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Raising philanthropic children: Moving beyond virtuous philanthropy, towards transformative giving and empowered citizenship

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Abstract

This article seeks to explore how children and young people are socialised to give within a western democracy. Drawing on England as a case study example it tracks the political and pedagogical favouring of a virtues approach to teaching children about philanthropic giving, orientated around benevolence and individual character virtues. Whilst accepting virtues have an important role to play within the socialisation of children as philanthropic actors, this article argues that such approaches maintain the status quo and do little to help engage children, both now and in the future, in challenging systems of inequality and inequity. Instead, this article calls for a more justice orientated approach to cultivating children's philanthropic behaviours, orientated around ideas of justice, activism, and system change.

KEYWORDS
children's rights, civic virtues, middle-childhood, philanthropic citzienship, transformational philanthropy

Practitioner Points

What is currently known about the subject matter

- There is a noticeable gap in critical discussions and research regarding the civic socialisation and philanthropic education of younger children, despite the acknowledged importance of the primary school years in shaping civic, social, and political behaviours.
- Middle childhood (around ages 6–11) is a critical period for the development of prosocial reasoning, where children become more adept at considering intentions, consequences, and others' feelings in their behaviour.
- Current approaches to cultivating children's philanthropy in England often lean towards benevolent perspectives, emphasising individual acts of kindness and generosity, but commonly overlook systemic injustices and hinder progress towards collective solutions for societal challenges.

What your paper adds to this

- The article argues that current approaches to children's engagement in philanthropy often focus on encouraging charitable giving but overlook the importance of critical engagement and considering alternative responses to social and environmental issues.

- It proposes a shift towards a more transformative form of philanthropy, emphasising active participation beyond monetary donations, including advocacy, volunteering, and social action, and involving children in decision-making processes.
- The concept of philanthropic citizenship also involves connecting individual acts of philanthropy to collective action, fostering a sense of community, and promoting a larger moral ecology beyond individual concerns.
- Empowerment and critical thinking are identified as a crucial elements, involving the development of children's commitment and motivation to effect societal change, as well as providing them with the skills, knowledge, and values to challenge the status quo.

The implications of your study findings for practitioners
- Embrace a transformative approach to philanthropy by recognising children as capable and influential individuals, actively involving them in decision-making processes, and encouraging critical questioning of existing systems and structures.
- Implement age-appropriate educational programs and initiatives that promote philanthropic citizenship, encompassing active participation, collective action, empowerment, critical thinking, and justice orientation.
- Continuously reflect on and evaluate philanthropic initiatives, involving children as co-producers of knowledge to inform future activities, and ensure that initiatives are oriented towards systemic change rather than maintaining the status quo.
- Empower children's leadership by creating opportunities for them to engage in decision-making processes, establish youth advisory boards, and collaborate with positive role models and mentors in the philanthropic community.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The central argument in this article contends that prevalent political and educational narratives involving children and young people's philanthropic behaviours depict philanthropy as an embodiment of virtues and benevolence. While such approaches to philanthropy underscore individual virtues and concern for others, they fall short in enabling children to contemplate or deeply engage with the systemic challenges underpinning social issues. This constrains children's growth as philanthropic citizens. Consequently, the article advocates for an approach that embraces transformative, critically engaged, social justice orientated philanthropy, which involves probing systemic issues and advocating for collective action.

Across the globe, children and young people frequently demonstrate various forms of philanthropic behaviour, both formal and informal, such as fundraising, contributing to food banks, and participating in community clean-up efforts. Indeed, nonprofits long-term sustainability relies on the pro-active engagement of younger participants (Gorczyca & Hartman, 2017). Apart from providing invaluable support to numerous deserving causes, the objective is to instil in children enduring 'habits' of giving and civic engagement that will persist throughout their lives. Unsurprisingly families, schools, and communities expend considerable effort to bolster the development of children's philanthropic behaviours as an integral part of their citizenship and civic participation (Body et al., 2020; Body et al., 2022). We commonly refer to this as philanthropic citizenship defined as '*a dimension of civic engagement associated with intentions and actions that intend to*

produce public benefit, for example, volunteering, social action, charitable giving, advocacy, and activism' (ibid).

While there is an extensive body of literature on philanthropy and civic engagement among adolescents and adults (Barrett & Pachi, 2019), it is widely acknowledged that there is a lack of substantive critical discourse and deliberation concerning the civic socialisation and philanthropic education of younger children (Body et al., 2020). Conversely, educational, social, and psychological theory and research consistently emphasise middle childhood and the primary school years (ages 4–11 years) as pivotal in shaping the development and normalisation of civic, social, and political behaviours (Feinstein & Bynner, 2004; Peterson, 2016; van Deth et al., 2011).

This article, drawing on multi-disciplinary literature from philanthropy, education, child development, psychology, and philosophy, is structured into four sections. First, we explore childhood giving, emphasising middle childhood as pivotal for developing enduring prosocial behaviour. Second, using England as a case study, we examine prevailing political and pedagogical narratives on good citizenship and their impact on how children learn to give. Third, we delve into the essence of philanthropy, drawing on philosophical foundations. We consider the role of 'moral content' (Schervish, 2014) 'moral virtues' (Martin, 1994), and 'moral creativity' (Nussbaum, 1998) in cultivating children's philanthropic citizenship. Through this lens we scrutinise dominant Western approaches to nurturing philanthropic citizens from a young age, critiquing their focus on character virtues, neoliberal models, and benevolent orientation. Finally, we consider the possibilities of philanthropic citizenship through the lens of critical

citizenship education, to deliver a more nuanced, rights orientated, activist approach to engaging children in philanthropy as current donors, beneficiaries, and active social actors within the philanthropic ecosystem, practically considering some of the core components of philanthropic citizenship. The article concludes with a discussion arguing for a justice-orientated approach to philanthropic citizenship and considers what next for this important yet overlooked area of research and practice.

2 | CULTIVATING CHILDREN'S CIVIC BEHAVIOURS

Understanding how situational factors interact with children's socialisation is crucial in understanding the complex mechanisms shaping philanthropic behaviours. Research by Silke et al. (2018), highlights the impact of factors like parental giving, engagement with charities, and exposure to media campaigns on children's giving tendencies. Additionally, peer attitudes and involvement with charities in school and community settings significantly shape children's giving attitudes (Adriani & Sonderegger, 2009; Agard, 2002; Leimgruber et al., 2012). While heightened parental giving behaviours do not always directly correlate with higher giving amounts from children (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979; Ottoni-Wilhelm et al., 2017, 2023), there is evidence of a correlation between parental and adult children's giving amounts (Wilhelm et al., 2008). Peer influence also plays a role, with children often altering their giving decisions under peer influence, primarily due to situational factors (Leimgruber et al., 2012; Wildeboer et al., 2017).

There are also several socio-cognitive and socio-emotional factors that support the development and display of these prosocial, civic behaviours, that is behaviours that are intended to help others. In the initial 5 years of childhood, a period characterised by rapid brain growth (Organisation for the Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019), learning and development hold paramount importance (Schleicher, 2019; Spiteri, 2020; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2020). Warneken and Tomasello's (2009) experimental study with children aged 14–18 months reveals that even at this young age, children exhibit natural altruism, demonstrating a willingness to assist others without expecting any rewards, driven by an intrinsic desire to help them achieve their goals. They propose that 'children start out as rather indiscriminate altruists who become more selective as they grow older' (p. 466). Furthermore, Wörle and Paulus (2018) conducted experiments exploring children's normative expectations regarding the fair distribution of resources. Their findings indicate that notions of philanthropy, such as charity and giving are deeply ingrained norms in children as young as 3–6 years old. Older children, particularly those aged 5–6, demonstrate a heightened inclination toward ensuring a fair allocation of resources, showing a preference for helping those perceived as less affluent within the experiment.

An increasing number of psychology researchers have highlighted the underlying mechanism of emotions, like empathy, sympathy, guilt, and cognitive developments such as perspective taking, in children's pro-sociality and civic-ness (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2006; Sierksma et al., 2014). Eisenberg, a prominent researcher in the field of developmental psychology, emphasises that middle childhood (roughly between the ages of 6–11) is a critical period for the development of prosocial reasoning in children (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Eisenberg-Berg, 1979). During this phase, children become more adept at understanding and evaluating the moral dimensions of social situations. They begin to consider factors like intentions, consequences, and the feelings of others when making decisions about how to behave. Furthermore, other studies highlight that without pro-active engagement in civic learning, children are already constructing discriminatory and prejudiced worldviews from a young age (Oberman et al., 2012; Ramsey, 2008).

Indeed, psychological research and child development theories provide evidence that children's empathy, sympathy, and perspective taking skills, develop from around 4 years of age and increase with encouragement, becoming more advanced over the course of middle childhood (Ongley et al., 2014; Weller & Lagattuta, 2013). Numerous scholars have meticulously traced the trajectory of children's cognitive development, with Theory of Mind emerging as a pivotal cognitive capability. This involves the understanding that other individuals possess distinct thoughts, beliefs, desires, and intentions, which may diverge from our own (Lecce et al., 2014). Throughout their schooling years, children progressively refine their Theory of Mind abilities, using them to navigate intricate social scenarios with greater sophistication. Recent empirical investigations substantiate that as children mature, their proficiency in discerning beliefs and perspectives amplifies, and they adeptly apply these skills across diverse contexts and scenarios (Lecce et al., 2014). Notably, their capacity extends to accurately assessing one person's beliefs regarding the intentions of others (Miller, 2009), as well as employing a greater frequency of mental state terminology to describe social behaviours (Meins et al., 2006). For example, Paulus and Moore (2012) suggest prosocial behaviours, such as comforting and helping are displayed early in life, and the frequency and the complexity of these behaviours, increases during the primary school years; whilst studies looking at sharing tendencies have shown that 3–4- and 7-8-year-olds are willing to share things such as toys and food, however the number of children who share and the number of resources they give increases with age and positive reinforcement (Fehr et al., 2008).

Applying these skills within the educational context, research suggests children are keen to engage in philanthropic and civic behaviours (Body et al., 2020; Lau & Body, 2021; Power & Smith, 2016). Such findings are echoed by others. For example, a UK based study with young adolescents, including those at the upper end of primary school age, reveals they are positive about charity, with high expectations of charities and civic action to solve social ills (CAF, 2013; Power & Taylor, 2018). Finally, several studies highlight the notable level of political and civic literacy in younger children (Abendschön & Tausendpfund, 2017; Götzmann, 2015; van Deth et al., 2011). Van Deth et al.'s (2011) panel study involving 700 children in Germany during their initial year of school (aged 6–7 years) challenges the conventional notion that adolescence is the primary period for cultivating

political and civic orientations. Their research reveals that these orientations take shape much earlier, as young children exhibit the ability to articulate political opinions and attitudes, showcasing fundamental political knowledge and orientations essential for active political engagement (van Deth et al., 2011). This underscores middle childhood as a pivotal phase for both civic and philanthropic education, which requires increased academic and practical focus (Dias & Menezes, 2014).

3 | POLITICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL BACKDROP

Within the UK (and beyond) sociologists, educationalists and social policy scholars have long been concerned with how we raise the good citizen, with volunteering and giving seen as important factors. English education policy has evolved from Labour's emphasis on social and emotional learning (1997–2010) to the current Conservative government's increasing focus on and investment in character education (2010–present), emphasising virtues, resilience, and grit (Jerome & Kisby, 2019; Jerome & Kisby, 2020). Nicky Morgan (Education Secretary 2014–2016) allocated over £14.5 m to character education initiatives (Marshall et al., 2017). Damian Hinds (Education Secretary 2018–2019) established quality benchmarks for OFSTED to monitor schools' character education from September 2019. Gavin Williamson (Education Secretary 2019–2021) continued this oversight, followed by Nadhim Zahawi (Education Secretary 2021–2022), who emphasised political impartiality. Gillian Keegan (Education Secretary 2022–present) maintains this focus, with particular attention to the religious character of schools, stating at the Church of England National Education Conference, '*Your [Church of England] schools are more likely to be good or outstanding than those without a religious character*'. Indeed, amongst subsequent education secretaries across the last decade, '*there is manifestly a high degree of elite social reproduction through a dominant system of independent and/or selective education which inculcates the structures and values of an essentially Christian ethos, focusing on moral/character education*' (Hilton, 2022). Meanwhile, critics of the character education programmes have attacked it for taking an approach which 'seeks to fix the kids', rather than teach children to question wider structural inequalities or root causes to social problems (e.g., Allen & Bull, 2018; Bates, 2019; Holden & Minty, 2011; Jerome & Kisby, 2019; Kisby, 2017; Suissa, 2015), branding the approach as '*unclear, redundant, old-fashioned, essentially religious, paternalistic, anti-democratic, anti-intellectual, conservative, individualistic and relative*' (Jerome & Kisby, 2020, p. 1).

Nonetheless, service learning, volunteering and community action have remained consistent pillars of the character education agenda, under the auspices of 'good citizenship'. This fits well with the 'responsibilisation' agenda of recent and successive governments (Allsop et al., 2018; Clarke, 2005), where citizens are expected to take increasing personal responsibility for their own educational, health and welfare needs, with significantly increased expectation of communities to address societal challenges. Such thinking ties in neatly with

the Labour's (1997–2010) promotion of the Third Way, followed by the Conservative's promotion of the Big Society (Body, 2020). The ideological narrative of the Big Society coupled with the political reality of austerity and public sector cuts has put increasing focus back on charity and voluntary action as an alternative (Mohan & Breeze, 2016). Whilst the language of Big Society has dropped away from the Conservative narrative, the focus on neighbourhoods, communities and local social action has not, and remains an important feature of current policy. This is encapsulated perfectly in the Civil Society Strategy 2018, through an intent focus on neighbourhoods and volunteering (HM Government, 2018). In this strategy, particular attention is paid to research from the Jubilee Centre at Birmingham (Arthur et al., 2017), stating that, '*research suggests that if children are involved in action for the benefit of others before the age of 10, they are twice as likely to sustain it throughout their lifetime as young people who only start at age 16 to 18*' (HM Government, 2018, p. 31).

The House of Lords select committee on citizenship and civic participation introduced the concept of the 'civic journey' in 2018, highlighting the complexity of citizenship issues in Britain. The civic journey is described as the evolving relationship between an individual, the state, and fellow citizens over time. In this sense active citizenship is viewed as volunteering and helping strangers, alongside democratic participation. They advocated for a seamless civic journey, with both central and local government playing key roles, emphasising the need for a comprehensive framework to facilitate societal contributions. Their report also stressed the importance of addressing barriers to engagement (House of Lords Select Committee, 2018). However, the discussion on the civic journey has predominantly focused on adolescents and adults, neglecting the critical role of civic learning in early and middle childhood.

In the backdrop of this, several conversations have emerged regarding children's civic behaviours under a variety of conceptual frameworks from discussions about kindness, civic virtues, service-learning, citizenship, character, pro-sociality, and moral education (Westheimer, 2015). Each of these concepts are widely contested. As discussed, popular with the current conservative governments, character education has come under significant criticism for being too narrow and instrumental (e.g., Jerome & Kisby, 2019; Jerome & Kisby, 2020; Suissa, 2015), whilst citizenship comes under scrutiny for being too wide and all encompassing (Kisby, 2017). Westheimer (2015) identifies, through extensive research in the US (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), three 'types' of citizenship promoted by educational programmes; the personally responsible, the participatory and the socially just. The personally responsible citizen, epitomised in character education, works on the assumption that to solve problems in society citizens must be responsible, law-abiding, honest and possess identified 'civic virtues' such as integrity, grit, resilience, and kindness. The participatory citizen is promoted through service-learning programmes, where the 'good citizen' refers to individuals who actively participate in their community within the current community structures. The socially-just orientated citizen would ideally include active participatory and personally responsible characteristics. Whilst simultaneously developing the knowledge and capabilities to critically

question the established systems; assess social, political, and economic structures; and address the root causes of problems, critically assessing the problem and seeking for structural change to find solutions to societal problems like food poverty (Westheimer, 2015, p. 39).

In short, when policy makers, educators, voluntary sector organisations and communities pursue ideas of philanthropic citizenship, they do so in many ways, to many different ends. Early exposure to civic concepts and values can have a profound impact on shaping responsible, active, and engaged citizens in the future. Incorporating philanthropic citizenship and civic education into the early education and learning experiences is vital for fostering a sense of civic responsibility and community involvement from a young age. Viewing philanthropy and giving as one form of individuals civic participation, the pedagogical approaches towards and framing of philanthropic citizenship has real consequences for the type of giving activities and engagement we encourage and the type of society we imagine, and thus requires further scrutiny (Holden & Minty, 2011). Therefore we now turn our attention to the ways in which we cultivate children's philanthropic citizenship.

4 | THE FOUNDATIONS OF CULTIVATING PHILANTHROPY

Our working definition of philanthropic citizenship embraces the widest sense of philanthropic actions as argued by Payton and Moody (2008), who define philanthropy as 'voluntary action for the public good'. Their definition outlines three core ways in which we can give through voluntary action; one, through voluntary giving, whether it be of money or property; two, through voluntary service, where we give our time, and, sometimes our talent; and three, through voluntary association, which refers to the organised activity, without which most voluntary service and giving could not take place. These activities will look different in different cultural contexts, different societies, and different global contexts, but nonetheless almost everyone will have a connection to philanthropy in one way or another, be it through mutual aid in the community to benefitting from medical breakthroughs funded by philanthropic efforts. It is both a tangible and intangible web of activity which is embedded in all our lives, meshing communities, locally, regionally, and globally together.

Nonetheless, philanthropy itself is a contested concept (Daly, 2012), which can be seen by many as inherently problematic. Whilst proponents of philanthropy promote it is positive, transformative effects on society, with the ability to offer alternative solutions and ways of being outside or alongside the role of government (see Breeze, 2021), critics point out that many manifestations of it can be considered counter-intuitive to democracy and social justice (see McGoey, 2015; Reich, 2018; Vallely, 2020). And whilst we may be tempted to dismiss these concerns as criticisms more related to what is referred to as 'big' philanthropy, where celebration and concerns are expressed as the uber wealthy are able to wield power through philanthropic efforts, political theorist Emma Saunders-Hastings

(2022) warns us that this is too simplistic a view. Central to Saunders-Hasting's argument is that philanthropy, in all shapes and forms produces relational inequality through the creation of '*objectionably hierarchical social and political relationships*'. Within these relationships the donor is assumed to have better knowledge of recipients' needs and interests than the recipients themselves. She continues to argue that democracy is always a preferable way in which to address societal needs, arguing democracy is a system which respects individuals' status as equals, whilst philanthropy involves the wealthy and privileged exercising influence over social and political outcomes, normally in ways which are beneficial to them and/or their own world view. Likewise, in this article we maintain that dominant approaches to how children are socialised as philanthropic citizens draw upon neo-liberal, market orientated values which draw on conservative theories of poverty and need, locating the causes in individual characteristics or cultural traits, adopting a top-down approach to combatting issues and prioritising donor interest (Herro & Obeng-Odoom, 2019), and thus philanthropic citizenship is often framed through a virtuous lens.

4.1 | A virtuous approach to philanthropy

Payton and Moody (2008) acknowledge that our understanding of philanthropy is often informally and haphazardly learned from family, church, and tradition, resulting in a limited perspective. However, they argue for taking philanthropy seriously, urging critical exploration of its problems, possibilities, and opportunities. Additionally, they propose utilising philosophical thinking about virtues to comprehend philanthropy and its implications. Human nature demonstrates a range of virtues and vices, but shared language binds us in recognising positive virtues such as kindness, generosity, honesty, and integrity. In Wright et al.'s (2020) work, virtues are defined as enduring, well-grounded character traits that are consistently expressed in a diverse array of situations, driven by appropriate motivations.

Schervish (2006, 2014) and Martin (1994, 2012) advocate virtuous approaches to philanthropy rooted in Aristotle's philosophy. Schervish frames philanthropy within a 'moral citizenship of care' framework, emphasising the importance of caring for others in society. He views morality as an essential dimension of human interaction, highlighting that philanthropy should be supply-led, responding to the needs of others with empathy and concern. Schervish views morality in this light as '*an essential organic dimension of human interaction, in general, not something imposed from the outside and a way of thinking, feeling, and acting in the light of goals, desires, aspirations and purposes*' (p. 390). Accordingly, Schervish presents the notion of the moral biography, which is the way in which individuals carry out agency. This agency is enacted through two elements, first the implementation of capacities, which are a collection of the resources we control, and include all forms of capital or wealth that individuals possess, such as status in society, skills, and financial resources. Within children such capacities maybe their knowledge, their lived experiences, or a utilisation of their rights as represented by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The second element is purpose, which is

the resolve to which we apply these capacities. Nonetheless, whilst children may easily have this resolve (see Body et al., 2021), they are to a large extent dependent upon the adults within their sphere to be able to put this resolve into action. As Schervish summarises, '*philanthropy is the response to affective demand such that donors directly fulfil the needs of others simply because they are people in need*' (Schervish, 2014, p. 396).

Similarly, Martin (1994, 2012) combines this idea of care and capacities with action, viewing philanthropic actions as an act or activity, built upon many widely recognised moral virtues, including generosity, compassion, courage, fairness, integrity, and so on (Martin, 1994). In this sense, virtues are considered as traits of 'character', providing individuals with '*morally desirable ways of relating to people, practices, and communities*' (Martin, 1994, p. 5). Virtuous philanthropy aims to cultivate nurturing relationships and relies on these compassionate behaviors. 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, including benevolence, justice, reciprocity, enlightened cherishing, and self-affirmation, centre on inspiring acts of generosity and giving. Enabling virtues provide the moral resources for effectively pursuing philanthropic actions, for example respect for others, self-direction, and moral leadership (Martin, 1994, p.5). 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). Thus, Martin argues that giving is not just a matter of fulfilling a moral obligation but can also be a source of personal fulfilment and happiness (Martin, 2012). According to Martin, giving can promote what he calls 'virtuous cycles' of happiness, where the act of giving leads to positive emotions and social connections, which in turn motivate further giving and enhance well-being. Giving children opportunities to develop these virtues is essential, as it fosters caring relationships and contributes to personal fulfilment and happiness.

Within both Schervish's and Martin's approaches, being a good philanthropic citizen is framed around a sense of individual virtues, care, moral obligations, and benevolence. Indeed, it is difficult to argue with the concept of virtues per se, as discussed, most people would agree that being kind, generous, compassionate, honest, and so on, are good things within democratic societies. However, *how* these actions are orientated matters. A benevolent orientation focuses on addressing need through sympathy, gifting time, money and/or efforts to those in need to alleviate suffering and has less focus on questioning of structural and systemic factors that contribute towards inequality and inequity, paying little attention to systemic change and policy reform (Louis et al., 2019). Thus, a focus on individual virtues can suggest an apparent lack of concern for collective action in favour of individualistic actions, which risk overlooking systemic injustice and promoting paternalism (Power & Taylor, 2018). As Louis et al. (2019) argue, '*when they come from a benevolence perspective (palliating the suffering of the needy), actors often give to individual victims without fixing root causes or systems that create suffering. When they come from an activism perspective (seeking to stand beside, and empower, united*

attempts to change the system), actors often endure the suffering of present victims in a struggle to achieve future change' (p. 3). This is not to suggest benevolent and activist perspectives cannot co-occur, but instead argues that benevolent respondents do not tend to engage in activism, however those who come from an activist perspective engage in both benevolent and activist behaviours, such as campaigning and political advocacy (Louis et al., 2019).

4.2 | Current approaches to cultivating children's philanthropy

Current research indicates that prevailing discourses on cultivating philanthropic citizenship with children in England lean towards benevolent perspectives, aligning with the previously discussed political framing of education and civic virtues. This is evident from children's earliest exposure to literature, where philanthropy is portrayed as an act of benevolence. A critical content analysis of over 100 popular western children's picture-books with elements of voluntary action (Body & Lacny, 2022) demonstrates that contemporary literature predominantly depicts voluntary action as an individual responsibility in the private sphere, emphasising virtues like kindness and generosity, while neglecting the broader societal, socioeconomic, political, environmental, and social justice dimensions (Patterson, 2019). These narratives often revolve around a singular benevolent hero, perpetuating the notion of an individual saviour rather than fostering critical inquiry into the systemic injustices at play. Consequently, while such narratives may elevate the hero, they tend to marginalise individuals and communities, depicting them as mere recipients of charity and pity. This portrayal not only reduces philanthropy to an act of privilege, but also hinders progress towards a collaborative pursuit of a better world *with* others, rather than *for* others. Moreover, the research highlights that many stories reinforce problematic gender, race, and power stereotypes within philanthropy and voluntary action, endorsing a 'politics of benevolence' (Jefferess, 2008) and perpetuating notions of 'white saviourism' (Vallely, 2020). This reinforces ideas of inequity, inequality, and paternalism within the realm of philanthropy.

A large-scale survey of primary school teachers in England underscores the prevalence of charity and fundraising activities within the primary school environment, recognising its role in shaping children's civic behaviours (Body et al., 2022). However, the research reveals a tendency to emphasise individualistic virtues in giving, with less than a third of children provided with opportunities for collective action and discussions on social justice issues during fundraising efforts, such as supporting children in poverty or foodbank initiatives (Body et al., 2022). Additionally, while most philanthropic activities centre around monetary donations, fewer than half of children participate in social action projects, and only 16% engage in advocacy or campaigning efforts (ibid). The study highlights disparities in access to philanthropic skill-building opportunities, with children from more privileged communities having greater access, potentially entrenching early inequalities in philanthropic education (Body et al., 2022). Furthermore, echoing other scholars (e.g., Power & Taylor, 2018;

Simpson, 2017), the normalisation of charity and fundraising in education perpetuates the notion of charity as the response to social needs, rather than encouraging critical inquiry into systemic injustices. This fosters an individualised citizenship approach, rather than promoting justice-oriented collective responses to societal challenges (Westheimer, 2015).

Body et al. (2020) participative action research project with 150 children aged 4–8 in England reveals that children's experiences of charity often reflect neo-liberal and market-oriented values, emphasising giving for rewards rather than principles of equality and justice. While all children regularly participate in fundraising activities, fewer than 20% were fully aware of the cause they were supporting, and less than 8% had a say in whether they participated. This raises concerns about tokenistic rather than participative giving, neglecting children's rights to active decision-making as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Body et al., 2022). Imposing philanthropic decisions on children without allowing them to critically engage with the cause and the underlying issues risks reducing philanthropy to a transactional process, potentially overshadowing the intrinsic values that should be cultivated. The authors argue that this approach may limit children's perception of philanthropy to a narrow financial perspective, rather than embracing the broader concept of social change advocated by many non-profits and philanthropic institutions.

4.3 | Shifting the narrative

To move beyond virtuous approaches to philanthropy, there is a need to embrace more transformative approaches that address systemic issues and promote collective action. Encouraging children to question societal issues and participate in philanthropic activities with a focus on justice and equity can empower them to become critical and engaged citizens. When we view philanthropy as an embodied part of citizenship, we draw on wider notions of citizenship and society in our understanding of enacting philanthropy. Thus, through this lens we view giving as an act of democratic participation in society, a way in which we can help shape the society we want, rather than simply respond to need (Bernholz, 2021).

Martha Nussbaum, the prominent philosopher focuses on the idea of 'moral creativity' as a response to this need for transformative citizenship. In her book 'Cultivating Humanity' she focuses on what type of citizen we need in the world to cultivate humanity where '*we recognise the worth of human life wherever it occurs and see ourselves as bound by human abilities and problems to people who lie at a great distance from us*' (Nussbaum, 1998, p. 9). She argues that there are three capacities which are essential to the cultivation of humanity: the capacity for critical reflection, the need for global perspectives, and the narrative imagination. These abilities need to be underpinned by knowledge and scientific understanding. In short, '*becoming an educated citizen means learning a lot of facts and reasoning. But it means something more. It means learning how to be a human being capable of love and imagination*' (Nussbaum, 1998, p. 14). Indeed, philanthropy

itself means '*love of humankind*' (Daly, 2012). This draws our attention towards the idea of a global citizenship lens in our understanding of philanthropy, which is underpinned by critical reflection and a sense of '*bounded humanity*' which requires collective thought and action. Nussbaum argues that this kind of 'moral creativity' requires a combination of empathy, reason, and imagination, and that it is essential for living a fulfilling and meaningful life. Cultivating moral creativity is not only good for individuals but also for society, as it can help to foster greater understanding, compassion, and cooperation among people with different values and beliefs. However, Nussbaum also argues that the eradication of humanities and the arts from education (Nussbaum, 2010), means students are losing '*the ability to think critically; the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a 'citizen of the world'; and, finally, the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person*' (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 7).

Indeed, increasingly children and young people worldwide are encouraged to adopt a critical lens in their citizenship, in England we often refer to this as 'critical thinking skills, in France it is the 'critical spirit' and so on, (Johnson & Morris, 2010). Thus, when viewing philanthropy through a global and critical citizenship lens, 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. This is not to say that virtues are not important, indeed they can be considered the building blocks on which moral creativity is established. Thus, instead of viewing arguments of virtues and citizenship as binary divides, we can view this as a spectrum in which the cultivation of virtues allows us to put into action a sense of 'bounded humanity' (Nussbaum, 1998) wherein we utilise our moral creativity to transcend individualistic approaches and cultivate collective responses.

A classic example of this would be how we engage children in discussions about food poverty. Children are regularly encouraged to give to food banks (Body et al., 2020), often at school through harvest festivals, and throughout the year. A virtuous approach would promote the gift of food to others as a benevolent gift, motivated by kindness and sympathy—these are important traits. However an approach informed by moral creativity (Nussbaum, 1998) and critical thinking, would both encourage the benevolent gift of food, but couple this with critical questioning about why food poverty exists, the systems and structures which reproduce food poverty and challenge children to consider what other appropriate collective responses are required—where children, both donors and beneficiaries, were encouraged to stand in solidarity as 'citizens of the world' in collective allyship rather than one having privilege over the other—and then to put this into action, for example protesting, campaigning, and so on. This supports children connecting their philanthropic actions with their role as a citizen in a democratic society and identifying when giving simply is not enough, when the 'need' calls for greater democratic action, to support both short term responses and long-term change. It is also then possible to see how this would work at a local level,

drawing on children's own lived experiences as donor, beneficiary or indeed both, and then at a global level, applying the same logic to global issues of food poverty.

Such an approach lends itself to considering more radical or transformational forms of philanthropy, which seek to foster new economic institutions and local, grassroots initiatives which seek to tackle manifestations of imperialism, colonialism, and poverty (Herro & Obeng-Odoom, 2019). This encourages a more critical perspective of the institutions of capitalism, such as banking, energy supply and the labour market, which are largely seen as reinforcing the privileged position of dominant groups in society. Instead, this perspective seeks to prioritise participatory approaches to philanthropic decision making, encouraging a reclaiming of the State, and holding it to account. In short it is about reshaping the philanthropic eco-system, which is orientated towards changing systems, instead of retaining the status quo, thus encouraging a more transformational approach to cultivating children;s philanthropic citizenship.

5 | A TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH TO CULTIVATING PHILANTHROPIC CITIZENSHIP

Thus far, this article argues that political and educational discourses frame children's engagement in philanthropy as an expression of virtues and benevolence through the act of charity. Whilst such an approach seeks to encourage a habit of giving, which is important, it misses a crucial element of encouraging children to critically engage with the cause and consider other potential responses to social and environmental issues. Drawing on Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) and Westheimer's (2015) conceptualisations of the different type of citizens promoted by different types of learning experiences, the argument proposed here is that how children and young people are engaged in early experiences of philanthropic practices matters. To help realise philanthropy's potential of achieving a more just and fair society, we need to offer children greater opportunities to engage in more transformative forms of philanthropy. This requires adopting a critical citizenship lens, shifting from a 'giving' to a 'doing' approach (Johnson & Morris, 2010). Thus here we can begin to consider what the core components of such an approach may be.

The first, and probably most obvious, component within this conceptualisation of philanthropic citizenship, would be a simple act of participation and doing, this generally means 'donating of one's resources without contracting to achieve a comparable economic compensation' (Martin, 1994: 10). This means philanthropic citizenship includes an intention to act or an act itself, such as advocacy, volunteering, social action, charitable giving, and activism. Which when we consider this from a children's rights perspective requires the active participation of children in the decision-making processes (Body et al., 2022; Nolas, 2015). In helping children to cultivate their philanthropic citizenship, children need to be supported and made aware of all the ways in which we can philanthropically, and democratically, participate beyond simply the donation of money, including

giving of time, talent, and voice. Thus, to cultivate this aspect of philanthropic citizenship, children should be encouraged to take responsible ethical action and reflect on this action.

Nonetheless, whilst the act of participation may be individual, it is important to then consider how we help children connect these acts to wider notions of collective action. This centres around the idea of creating 'communities of enquiry' (Fisher, 2008). This is not to suggest all participants should join in with a 'groupthink' approach, indeed maintaining individual identities is important. Nonetheless, this approach seeks to counteract what Giroux describes as the neo-liberal '*individualistic and competitive approaches to learning*' (Giroux, 1997, p. 109) and to promote to children a '*larger moral ecology beyond their own individual...concerns*' (McLaughlin, 1992, p. 243). Thus, we return to the idea of Nussbaum's 'bounded humanity' and seek to engage with issues collectively, as 'citizens of the world', standing beside one another in united attempts to change systems which reproduce injustice (Louis et al., 2019).

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 & Howe, 2001). This is about helping children to develop the disposition to be committed and motivated to help change society (Johnson & Morris, 2010; Veugelers, 2007), to develop civic courage and responsibility for decisions taken. Indeed, empowerment relies on cultivating the skills, knowledge, and values to imagine a better world and challenge the status quo.

One more crucial element of philanthropic citizenship involves the intention to create social and/or environmental benefits. We break this into two key aspects. First, the act of intending to produce benefits requires critical thinking to identify the underlying problem that the action aims to address, analyse its root causes, and determine the most ethical and effective approach to tackle it (Jerome & Kisby, 2019; Kisby, 2017; Suissa, 2015). For example, this involves thoroughly examining the cause, actively involving the recipients as partners and co-producers (Jefferess, 2008) in the response, and considering what would be an appropriate and ethical philanthropic response, even exploring if other avenues, such as government support, might be more suitable. Thus, children's participation should be informed by what is the most appropriate response to that need, and indeed children should be encouraged to consider what is the more appropriate vehicle in terms of attending to that need. Secondly, the act must be directed towards generating some form of environmental or social good (Payton & Moody, 2008). While the concept of 'good' can be subject to varying interpretations, in this context, it generally refers to the intention to protect human and/or environmental rights (Martin, 1994). Therefore, proponents of philanthropic citizenship advocate for critical thinking within a framework of justice (Body et al., 2020; Body et al., 2021; Nussbaum, 1998; Simpson, 2017; Westheimer, 2015). As Simpson (2017, p. 90) explains, having a social justice mentality or mindset entails a commitment to equality, along with developed critical and independent thinking, which ultimately results in ethical action. Indeed, this requires us to equip children, as appropriate to their age and evolving competencies, with the

knowledge of how to collectively impact systemic change, on both local and global scales, and with the skills on how to use knowledge to influence power and how our overall and wider behaviours influence society and injustice.

There is no single one right way to put philanthropic citizenship into action. Initiatives such as UK Youth Fund, Youth Social Action Fund and the *#iwill* campaign have offered some examples of engaging younger generations, however in the main these focus on with adolescents, with less attention paid to younger children. Citizens UK, a charity which empowers communities to drive social change through collective action, can offer a lived example of one way in which this can be enacted with younger children. Citizens UK effectively engages children, and the wider community, in philanthropic citizenship through community organising, enabling them to play a central role in addressing pressing social issues, which matter to them. They promote a five-step approach to social change, emphasising community collaboration and empowerment. The organisation starts by assembling diverse teams from local entities such as schools, faith groups, universities, and charities. Differences are valued, and common ground is sought to facilitate collective solutions. Acknowledging the importance of including children in decisions that impact their lives; facilitated, active listening concerning social injustices unites children around shared concerns. Children are then encouraged to envision a better future and devise strategies to address underlying injustices. This involves research, relationship-building with stakeholders, and identifying actionable solutions. Citizens UK then supports children in engaging in action, including social action, and staging imaginative and legal public demonstrations to hold responsible parties accountable. The organisation assists in team-building, training, and connecting with influential figures to drive change. The final step involves engaging decision-makers in government, businesses, or other power-holding entities to find collaborative solutions. Citizens UK provides guidance to facilitate constructive dialogue and ensure sustainable change. Some real-life examples include St. Antony's Primary School choir, supported by Citizens UK, composed the song 'Realise, Wake Up, Pay Up' as part of a social action campaign to persuade London City Airport to pay the London Living Wage. The campaign began with community mobilisation and listening to the concerns of children and local families. Through collective action, the airport agreed to increase wages, benefiting contractors and local residents. Another example includes Citizens UK mobilising the Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens to advocate for a reduction or waiver of the £1012 child citizenship fee. Children played a central role in this initiative, sharing their experiences through social action projects, including creating poetry and sharing testimonials. The collective pressure resulted in the Home Office publishing new guidance for fee waivers, demonstrating the power of children's voices in effecting change. Citizens UK serves as one model for engaging children in philanthropic citizenship. Others include charities such as First Give, Young Citizens and the Linking Network who all seek to empower children as active change makers through engagement in philanthropic action in their local communities. A similar initiative, The Giving Square, a US non-profit, also adopts such an approach.

5.1 | What can this mean for practice?

Nonprofits long-term sustainability relies on the pro-active engagement of younger donors (Gorczyca & Hartman, 2017). To date, significant research has focused on how nonprofits may engage upcoming generations of donors (e.g., Goldseker & Moody, 2020). However, as argued in this article, less attention has been paid to how younger children are socialised into philanthropic behaviours. This article discusses how political, educational and philosophical discussions on philanthropy have largely influenced children's early experiences of philanthropy rooted in character virtues and urges a more transformational approach to philanthropy drawing on the core components in encouraging children's philanthropic citizenship. Taking a children's rights approach to this participation means recognising children and young people as capable and influential individuals in their own right. They are experts in their lives and experiences, deserving to be active citizens who contribute to shaping the world they inhabit. Instead of merely treating them as future citizens and donors to fit into existing systems, we should empower and enable them to be part of the decision-making process in philanthropy. Engaging children and young people in philanthropic decision-making goes beyond creating future donors within the current systems. It involves encouraging them to question these systems and structures critically. We should support them in exploring alternative ways of existence that promote equity, social justice, and the understanding of the interconnectedness within the philanthropic ecosystem. This includes recognizing the vital roles of volunteering, advocacy, campaigning, activism, and influencing governments in driving social change.

Taking up this challenge should not simply be reserved for organisations working directly with children. Indeed, philanthropic actors across the philanthropic ecosystem can play a significant role in improving children's philanthropic citizenship by implementing various strategies and initiatives. As outlined in section 1 of this article, research shows us even the youngest of children have the capabilities of engaging critically in discussions regarding political, civic, environmental, and social issues. However, it is important that opportunities created are age appropriate and supportive of children's evolving capabilities and thinking. Initiatives nonprofits and philanthropic actors can consider, may include:

1. **Raising education and awareness:** Create educational programs that promote philanthropic citizenship, embracing the core components of active participation, collective action, empowerment, critical thinking, and justice orientation (Westheimer, 2015), and help children learn about social issues and how to imagine and create different ways of being. This also involves raising awareness among children about the power of their actions in making a difference.

2. **Child-orientated activities**: Develop specific philanthropic initiatives and projects tailored with and for children and youth, offering age-appropriate opportunities for children to get involved in a range of philanthropic initiatives, connecting critical thinking with actions, such as charitable giving, social action, volunteering,

fundraising, advocacy, campaigning and protesting activities (Body et al., 2020).

3. **Evaluation and learning**: Philanthropic institutions and nonprofits should continuously reflect on their initiatives to help cultivate children's philanthropic citizenship, working with children, as coproducers of knowledge, to help inform future activities. This should include open and honest critical reflection on philanthropic institutions themselves, for example, are activities orientated towards changing systems, or reproducing and retaining the status quo.

4. **Empower Children's Leadership:** Encourage children's engagement in leadership and involve children in decision-making processes. Participatory activities can include the creation of youth advisory boards or committees where children can meaningfully influence philanthropic strategies and grant allocations (see Patuzzi & Pinto, 2022).

5. **Inspiring Role Models:** Facilitate children to engage with positive role models and mentors who can collaborate with, and inspire, them on their philanthropic journey. Fostering interactions with community leaders, volunteers, and successful philanthropists, who adopt collective and activist orientations, helps encourage children to lead on philanthropic decision making (Body et al., 2021).

6. **Collaborating with Educational Institutions:** Establish partnerships with schools to incorporate philanthropic citizenship into the curriculum. Body et al. (2022) highlight how partnerships between schools and justice orientated nonprofits, support schools in adopting more justice orientated approaches to philanthropic citizenship.

7. **Acknowledging children's contributions**: Recognise, commend, and celebrate the philanthropic efforts and achievements of children, in ways that are meaningful to the children themselves. As research highlights this increases philanthropic engagement longterm (Ongley et al., 2014; Weller & Lagattuta, 2013).

8. **Nurturing global perspectives**: Stimulate children to look beyond their local communities and comprehend global issues, as 'citizens of the world' (Nussbaum, 1998). Expose them to diverse cultures and viewpoints, fostering a sense of global citizenship.

9. **Supporting skill development**: Provide resources and training opportunities to enhance children's philanthropic skills, leadership abilities, and understanding of social issues. For example, even in the youngest of children aged 3–5-years old, Payne et al. (2020) through their research highlight that as children are given more agency to practice everyday civic-ness, children's civic capabilities expand.

10. **Advocating child participation**: Promote policies and practices that respect and encourage children's right to participate in decision-making processes across the philanthropic ecosystem, shaping societal responses to social and environmental issues (Body et al., 2021).

6 | CONCLUSION

This article seeks to explore how children and young people are socialised to give within western democracies. Drawing on England

as a case study example it tracks the political and pedagogical favouring of a virtues approach to teaching children about philanthropy, orientated around benevolence and individualistic characteristics. Whilst accepting virtues have an important role to play within the socialisation of children as philanthropic actors, such approaches maintain the status quo and do little to help engage children in challenging systems of inequality and inequity. Instead, this article calls for a more justice orientated approach to cultivating children's philanthropic behaviours, orientated around ideas of justice, activism and system change.

There are of course limitations to this approach and such a framing is open to criticism, most notably from proponents of more traditional forms of philanthropy, or critics of an analysis which is rooted in western liberal ideology. Nonetheless, the hope of this article is to at least provide a space for discussion and debate and highlights the importance of critical consideration about how we work with children and young people as philanthropic actors. This is an area which remains under-researched, yet could any topic be more critical for the future of philanthropy? Thus, this article also acts as a call for further research, paying particular attention to international comparisons and children's lived experiences as philanthropic citizens.

Virtuous approaches to philanthropy emphasise individual virtues and care for others, but they may not fully address systemic challenges underlying social issues. Embracing transformative philanthropy involves questioning systemic issues and promoting collective action. Empowering children with the tools and knowledge to engage meaningfully in philanthropy can shape them into active and compassionate citizens, driving transformation and progress. As we move towards a more transformative philanthropic perspective, we can create a more just and equitable society for all.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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