed an agent if they perform an action ϕ intentionally, if they have reasons to do ϕ , if they can reflectively be aware of doing ϕ , and if they are free to do ϕ , thereby being responsible for doing so (Engel, 2013, p. 160). Linking the concept of agency to the term 'epistemic' thus alludes to the ability to be an actor in the process of knowing, thereby possessing the capability to produce, use, or transmit knowledge (Catala, 2015 as cited in Dufourt, 2024). In this vein, there exists 'epistemic agency,' wherein one performs ϕ (where ' ϕ ' represents an epistemic attitude, such as belief, judgement, or conjecture) for a practical or epistemic reason, effectuating the action appropriately (Engel, 2013, p. 165). Therefore, we can define the notion of 'epistemic agency' as a reflexive, self-aware, and directly controlled action that empowers the agent to make judgments, decide what to believe, acknowledge the reliability of the belief-forming process, and defend their epistemic standpoint (Sosa, 2015, p. 93).

This concept of ‘epistemic agency’ implies direct agency, exercised at the highest epistemic level through our reflective capacity. The individual who acquires and evaluates their reasons for belief, judgment, and supposition is genuinely active, not passive. Consequently, when we engage in reflection, our beliefs typically emerge through a deliberative process involving the ability to choose the path of judgment, enabling us to exert control over it. Hence, it is apt to assert that ‘epistemic agency’ is intertwined with the notion that humans are active in exercising their judgments, suggesting freedom of action and epistemic freedom over beliefs. Nonetheless, being recognised in one's ‘epistemic agency’ contributes to becoming a subject (Dufourt, 2024), a recognition often absent in the case of children. The reciprocal recognition of children’s ‘epistemic agency’ as activists is frequently lacking due to an adult-centric bias rooted in ‘the wisdom of age’ (Liebel, 2014a), which undervalues their opinions and perspectives. This bias, which is unilateral and flows from top to bottom, implies that adults regard children as passive recipients of knowledge, disregarding their capacity to actively contribute to the environmental discourse (Vitale & Miller, 2020).

This can result in epistemic injustice, wherein children’s voices are disregarded or discounted based on their age, inevitably placing them at a disadvantage within the community knowledge (Florio et al., 2020). I now contend that one of the primary barriers to the epistemic agency of environmental child activists relates, in Miranda Fricker’s terms (2007), to bias against their epistemic capability, which manifests through two distinct mechanisms. The first manifests as hermeneutical marginalisation, wherein children struggle to articulate their experiences within the prevailing adult-centric discourse. This occurs when the vocabulary or concepts of the dominant discourse fail to encompass or comprehend children’s experiences. The second manifests as testimonial injustice, whereby children face discrimination as communicators due to others’ prejudiced perceptions. This arises when a child’s credibility is undermined by their identity or activism background, rather than being evaluated solely on the substance of their discourse. In some instances, these biases are compounded when other aspects of a child’s identity (such as language, economic status, religion, and gender) are also



employed to dismiss their knowledge (Kotzee, 2017). It is crucial to recognise that epistemic injustice towards environmental child activists is not always overt, as it is deeply entrenched within social and normative structures. Nevertheless, it is imperative for the development of a fairer society to acknowledge and value children's epistemic agency in the struggle for environmental protection. This entails listening to their perspectives impartially and recognising the pivotal role they play in advancing a sustainable future for all.

In this context, children's activism emerges as a potent tool that underscores the necessity of challenging the power dynamics of knowledge between children and adults. Activism, in my view, aims to confront and question the prevailing epistemic power dynamics through a deliberate and conscious broader approach aimed at transforming knowledge into agency. Knowledge alone is inadequate if children do not perceive themselves as significant agents capable of responsibly utilising their knowledge within society. Hence, the concept of 'epistemic agency' enables us to reconsider the role of children by envisioning them as active users, creators, and transformers of knowledge (Nieminen & Ketonen, 2023). Children, through their activism, have demonstrated possessing robust epistemic agency resources, including well-established mechanisms for self-organisation, self-regulation, self-reflection, and proactive engagement. This capacity to make informed decisions and take corresponding actions reflects both freedom of action and epistemic freedom regarding environmental beliefs. Environmental child activists serve as epistemic agents by intervening in the realm of knowledge and action to safeguard the environment, generating, utilising, and disseminating knowledge concerning sustainability. They reflect on environmental impact, make informed choices, and advocate for their stance on environmental conservation. Within this framework, the concept of 'Epistemic Contribution' as introduced by Miranda Fricker (2015), assumes relevance. This crucial aspect of the Capability Approach ensures that individuals can fully engage in society and have their voices acknowledged. Environmental child activists significantly exercise this epistemic contribution by contributing their knowledge and perspectives to the processes of knowledge production and acquisition. Furthermore, by distributing informative

and interpretive materials, these children not only share information but also enrich the collective reservoir of shared knowledge.

children activists and epistemic capability

In recent decades, the capability approach has emerged as a new theoretical framework in moral and political philosophy concerning issues of welfare, development, and justice. Economist-philosopher Amartya Sen has been a leading figure in this approach, with philosopher Martha Nussbaum and an increasing number of scholars across the humanities and social sciences significantly contributing to its development. This approach is conceived as a flexible and multipurpose framework rather than a precise theory of welfare (Robeyns, 2016). The term ‘capability approach’ is preferred in philosophical literature, while some philosophers refer to it as ‘capabilitarianism’ (Nielsen & Axelsen, 2016; Robeyns, 2016). The Capability Approach is a normative proposal that places individuals at the centre of the development process (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). Unlike welfare analysis, which relies solely on individual incomes and utility, the capability approach focuses on human capabilities, defined as the substantive or real freedoms that people can be and do what they have reason to value. Consequently, according to the capability approach, the authentic manifestation of freedom to be and do what one values can only be realised if people are considered active agents in their own lives, rather than mere passive recipients of social welfare policies (Sen, 1999). In this regard, the agency assumes paramount importance within this approach. According to Sen (1985, 1999), an agent is a person who acts and brings about positive changes for themselves as well as for their community.

However, despite the capability approach being initially developed as a normative proposal focused on adults, its flexible nature has been reconceptualized to be applied to the case of children. Thanks to a movement of scholars who emphasize the importance of transforming the perception of children and recognizing them as active agents capable of generating real and positive changes in the global landscape; rather than considering them solely as vulnerable subjects in need of care and protection, which is also of utmost importance. The consolidation of this interdisciplinary academic collective is labelled in another



article under the name of Children's Capabilitarianism (Maldonado-Castañeda, 2024). Among the most significant contributions shared, in my view, by Children's Capabilitarianism, is the more comprehensive understanding of children's agency and substantive participation, both individually and collectively, positioning and recognizing them as social agents capable of influencing the world (Clark et al., 2019; Hart et al., 2015). In this sense, Children's Capabilitarianism advocates for children's capacity for self-determination (Biggeri et al., 2011; Hart & Brando, 2018) and points out challenges in transforming children's rights, circumscribed in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), not only to be heard but also in a substantive/real capacity to participate in society (Liebel, 2014b; Peleg, 2013). According to Children's Capabilitarianism stances, children's agency experience is not a one-dimensional capacity, but it is influenced by multiple conversion factors⁵, such as culture, family, education, and society (Stoeklin & Fattore, 2018). Therefore, children's agency is multifaceted and reflects different expressions of the relationship between resources and systems of action. These factors can limit or facilitate minors' capacity to make decisions and act autonomously, which in turn can influence their well-being and their ability to engage in valuable activities. Thus, the relational nature of agency is highlighted, meaning it is not something individuals possess, but it is present in interdependencies. Therefore, we must understand agency as a level of autonomy that can be facilitated or hindered by various interactions between individual and social factors (Baraldi & Iervese, 2014).

In the realm of participation, promoting children's involvement requires more than just providing opportunities; it necessitates a fairer distribution of power. Real children's participation begins with them, on their own terms, within their own

⁵ Conversion factors influence a person's freedom to convert resources into functioning. Personal factors, such as metabolism or physical ability, are internal to the individual and affect their ability to use resources. Social factors, such as public policies or social norms, are external and determined by the society in which the person lives. Environmental factors, such as climate or the availability of infrastructure, are from the physical or built environment in which the person lives. For example, a person's mobility on a bicycle is affected by their physical condition (personal factor), social norms that may or may not allow certain groups to use bicycles (social factor), and the availability of appropriate infrastructure for cycling (environmental factor). For further details, see: Robeyns, I., & Morten, F. B. (2023)., 'The Capability Approach' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/capability-approach/>.

realities, and in pursuit of their own visions, dreams, hopes, and concerns (Hart & Brando, 2018). Additionally, Children's Capabiltarianism underscores that participation isn't solely vital for children's well-being and development but can also positively impact communities and societies at large. Involving children in decision-making fosters friendship, sociability, and community spirit, nurtures values and responsibilities, and promotes critical thinking and democratic practice (Biggeri et al., 2011). A crucial yet overlooked aspect within Children's Capabiltarianism is the epistemic agency of children, their capacity to shape their own cognitive abilities and knowledge. While research has extensively explored children's agency in educational settings like schools (Biggeri & Santi, 2012; Hart & Brando, 2018; Tao, 2016; Terzi, 2014), it hasn't adequately addressed their role as active agents in knowledge acquisition and production. To fill this conceptual gap, I propose integrating Miranda Fricker's concept of 'epistemic capability' (2015) adapted for environmental child activists. Though Fricker's proposal isn't explicitly aimed at children, it can be readily applied to this demographic. This is justified because, according to Fricker, our capacity to contribute epistemically develops through various social interactions involving sharing information and forms of social understanding, wherein we both impart and receive information in the process of constructing meaning. Therefore, 'epistemic reciprocity' (Fricker, 2015, p. 79) is necessary for everyone to be recognised as knowledge agents. Excluding segments of the population, like child activists, based on age and gender biases, hinders their epistemic development.

Epistemic contribution is regarded as one of the essential capabilities⁶ necessary for enabling individuals to fully participate in society and ensuring the audibility of their voices from an egalitarian perspective (Walker, 2019). The concept of 'epistemic contribution' pertains to the involvement of various social groups in the processes of knowledge production and acquisition (Fricker, 2015, pp. 83-85). Fricker suggests that the collective capacity for 'epistemic contribution' plays a

⁶ In this regard, Miranda Fricker refers to the list of capabilities proposed by Martha Nussbaum is aware of the disagreement on this matter from Amartya Sen. However, Fricker considers that despite the difference between Sen and Nussbaum, both would agree that epistemic capability is necessary for the expansion of capabilities.



pivotal role in societal knowledge production. For children to engage fully in this endeavour, they require opportunities to develop their capability for epistemic contribution – that is, to both receive information and contribute interpretative insights to the corpus of knowledge, understanding, and practical deliberation. Miranda Fricker (2015, pp. 74-78) identifies two fundamental forms of epistemic donation crucial for human development. The first involves the exchange of information and perspectives among individuals or small groups. This form of epistemic donation encompasses the dissemination of informative materials, including data, evidence, critical questions, hypotheses, arguments, and other relevant components related to the subject under examination. The second form of epistemic donation encompasses the distribution of interpretative materials, which extend beyond interpretations themselves to include elements related to their justification and rationality. These interpretative materials may involve the concepts used and potential alternative interpretations. Both forms of epistemic donation are significant as they allow individuals to attribute meaning to the collective social world and contribute to the formation of a shared corpus of epistemic materials.

However, when it comes to environmentalist children, the concept of ‘epistemic contribution’, particularly concerning children's rights and environmental protection, often faces a lack of reciprocation. Adults may perceive children as lacking the cognitive capacity or maturity to understand, interpret, or engage in debates surrounding such information and knowledge, let alone actively contribute to its improvement or modification. This situation reveals an instance of epistemic injustice, where social acceptance dictates the extent to which individuals can make their epistemic contributions. As Fricker (2015) notes, ‘While some individuals are enabled by a uniformly distributed social acceptance to make their epistemic contributions in all areas, others find that their capability is weakened or completely disappears in some contexts’ (p. 80). This phenomenon can be termed as ‘agential epistemic injustice’ (Medina & Whitt, 2021; Pohlhaus, 2012).

Despite the fragmented nature of this social epistemic capability, children turn to activism to disruptively enter this epistemic sphere, demanding recognition as contributory agents of knowledge rather than merely passive recipients.

Activism, in this sense, empowers them to confront and resist agential epistemic harms, thereby enhancing the epistemic agency of oppressed subjects, amplifying their voices, and facilitating the development and exercise of their epistemic capabilities (Medina & Whitt, 2021). Rather than restricting children's access to information, the focus shifts towards providing information and fostering critical thinking. Creating opportunities for children to access information, express their perspectives, and organise for collective action can safeguard their rights, particularly their protection rights. Upholding the right to give and access information promotes a broader consideration that encourages diverse modes of participation, including and supporting child activism (Tisdall & Cuevas-Parra, 2022). Notably, examples of children's participation that effectively address these challenges are of particular interest, as they render participation meaningful, impactful, and sustainable.

children litigants

Research by Aoife Daly and Laura Lundy (2022) highlights that, despite the politically disadvantaged position of those under 18, the recent surge in climate-related legal actions led by children is emerging as a vital tactic in climate activism. This strategy provides a platform for expressing their opinions, gaining visibility, and developing the capacity to influence systemic inequalities. Moreover, it positions them as competent actors in critical political matters, emphasising their essential role in global efforts to bridge the gap between international human rights law and the climate crisis. In recent years, children's activists have initiated dozens of cases worldwide, with some resulting in significant legal changes. For instance, in the Neubauer case of 2021, the German Constitutional Court compelled the German government to adopt 'more urgent and shorter-term measures' to curb carbon emissions. Another notable example occurred in Colombia in 2018, where a group of 25 children and adolescents filed a lawsuit against the Colombian state via a "tutela" action, with legal support from "Dejusticia". Their aim was to demand protection of their rights to a healthy environment, life, health, food, and water, threatened by indiscriminate logging in the Amazon and its adverse effects on the country's climate. What is particularly encouraging about this Colombian case is



that it was grounded in the rights of future generations, who will bear the brunt of deforestation and global warming. Consequently, not only did the court rule in their favour, but it also highlighted the government's failure to fulfil this responsibility.

Although not all climate-related applications have been successful legally, they have generated significant ripple effects. For instance, fifteen children, including Thunberg, filed an innovative complaint with the *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* against five of the largest carbon emitters. While the committee determined that the request could not be fully examined, stipulating that the applicants should first seek redress in national courts, it arrived at a pertinent conclusion. The committee pointed out that, theoretically, a government could be held accountable for the impact of its country's carbon emissions on children, both domestically and internationally, thus establishing a precedent within a UN body. These examples illustrate how children's activism is advancing operational principles based on human rights at international, national, and local levels, paving the way for a human rights-centred approach to tackling climate change (Gasparri et al., 2021). Additionally, they exemplify intergenerational collaboration, where certain adults, such as a group of lawyers in this case, play a crucial role in backing the activism of the most marginalised children who might otherwise have limited access to legal epistemic resources. However, as highlighted in Taft & Gordon's study (2015), while intergenerational collaboration offers evident advantages, it also presents challenges within age-stratified societies.

children movements

Building on Liebel's perspective (2012), which suggests analysing children's participation not through normative texts but from concrete experiences (participation from below), I introduce another example of collective epistemic agency: the environmental movements. Arguably the most widely cited and recognised case is the *Fridays for Future* (FFF) movement, led by activist Greta Thunberg. Their goal is to exert moral pressure on policymakers, advocating for them to heed scientists and take decisive action to mitigate global warming. Harnessing the power of social media and using hashtags like *#DigitalStrike* and *#ClimateStrikeOnline*, FFF activists expanded their reach and network, contributing

to making the climate struggle more inclusive globally. They implemented a variety of strategies, such as online petitions, live streams on YouTube to exchange ideas on addressing climate change, and webinars to educate about environmental issues. Additionally, they turned to platforms like Instagram and TikTok and launched the 'Bulletin for the Future' to share relevant information and foster ongoing dialogue. Furthermore, they regularly organised public virtual meetings to bring together climate activist children from around the world and design future action strategies. Another relevant movement is *Zero Hour*, which focuses on amplifying the diverse voices of children in the conversation about climate and environmental justice. *Zero Hour* is a youth-led movement that creates entry points, training, and resources for new activists and supportive adults who wish to take concrete action on climate change. As explained on their platform, *Zero Hour* contributes to educating communities worldwide about the systems of oppression they identify as root causes of climate change. These roots include capitalism, racism, sexism, and colonialism, and how these systems intersect with the climate movement to form climate justice.

In Latin America, noteworthy movements include '*Guardianes por la Vida*' (Colombia), '*Tremendas*' (Chile), and '*Re-Earthing*' (Mexico), which are powerful initiatives led by children's activists in the region. While each movement has its unique focus, they share the common goal of addressing urgent social and environmental challenges. Through their efforts, these movements have made significant contributions to knowledge and action in their respective fields. '*Guardianes por la Vida*' is dedicated to protecting the Amazon and promoting the care of *frailejones* and *páramos*⁷. They have engaged in political advocacy at local, national, and international levels, highlighting the importance of *frailejones* for

⁷ The *páramos* are mountainous ecosystems located above the Andean forests, mainly in Colombia and Ecuador, but also present in other regions such as Perú, Venezuela, and Costa Rica. They are areas of cold climate throughout the year, with fertile soils of volcanic origin. These ecosystems are vital due to the ecosystem services they provide. They host unique species, being home to six out of every ten plant species found only in the *páramos*. Additionally, they play a crucial role in mitigating and adapting to climate change by storing carbon in their soils significantly. The most important function of the *páramos* is their ability to act as a source of freshwater. Thanks to a plant known as *frailejón*, their climate and soil, the *páramos* can collect, filter, and regulate rainwater, mist, and thaw, providing a constant supply of clean and pure water. For further information, please visit <https://www.humboldt.org.co/>



ecosystems. Their actions include advocating for the prohibition of animal testing, the ban on single-use plastics, the declaration of a climate emergency, and the ratification of the Escazú Agreement⁸ in Colombia. On the other hand, the *'Tremendas'* movement focuses on empowering girls and adolescents, particularly in the context of climate justice and gender equity. *'Tremendas'* challenges social stereotypes and encourages girls' active participation in decision-making. Their epistemic contributions include scientific training programmes for girls and citizen participation initiatives aimed at amplifying girls' voices and leadership in their communities. Lastly, the *'Re-Earth Initiative'* centres on ecosystem restoration and the dissemination of climate knowledge. *'Re-Earth'* strives to make the climate movement more accessible by translating public policy documents. Their epistemic contributions involve creating tools and resources for climate action and promoting environmental philanthropy and intergenerational participation in decision-making.

I've identified at least four epistemic contributions from these environmentalist movements. Firstly, they're adopting and adapting the existing repertoire of actions centred on nonviolent direct action. This focus is critical as nonviolent direct action-based mobilisations are more likely to succeed and can lead to greater democratization and long-term stability (Pickard et al., 2022). The increasing participation of children in protests demonstrates their interest in direct action with more immediate outcomes, thus reshaping the landscape of political engagement and our understanding of what it means to be politically active. Secondly, the contribution relates to digital activism, which has seen significant growth in recent years. Protesters are increasingly turning to digital action, using

⁸ The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, better known as the Escazú Agreement, is an international treaty signed by 25 countries and ratified by 15 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding protocols for environmental protection. This agreement seeks to guarantee the implementation of rights to access environmental information and public participation in decision-making processes, as well as access to justice in the environmental context, and to apply and strengthen elements related to the protection of rights to sustainable development and living in a healthy environment. Its provisions include a gender perspective, open government, and priority criteria for its application for people in vulnerable situations. Additionally, it has a section on the protection of human rights defenders in environmental issues. For further information, please visit <https://www.cepal.org/es/acuerdodeescazu>.

new communication platforms to mobilise swiftly, share information, and prevent repression. Creativity and innovation play a crucial role in this activism (Buhre, 2023), and children have played a prominent role in making civic action more agile and mobile, often leading to more inclusive participation and decision-making (Teixeira, 2024). Furthermore, social media and digital platforms have been effective tools for influencing politics, with hashtags particularly powerful in converting individual messages into collective action and allowing participants to claim new public spaces. Digital technologies have opened new possibilities for citizen participation, enabling greater political and civic engagement among children (Livingstone et al., 2019). This advancement has not only transformed how children exercise their rights and citizenship but also expanded the spaces, structures, and mechanisms available for their political participation. In this regard, digital activism and the use of digital technologies are key elements in countering the marginalisation and exclusion often faced by children in public decision-making, empowering them as active citizens by providing necessary information, developing their civic skills, and making tools accessible to demand action and alter political landscapes.

The third contribution revolves around challenging the capitalist economic system by highlighting the interconnection between climate change and capitalism. Liebel (2012, p. 211) argues that children play an active role in developing new economic models based on solidarity. Their actions go beyond political demands, instead seeking to reorganise their living conditions by proposing practical and prospective alternatives to address the climate crisis. These activists have raised awareness of how capitalist practices such as resource extraction, excessive consumption, and pursuit of short-term profits contribute to environmental degradation and climate change. Additionally, they have pressured political and business leaders to adopt stricter and more effective measures to address climate change, including policies limiting greenhouse gas emissions and promoting a transition to a more sustainable and just economy. In this sense, the climate activist children's movement has helped change the narrative around capitalism, challenging the idea that unlimited economic growth is compatible with planetary



health and advocating for a more equitable and environmentally sustainable approach to economic development. A final contribution, as highlighted in Frida Buhre's research (2023), revolves around reframing the climate crisis in geopolitical terms. For example, the FFF movement proposes using the term 'Most Affected Peoples and Areas' (MAPA) instead of 'Global South' to highlight how a changing climate affects different regions worldwide, impacting communities less capable of protective action, particularly those disproportionately affected by poverty and systemic racism.

final remarks

At the core of this discussion lies the inherent value of children's epistemic agency, their ability to generate knowledge and understanding, which ought not to be underestimated. These activists not only vocalise their concerns but also offer fresh, creative, and unconventional perspectives crucial for shaping knowledge in the pursuit of climate and social justice. Nurturing and recognising this epistemic agency will not only enhance the realm of child activism but also fortify the knowledge repository needed to confront the global challenges posed by the climate crisis. Moreover, within the realm of child activism, it has been shown how children can exploit new avenues of action to strengthen their standing in society and exert their rights to enhance their influence within it. The involvement of children in reshaping environmental landscapes serves as proof that their reintroduction to society does not inevitably result in new forms of oppression and exploitation. Rather, it can facilitate fresh perspectives on participation that extend beyond social peripheries or mere symbolism. As creators and investigators in their own regard, children wield the power to shape their reality and its interpretation, thereby acquiring the requisite knowledge to reinforce their plea for societal engagement. In doing so, children contribute to establishing the material foundation for their own rights and taking charge of their own hands.

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