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Philanthropic tales: A critical analysis of how philanthropic citizenship is represented in children's picture-books – problems and possibilities

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Abstract

In this article we critically question how philanthropic citizenship is represented within children's literature. Critical content analysis of over 100 western children's picture-books reveals that the majority of children's contemporary literature frames philanthropy as an individual act of personal responsibility which takes place in the private sphere, focusing on singular acts of kindness and generosity, overlooking connections between the cause and wider societal socioeconomic, political, environmental and/or social justice issues. Furthermore, many stories reinforce concerning traditional and stereotypical ideas of gender, race and power. Nonetheless, we also identify several books which notably seek to move beyond this, connecting acts of philanthropy to wider ideological, economic and political factors, placing a strong emphasis on social justice. In conclusion, we call for further research to explore how philanthropic stories are used within the home and classroom, and what children interpret as the 'good philanthropic citizen' through these stories.

Keywords

children's literature, philanthropic citizenship, philanthropy, social justice, picture-books, voluntary action

Introduction

Philanthropy, defined as 'voluntary action for the public good' (Payton and Moody, 2008: 28), plays a fundamental role in civil society globally. Whilst there is a growing abundance of literature on who gives, be it their time, talents or treasure, to what and why there is little understanding about how individuals are educated or socialised to give which most commonly occurs, both in and

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outside of school, as part of citizenship development. In this paper we consider the intersection between the concept of philanthropic citizenship and children's literature. We define philanthropic citizenship as a dimension of citizenship behaviour, associated with intentions and actions that intend to produce social and/or environmental benefits for example volunteering, social action, charitable giving, advocacy and activism (Body, 2021). Children's literature has long been renowned for engaging children in moral and prosocial learning by drawing children into creative and imaginative worlds. As Mills (2014) points out, 'at least one function of a children's book is to shape the evolving moral character of its readers' (p. 5). Indeed, encouraging children to think of others and engage in acts of kindness remains a central theme of children's literature (Snell, 2016), with children's books increasingly recognised as important in developing children's empathy and understanding of local and global citizenship (Nussbaum, 1998). Therefore, this paper seeks to respond to two research questions:

(1) How do children's picture-books represent philanthropic acts?

(2) Do some picture-books present more positive manifestations of philanthropic citizenship than others?

This paper is divided into four sections. The first explores literature on children's philanthropic citizenship and the role of storytelling in developing these moral and prosocial behaviours. The second section, the methodology, outlines the research process which consisted of an in-depth, critical content analysis of over 100 children's picture books discussing acts of philanthropic citizenship. The third section presents the findings to our research questions, critically discussing these considering the aforementioned literature. Finally, the last section seeks to present implications for both children's education and future research, highlighting several problematic trends in the literature with regards to how philanthropic citizenship is represented, but also noting several standout examples which we suggest, discussed in an age-appropriate way, is likely to encourage greater consideration of philanthropic citizenship which meaningfully connects to broader social, political and environmental issues.

How do children develop philanthropic behaviours?

Whilst well discussed in youth studies, to date, little research has focused on the philanthropic activities and engagement of younger children (Body et al., 2020a & 2020b; Sarre and Tarling, 2010). Yet educational, social and psychology theory and research highlights this middle childhood period as crucial in the development and normalisation of civic behaviours (e.g. van Deth et al., 2011; Wörle and Paulus, 2018). Known research into children's philanthropic citizenship and charitable giving suggests that children are often willing and generous with their time, talents and treasure (Body et al., 2020a; Power and Smith, 2016), with US-based research highlighting charity as a 'deeply rooted norm' in younger children (Wörle and Paulus, 2018). Likewise, research with young adolescents reveals children are positive about charity, with high expectations of charities to solve social ills (CAF, 2013; Power and Taylor, 2018). Theoretical understandings of children's giving behaviours, often concerned with children's pro-sociality, tend to come from two different bodies of research. Some assume that philanthropic behaviours are driven by situational factors (e.g. Ottoni-Wilhelm et al., 2017), others focus on the individual characteristics of children, highlighting intrinsic ideas of kindness and empathy (Warneken and Tomasello, 2009).

Encouraging philanthropic acts, such as giving to charity, volunteering and social action, has become increasingly mainstream in education and more broadly in society (Body et al.,

2020a; Power and Taylor, 2018). Research shows that parents, schools and communities often go to great lengths to encourage, support and engage children of all ages in philanthropy and charitable giving, creating a strong enthusiasm for supporting others (Body et al., 2020a). However, although this seems a useful means of developing early philanthropy and giving, there is evidence that children's actual involvement in philanthropy can often be passive and can encourage tokenistic transactional acts, where children are routinely rewarded for their giving, overriding intrinsic empathetic behaviours, which could be counterintuitive to long-term goals of social change (Body et al., 2020a; Wörle and Paulus, 2018). This has prompted greater emphasis not just on teaching children to be charitable, but on *how* we engage children in philanthropy as active philanthropic citizens (Body et al., 2020a; Simpson, 2017; Westheimer, 2015).

What do we mean by children's philanthropic citizenship?

Philanthropy itself is a contested concept (Daly, 2012), which can be seen by many as inherently problematic, with critics pointing out that many manifestations of it can be considered counter-intuitive to social justice (see McGoey, 2015; Reich, 2018; Vallely, 2020). However, these critics largely view philanthropy as an act of the super-wealthy, perhaps overlooking every-day and every-person philanthropy. This is not to brush aside the very real and current debates about 'big' philanthropy, but instead seeks to focus on how a reframing of philanthropy within a wider global citizenship perspective may work for the common-good. When viewing philanthropy from a global citizen perspective, which means encouraging active roles, both locally and globally, in building more peaceful, sustainable, equal, tolerant and inclusive societies, we need to deliberate the differences with which all citizens live, understand divisions and strive for a common-good (Nussbaum, 1998). Thus, under this definition of philanthropy, we adopt a positive, progressive idea of philanthropy reflecting Schervish's (2014) call for the 'moral content' of philanthropy to be recognised and the relational aspects of philanthropy where 'we attend directly to people in their needs' (Schervish, 2014: 403).

Philanthropic actions are often viewed as an act or activity, built upon many widely recognised virtues, including generosity, compassion, courage, fairness, integrity, etc. (Martin, 1994). Virtues are considered as traits of 'character', providing individuals with 'morally desirable ways of relating to people, practices and communities' (Martin, 1994: 5). Virtuous philanthropy seeks to foster these caring relationships and draws on these behaviours. Martin (1994) identifies a total of 30 philanthropic virtues which he divides into two broad and overlapping categories, participation virtues and enabling virtues. Participation virtues such as benevolence, justice, reciprocity, enlightened cherishing and self-affirmation focus on motivating giving. Enabling virtues provide the moral resources for effectively pursuing philanthropic actions, for example respect for others, self-direction and moral leadership (1994: 5). In contrast critics of character virtue learning point out that a focus on personal ethics means broader social, political and environmental issues are addressed at an individual level rather than a community, local or global level (Jerome and Kisby, 2019; Kisby, 2017). Suissa (2015) states 'without a more radical conception of just what "the political" means, and without engaging children in debates about how political aims, ideas and values are intertwined with, yet importantly distinct from, moral values, there is no hope of engaging children in the pursuit of a more socially just and less oppressive society' (p. 107). Accepting of these challenges, we do not seek to view character virtues and citizenship as binary ideas, instead they are viewed as interconnected (Peterson, 2019). Indeed, as Martin (1994) highlights, it is the combination of these virtues put into philanthropic action which he argues 'provides a forum for

moral creativity, for putting our version of a good society into practice, and for fostering caring relationships that enrich individuals and communities alike' (p. 172). We extend this to argue that a citizenship approach to philanthropic giving seeks to embrace social justice, where children are simultaneously encouraged to develop the virtues to respond to social needs, whilst critically exploring and engaging with the wider issues which sit behind notions of charity (Body et al., 2020a; Simpson, 2017). As Peterson (2019) suggests, engagement in communities and deliberation with others is central to developing individual character virtues, alongside recognising and challenging structural injustices. Indeed, many education scholars argue that the importance of citizenship education is to help children and young people become critically literate (e.g. de Andreotti, 2014; Weinberg and Flinders, 2018), whilst simultaneously many critics of philanthropy argue that it ignores critical enquiry in the root causes of injustice and thus philanthropic actions often reinforce social inequalities (McGoey, 2015; Reich, 2018; Vallely, 2020). In a global citizenship education context, Jefferess (2008) in particular cautions against what he terms a 'politics of benevolence' where privileged global citizens give to the needy 'other' reproducing the unequal power relations between 'those who help and those who are in need of being helped' (p. 27) rather than encouraging reciprocity and equality. By viewing philanthropy through a citizenship lens within an education context we aim to consider how philanthropic acts can be connected to wider social and political frameworks, and seek to avoid this 'politics of benevolence', instead, working towards making a better world 'with' rather than 'for' others (Jefferess, 2008).

In breaking our definition of philanthropic citizenship down we identify several core components. First, there is an act of giving, which generally means 'donating of one's resources without contracting to achieve a comparable economic compensation' (Martin, 1994: 10) meaning philanthropic citizenship includes an intention, rooted in the virtues we discuss above (Martin, 1994), to act or an act itself, such as volunteering, social action, charitable giving and activism. Second, this suggests an active participative role, which when we consider this from a children's rights perspective requires the *active* participation of children in the decision-making processes (Nolas, 2015). Furthermore, a children's rights discourse goes beyond the idea of viewing the child as just competent in their own right and moves towards how children's rights education can promote 'democratization of human rights' (Jerome, 2016: 152). This helps us identify a third crucial element of philanthropic citizenship, that is empowerment, which is another important component of developing children's moral capabilities (Covell and Howe, 2001). One more crucial element of philanthropic citizenship is the intention 'to produce social and/or environmental benefit'. Here we identify two key aspects, first with intent to produce benefits, there must initially be some critical thinking in terms of identifying what the problem is that the act is trying to address, the root causes of that problem and how to address it best ethically (Jerome and Kisby, 2019; Kisby, 2017; Suissa, 2015). For example, critically examining the cause, actively engaging recipients as partners and coproducers (Jefferess, 2008) in the response and considering what an *appropriate* and *ethical* philanthropic response should be, and indeed whether other responses, such as government support, would be more appropriate. The second aspect, is that the act intends to produce some form of environmental or social good (Payton and Moody, 2008). Here we acknowledge our understanding of 'good' may vary, but broadly speaking this concerns intention to help protect human and/or environmental rights (Martin, 1994). Thus, advocates of ideas of philanthropic citizenship within education advocate for critical thinking within a framework of justice (Body et al., 2020a & 2020b; Nussbaum, 1998; Simpson, 2017; Westheimer, 2015). As Simpson (2017: 90) states 'a social justice mentality or mindset could be considered a commitment to equality, a developed critical or independent thinking which results in ethical action'.

The role of storytelling in developing children's philanthropic citizenship

Storytelling has long been recognised as an important aspect of children's moral and prosocial learning and development (Aksoy and Baran, 2020; Kidd and Castano, 2013). Multiple research studies highlight how children's stories can inspire children to perform more prosocial behaviours (e.g. Larsen et al., 2018). Indeed, Nussbaum (1998) points to the importance of children's stories in developing children's moral capacities, and while she acknowledges that literature cannot 'transform society single-handed' (p. 94) stories can provide experiences which cultivate 'at least a beginning of social justice' (p. 94). Likewise, the power of storytelling to cultivate kind and compassionate behaviours is widely promoted throughout education and citizenship literature (e.g. Kidd, 2020; Peterson, 2016).

Nonetheless, not all stories are equal in the development of children's moral and prosocial behaviours (Narvaez, 2002). For example, children tend to find accessible, more ordinary figures who are more like themselves, more inspiring than those who are extra-ordinary or unreachable (Han et al., 2017; Klein and O'Brien, 2017). Larsen et al. (2018) found that reading human stories to children significantly increased their altruistic giving but reading the anthropomorphic stories decreased it. Contrary to the common belief, realistic stories, not anthropomorphic ones, are better for promoting young children's prosocial behaviour. Furthermore, evidence suggests that despite increasing diversity across western society, children's picture-books that feature non-stereotypically diverse populations, including diversity in gender, race and socio-economic status, remain a rarity (Hamilton et al., 2006; Koss, 2015; Thomas, 2016).

Nussbaum (1998) specifically investigates the role of literature in developing children's civic responsibilities and global citizenship. She points out a positive causal relationship between the development of children's morality and literature, arguing that the arts, can support us not only to understand and be motivated to participate morally, but also enables us to put that into practice in our own conduct and decision-making. According to Nussbaum, the narrative imagination that is developed through storytelling and literature, is essential preparation for moral interaction. Developing ideas of habit and empathy conjure up a certain type of citizenship and a certain form of community, one that is based upon sympathetic responsiveness of others needs and an understanding as to the circumstances which shape those needs, this is like Martin's (1994) presentation of participation virtues discussed earlier. Furthermore, Nussbaum (1998) argues that as children continue to develop these traits, they develop their own capabilities of compassion. Nussbaum (1998) argues that 'the basis for civic imagining must be laid early in life. . .At this point, stories can then begin to confront children more plainly with the uneven fortunes of life convincing them emotionally of their urgency and importance' (p. 93). According to Nussbaum, narrative imagination develops moral interaction which is essential for developing compassion and civic responsibility. Therefore, literature has a vital role in helping children develop their philanthropic citizenship from a young age. However, although there is a significant amount of literature which considers storytelling and pro-sociality, there is a lack of studies focusing specifically on children's stories and the development of philanthropic behaviours, this gap in understanding requires further investigation.

Methodology

This study is a critical content analysis of contemporary children's picture-books. The review of literature above sets out a broad conceptual terrain regarding our exploration of how philanthropic citizenship is represented in children's picture-books. Our aim in this research was not simply to critically assess this representation, but also suggest where this is done well, and why, to provide

important theoretical and practice implications. Therefore, to obtain an overview of the range of children's picture-books discussing philanthropic citizenship and following Creswell and Poth's (2016) recommendation of collecting 'extensive detail' in terms of the volume of books examined, we employed a broad sampling approach to obtain our primary sources.

The sample of books focuses on UK and US literature. In the first instance, an audience of teaching professionals and primary school education specialists were approached via social media to recommend children's picture-books which they felt promoted philanthropic ideas. The researchers then broadened their search to carefully examine reviewers' lists of recommended children's picture-books. This included exploring among others, The Book Trusts' 100 Best Children's Books as well as five years' worth of The Guardian's Best Children's Books lists from 2016 to 2020. Various websites promoting children's literature were examined (e.g. A Mighty Girl, Learning to Give, etc.), and dozens of publishers' sites were considered. Finally, visits were made to a multitude of large and small booksellers as well as community libraries to be able to look for possible additions as well as to physically examine volumes previously only seen online.

It is not our intention within this research to compile a definitive list of children's picture-books which promote children's philanthropic citizenship. Instead, the snowball sampling approach led us to investigating over 500 children's picture-books and then identify 104 which discussed philanthropic acts in a meaningful way. By meaningful, we mean where the act of giving was a central part of the story, a popular example would be Julia Donaldson's 'The Smartest Giant in Town' (2003) where George the giant voluntarily donates all of his new clothes to various animals in need.

Data analysis

Responding to RQ1 (How do children's picture-books represent philanthropic acts?), in the first phase of analysis we sought to examine how philanthropic acts were represented within the literature through a detailed content analysis. As identified in the literature review, the act of engaging in some sort of voluntary action for social good is the first, and potentially most important, core component of philanthropic citizenship. Utilising a systematic content analysis procedure (Grant, 2018), each book was accessed online and analysed by both researchers and discussed to validate the findings. Codes to identify the type of philanthropic act and characteristics of the giver, beneficiary, gatekeepers, etc. were agreed prior to analysis. From this we were able to draw on themes which cut across the books in terms of gender, race, class and types of philanthropic acts.

In response to RQ2 (Do some picture-books present more positive manifestations of philanthropic citizenship than others?), the second phase analysis, we specifically sought to identify stories within which other core components of children's philanthropic citizenship were discussed alongside the philanthropic act, including active participation of characters in decision making, characters empowered to take action, evidence of critical engagement with the cause area and a link to social and/or environmental justice. Every book was given a score of 0 or 1 against the remaining four core components of philanthropic citizenship, 0 = component not explicitly discussed, 1 = component was explicitly discussed. Hard copies of all books which scored a total of 3 or above were purchased and further thematic content analysis, involving the story-content, illustrations and authors notes (Grant, 2018) was conducted to understand the presentation of these core components and the commonality within these books. Specific attention was applied to the journey of the lead character(s), portrayal and characteristics of givers and beneficiaries, barriers and opportunities they faced and discussion concerning the impact of their philanthropic act, within the written text, illustrations and author notes.

Findings and discussion

In this first stage of our analysis, we consider how children's picture-books represent philanthropic acts and what this may potentially teach children about philanthropic citizenship. What we identify here are several trends which run across the 104 books discussing voluntary action for public good which we analysed, some of these we consider helpful to cultivating philanthropic citizenship and some we consider more problematic. Summarising the type of voluntary action which took place in these books, we found that 87% of the books featured volunteering, the giving of time, as the most common way in which people gave. This was closely followed by the giving of resources such as food and materials, which featured in 84%. The giving of money only featured in less than 10% of these books. Finally, campaigning for a cause featured in 37% of the sampled books. The broad scope of philanthropic activities discussed in the books is welcomed and fits well with how children tend to view 'being charitable' as a mass of prosocial behaviours and actions (Body et al., 2019).

Whilst there was notable variety in the quality of books examined a significant trend across them was a purposeful intent to present children with some moral learning often framed around commonly recognised philanthropic virtues such as generosity, compassion, courage, conscientiousness, fairness and integrity, etc. (Martin, 1994). We welcome the development of these philanthropic virtues through literature, however analysis across all the books also draws our attention to a range of more problematic, thematic trends which we will now discuss.

Problematic trends

First, the vast majority of the books which discuss giving, frame philanthropic action as an individual act of personal responsibility which takes place in the private sphere and focuses on singular acts of kindness and generosity, rather than acts which challenge the status quo. Most commonly these acts were represented by rescuing an animal, closely followed by the creation of gardens and parks. Whilst other cause areas were hinted at, it was a rarity to see other causes explicitly discussed or even portrayed, for example only one book specifically discussed food poverty. From a perspective of philanthropic citizenship, we suggest these books often fail to address or even link to the issues of justice which sit behind these acts or encourage any depth of critical thinking about the cause being addressed and instead potentially encourage a 'narrow kind of individualised and responsibilised citizenship' (Jerome and Kisby, 2019: 107). For example, in one of the books a child seeks to help a friend whose family continuously has no food in her fridge. She and her mother gift the family food and then celebrate together as they all have food, yet the issue of why the family is in food poverty is left unquestioned, disassociating the philanthropic act from the root causes of food poverty. There is a concern here that this not only a missed opportunity (Body et al., 2019, 2020a & 2020b), but that teaching ideas of philanthropy disconnected from wider social and political frameworks, potentially promotes the idea of charity as the response to social ills rather than questioning structural inequalities (Body et al., 2020a; Power and Taylor, 2018).

Second, over 90% of the books sampled include the giver being rewarded for their giving at the end. This is coupled with a paradox in which a similar majority of the stories frame the act of giving as an act of altruistic self-sacrifice. For example, in *The Smartest Giant in Town*, George the Giant is rewarded with a crown for his kindness at the end of the book. Indeed, many of the books follow a similar pattern; a need is identified, the individual gives up or sacrifices something to help meet that need, the need is met and ultimately the lead character is rewarded. Whilst individually these books are not problematic in that sense and indeed reciprocity is an encouraged philanthropic virtue (Martin, 1994), we raise a slight note of caution that this dominant trend normalises the idea

that children should expect rewards for philanthropic acts and promotes giving as a transactional act. As discussed in the literature review, routinely rewarding empathetic behaviours with short-term external rewards can be counterintuitive to long-term goals of provoking social change (Body et al., 2020a; Wörle and Paulus, 2018).

Third, within many of the books gender stereotypes are re-enforced, particularly female characters. Our findings highlight male characters are twice as likely to be involved in action-based causes than female, for example rescuing animals, building shelters, etc., whereas female characters are almost twice as likely to support social issues, including caring for elderly, helping at a food bank, etc., and are more than twice as likely to be involved in supporting family and friends through helping behaviours and social action. This finding is in keeping with wider analysis on children's picture-books which finds that 'the continued portrayal of females in traditional gender roles is problematic' (Koss, 2015: 37). Another interesting, gendered theme was the role of a matriarchal character, either a mother or grandmother type figure. These characters are commonly portrayed as pivotal in the story, and as caring and nurturing, encouraging, explaining and/or facilitating the giving. These background females scaffold the giving in terms of care, compassion and often duty. Overall female characters demonstrated stereotypical behaviours of nurturing and caregiving, so continuing a trend of sexism and gender stereotyping within children's contemporary literature (Hamilton et al., 2006). Whilst male characters do feature as supportive background scaffolding characters, they are also more commonly portrayed as powerful and the gatekeepers to change, for example, as landlords, developers and those in positions of political power such as town major or a member of parliament, for example, as in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* (Beaty, 2019) where Sofia has to navigate the male Major to achieve change. Such findings echo and reinforce the misguided gendered assumptions often made about civil society in which the practices of women are framed as helping and lending a hand whereas male roles are seen as more active in civil society (Muddiman et al., 2020).

Fourth, overall, there is a general lack of ethnic and cultural diversity, coupled with some books featuring problematic intersects of philanthropy, race and/or privilege. Again, this has been identified by scholars previously within wider analysis of children's picture-books (Koss, 2015), however looking at this phenomenon through a lens of philanthropic citizenship offers even further insight. The majority of picture-books within this project that feature human characters, rather than anamorphic characters, portray characters of seemingly white European or white US descent, shown in privileged situations. Indeed, these characters are three times more likely to be the 'giver' in these books than people from all other ethnic backgrounds. As Koss (2015) points out 'children who interact with current picture-books predominantly see white faces and receive the message that. . .to be white is to be better' (p. 37). Where individuals from different ethnic backgrounds are prominently featured, these characters are eight times more likely to be portrayed as living in deprived situations than the white European or white American characters. Furthermore, giving in these situations was framed more in the context of local community action, where communities gave to one another to improve their local community, whereas characters from white European or white US descent, and often privileged backgrounds, are more often heroised, with their giving framed as acts of benevolence towards the needy. Indeed, contemporary philanthropy has come under criticism for 'white saviourism' (Vallely, 2020), the phenomenon in which a white person 'guides people of colour from the margins to the mainstream with his or her own initiative and benevolence' while viewing the beneficiaries as 'incapable of helping themselves' (Cammarota, 2011: 243–244). Within some books sampled ideas of paternalistic 'white saviour syndrome' and a 'politics of benevolence' (Jefferess, 2008) continued to be perpetuated, sometimes subtly and sometimes overtly. For example, there were several books in which the framing of giving was to

'save' and 'free' children and families in the global south, told entirely from the giver's perspective with no agency at all afforded to the beneficiaries.

Given the problematic nature of how philanthropic acts are represented within many children's books, we now turn our attention to those books of note which sought to portray the diversity of philanthropy and move beyond ideas of personal responsibility, connecting acts of voluntary action and philanthropy to wider ideological, economic and political factors, placing a strong emphasis on empowering beneficiaries and social justice. Here we explore the possibilities of children's literature in promoting philanthropic citizenship.

Possibilities. As Nussbaum (1998) suggests, *good* literature can help children practice their moral behaviours and responses to different moral dilemmas before they seek to put these into practice in real-life. Therefore, in our second stage of analysis we seek to identify what strong examples of philanthropic citizenship can look like through books which begin to counter some of our discussed concerns. Nonetheless, rather than an exhaustive list of the 'best books' this is simply a selection of some examples which through our analysis we identified as being potentially well placed to help encourage children's philanthropic citizenship, by promoting ideas of philanthropic actions which include aspects such as the active participation of children who are viewed as competent and where the philanthropic response is critically considered, ethical and appropriate. We do not seek to present any of these books as 'perfect' examples, indeed each has strengths and weaknesses, instead our analysis considers the standout features which merit further discussion.

As argued, a core feature of children's philanthropic citizenship is critical enquiry where children are actively engaged in considering the cause and the ethical philanthropic response whilst considering wider political and social frameworks (Body et al., 2020a; Nussbaum, 1998; Simpson, 2017; Westheimer, 2015). An example of this is *Follow the Moon Home: A Tale of One Idea, Twenty Kids, and a Hundred Sea Turtles* (Cousteau and Hopkinson, 2016). This story follows the lead character, a female child named Viv, as she tries to save the sea turtles. Encouraged to take part in a community action project in school Viv is urged to identify the problem, plan a response by gathering information and figuring out what to do, acting and engaging others in collective action, telling the story, then reflecting on what she did and what to do next. It is through this engaged cycle of critical thinking, researching the problem, seeking wider solutions and then putting those into action that Viv can pull the whole community together to save the Loggerhead Sea Turtles. Written by Philippe Cousteau, a prominent leader in the environmental movement, the book purposefully encourages children and young people 'to change the world' (Cousteau and Hopkinson, 2016: 38) finishing with a letter addressed to 'young activists' as a call to action. This is followed by a letter to parents and teachers to encourage them 'believe in your children', in which Cousteau directly addresses the issue of children's philanthropic citizenship:

> 'Too often, adults see kids only as volunteers for environmental projects, as participants, rather than seeing them as critical thinkers capable of solving any number of problems' (Cousteau and Hopkinson, 2016: 39)

This appeal to adults and children provides an example of what social activism projects can look like in school. With schools and communities providing such vital places for these activities (Torres-Harding et al., 2018) such an approach potentially provides ideas about how to help children co-construct social action and activism programmes.

This concept of linking critical thinking and action is overall more prominent in the environmental focused books. For example, though not as direct as Cousteau and Hopkinson (2016), Tucker and Persico (2019) call for similar action in *Greta and The Giants*, with Greta challenging the greedy giants after she sees them destroying her forest. By encouraging collective action, she

engages in conversation with the giants and saves the forest. The book finishes with a letter to children about the 'real' Greta Thunberg and states 'the story you've just read has a happy ending. But in the real-world, Greta is still fighting the Giants. . .. Greta needs your help' (Tucker and Persico, 2019: 30). Here, like *Follow the Moon Home*, children are encouraged to critically consider and 'learn everything you can about climate change' (p. 30), as well as take part in climate protests, engage in more environmentally friendly practices and advocate for positive steps to help combat climate change in their local community and through engaging political representatives. Another example, *Kind* (Green, 2020) includes several suggestions about how children can actively take steps to help others and/or the environment in their everyday lives, encouraging real world action. Through promoting critical thinking these books also encourage political engagement both as part of the story and through deliberate notes at the end, linking the ideas within the story to wider social and political action. For example, in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* (Beaty, 2019), the lead character Sofia campaigns and lobbies City Hall to improve her local community park. Additionally, in *The Day War Came* (Davies, 2018), Davies positions the story in a political context noting in an author's note, 'in the spring of 2016 the UK government refused to give sanctuary to 3,000 unaccompanied child refugees' (p. 27). We argue that these types of stories set the stage for supporting children to engage in deeper critical thinking about causes and what constitutes more ethical action (Nussbaum, 1998; Simpson, 2018), and begins to connect solutions with social and political structures (Body et al., 2020a).

Another common feature of these stand-out books was their anchorage in real-life scenarios. As identified in the literature review, children tend to find accessible, more ordinary figures who are more like themselves more inspiring than those who are extra-ordinary or unreachable (Han et al., 2017; Klein and O'Brien, 2017) and human stories significantly increases children's altruistic giving (Larsen et al., 2018). Most of the stand-out books were either based on or inspired by true stories, and even when not based on a real-life story, the story is based upon a realistic scenario. The real-life stories vary from well-known public figures, both current and historical, to less well-known beneficiaries. To illustrate, *Kamala and* Maya's *Big Idea* (Harris, 2020) is inspired by the childhood stories of sisters Kamala and Maya Harris. The author, Meena Harris, Maya's daughter and Kamala's niece, notes at the end of the book how both girls were inspired by their civil rights activist mother (Meena's grandmother). Kamala, then went onto become the Vice President of the United States in 2021 and Maya is an American lawyer, public policy advocate and writer. *Greta and the Giants*, as highlighted by the ending authors note, is clearly based on the story of Greta Thunberg, the very well-known, young climate activist. Furthermore, *Boxes for Katje* (Fleming, 2003), Beatrice's *Goat* (McBrier, 2001) and *The Day War Came* are all inspired by real life stories of children as beneficiaries, while *The Library* (Stewart, 1995), Saving the Countryside (Marshall, 2020) and *The Tree Lady* (Hopkins and McElmurry, 2013) are based on real historical females who resisted traditional gender role stereotypes and demonstrated benevolence towards their local communities; one gifting her worldly possessions to benefit the town, another protecting the countryside and the other researching and creating a park full of trees in a desert. Through the anchorage to real-life we also note greater diversity, across gender, race and socio-economic status, providing an alternative to the problematic trends discussed earlier. These humanising stories (Thomas, 2016) begin to tell the tales of those people whose experiences are not so often told, and so provides at least a 'step in the right direction' (Koss, 2015: 38). This increased diversity has dual potential, it allows a diverse range of children to see others who are like themselves and they can more easily connect (De Leon, 2002), and they also increase awareness of others and the understanding of our pluralistic society (Landt, 2013).

The link to real-life characters and organisations does not end there, some of these books were also tangibly linked to real charities. For example, former US-Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton,

lends her support to the book Beatrice's *Goat* by offering an afterword, drawing attention to the books inspiration, the work of Heifer International, a charity 'investing in individuals and communities to help them create lasting change'. One of the charity's aims is to provide female farmers with a living wage to create lasting change. This is articulated in the true story of Beatrice's Goat, in which income from the goat's milk and selling of the goat kids provides enough money for Beatrice to go to school and receive her wish of an education. Whereas *The Day War Came* is endorsed by the charity Amnesty International 'because it shines a light on children's rights to be safe and have an education' (Davies, 2018). From every copy sold 50p is donated to the charity Choose Love, set up to support refugees across the world. Greenpeace, the non-governmental organisation which seeks to 'defend the natural world from destruction' receives 3% of all the sales from *Greta and the Giant.* Lastly, *Kind*, by Alison Green and illustrated by 38 different illustrators, finishes with an explanation about how they came together to develop the book to raise funds for Three Peas, an international charity established to help individuals and families who have had to flee their homes. These examples begin to expose children to the wider structures that sit around voluntary action and the charities which seek to promote ideas of social justice, helping children to connect their local actions with wider community and indeed global issues (Body et al., 2020a).

As identified earlier, a common feature across the books was a lack of advocacy or voice of the beneficiaries. Most are told from the perspective of the 'giver', with the beneficiary either a secondary voice or not featured. Within our examples of the standout books we have four which are either told from the point of view of the beneficiary or significantly include the beneficiaries voice. In three of these books, Beatrice's *Goat*, *The Day War Came* and *Boxes for Katje*, the beneficiary of the philanthropic action is the leading voice. In *Dear Earth. . . From Your Friends in Room 5*, the children engage in a conversation with 'the earth' to work out how to help. Within each example, to varying extents, the beneficiaries story is told, they are given agency and in doing so the need which predisposes the philanthropic act is discussed. For example, in *The Day War Came*, the impact of war upon a child is vividly described through images and prose, 'war took everything. War took everyone. I was ragged, bloody, all alone' (Davies, 2018). Not only is it important to hear these alternative perspectives, but the conversation between characters and the interactions between giver and beneficiary promotes ideas of solidarity, shared understanding and common cause. Similarly, in *Kind* (Green, 2020), the book actively links acts of kindness with having dialogues with others who may not be the same as you, encouraging inclusivity and celebrating diversity. Furthermore, while largely told from Katje's perspective the dialogue between Katje and the gift giver Rosie in *Boxes for Katje* creates a sense of solidarity between the two girls and allows Rosie to respond to Katje's actual needs, not just the needs Rosie perceives her to have. These stories promote ideas of collective solidarity within philanthropy shifting from traditional donor-centric approaches which favour donors wants and needs, to more community centric approaches favouring the community needs and seeking to share power, recognising the relational and moral elements of philanthropy (Schervish, 2014).

This concept of the importance of the dialogue is repeated throughout the other stories, encouraging ideas of advocacy and empowerment of children's voices. Kamala and Maya in *Kamala and* Maya's *Big Idea* engage the local community in conversations to achieve change through collective actions, as does Sofia in *Sofia Valdez for Future Prez*. Viv in *Follow the Moon Home* engages the local community, mobilising volunteers, engaging the media and works with a range of charities to help protect the Loggerhead turtles. In *Clean Up* (Bryan and Adeola, 2020) the lead character Rocket actively advocates for cleaner beaches, sharing knowledge with other beach goers and raising awareness and in *Dear Earth. . . From Your Friends in Room 5* the children actively share their knowledge with others to increase the number of 'Earth Heroes'. In each example, the

children are empowered as change-makers, they are active and lead the decision-making processes (Nolas, 2015) and they are emboldened to make a difference (Body et al., 2020a).

Although the books mentioned for having stand-out qualities do not form an exhaustive list of children's picture-books which promote ideas of philanthropic citizenship, they do provide examples of stories where literature becomes the representation of human possibilities for children's philanthropic citizenship. Indeed, each of these stories presents positive and ethically considered possibilities of philanthropy (Schervish, 2014) which creates positive change in communities. Children are presented with tangible and clear examples of a range of diverse characters engaging in voluntary action for social good which sits within a wider framework of social and environmental justice. This is not to suggest that literature can transform the world single-handedly, but good literature offers a good start in helping children to frame their acts of giving in a justice framework (Nussbaum, 1998) and move beyond individualised philanthropic virtues (Martin, 1994). If we wish to help cultivate and grow children's philanthropic citizenship, we must first consider what are we teaching children about philanthropy and giving through the books we share with them. We should also consider how can we positively counter some of the dominant narratives which too often promote gendered and racial stereotypical ideas and frame giving as an individual act, which should be externally rewarded, and which is disconnected from wider social and political structures.

Conclusion

In this paper we have questioned how philanthropic citizenship is framed within children's literature. We first mapped out our conceptualisation of philanthropic citizenship and how we feel this can be an approach to teach children philanthropic behaviours within a citizenship framework, and how storytelling may support this endeavour. We then highlight some problematic trends which exist across children's literature, in that most children's contemporary literature frames philanthropic actions as an individual act of personal responsibility which takes place in the private sphere and focuses on singular acts of kindness and generosity, overlooking connections between the cause and wider societal socioeconomic, political, environmental and/or social justice issues. Furthermore, many of these stories reinforced concerning traditional and stereotypical ideas of gender, race and power within philanthropic giving. As a result, we suggest that such books disassociate the philanthropic and voluntary action from the root causes the action is trying to address. Therefore, they do little to encourage children to think more critically about these issues or prepare them for real challenges facing them both as current and future citizens. However, through this process we were able to identify the possibilities for children's literature, noting several stand-out books which seek to move beyond these ideas of personal responsibility, connecting acts of voluntary action and philanthropy to wider ideological, economic and political factors, placing a strong emphasis on social justice and celebrating diversity. We suggest such literature, presented and discussed in an age-appropriate way, is likely to encourage greater consideration of philanthropic citizenship within a wider political and social justice framework.

This study has implications for research, practice and pedagogy in children's citizenship, philanthropy and education research. Our findings can be used to support scholars and educators to further consider the concept of philanthropic citizenship and how to meaningfully engage children in an age-appropriate way in considering voluntary action for the public good. Our findings also have implications for children's writers and publishers, encouraging them to consider how they portray acts of giving within contemporary children's literature. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that this study focused solely on an adult interpretation of this literature, and that we now call for further research to explore how philanthropic stories are used within the home and classroom and the

impact this has on children's conceptualisation of and active engagement in philanthropic citizenship. We would suggest ethnographic inspired, child-led, participatory research studies conducted collaboratively in naturalistic scenarios, exploring dialogues and lived experiences between children, teachers and parents would yield particularly rich findings.

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