



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

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During middle childhood (ages 6-11), children experience important developments in their prosocial reasoning, including the consideration of intentions, consequences, and other peoples' feelings. These are significant developmental phases, which link to giving and civic action agency, yet this time period has been underexplored in philanthropic research. The teaching of individual values and benevolence has been preferred over a more critical inquiry into societal structures and inequities.

What is the impact of shifting to a justice-oriented approach to philanthropic citizenship education, moving away from an overfocus on children's individual virtues and benevolence?

Through a case study based in England, the author demonstrates how children's philanthropic citizenship has seen children as future citizens and donors fitting into existing systems of giving rather than supporting them to be active and critical members of society through more transformational approaches, such as advocacy, volunteering, activism, and engagement with government.

[#childrensgiving](#) [#philanthropiccitizenship](#) [#transformationalphilanthropy](#) [#nextgen](#)

Background

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Context



- **Philanthropic citizenship is a dimension of civic engagement associated with intentions and actions that produce public benefit.** Education of philanthropic citizenship is not well researched among younger children, particularly in middle childhood, when the development of prosocial reasoning is emergent.
- Within society, scholars, educators, and governments are concerned with raising good citizens. **The focus has been on the individual's development as a "good citizen" rather than questioning established systems and structures.**
- A large-scale survey of England's primary school teachers showed the focus on individual virtue signaling through monetary donations as part of giving initiatives, with **less than 1/3 of children engaged in dialogue on social justice or opportunities for collective action to make change on the issue they were donating toward.**
- **Children in this context have been raised to focus on individual values of virtue as they are associated with giving.** Virtue and activism coexist in a broad philanthropic citizenship approach, but current modalities neglect to engage children as active, critical agents of change.

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Take aways & Learnings



- **Current philanthropic citizenship education risks elevating the donor as a hero and marginalizing individuals and communities as recipients of charity and pity.** How we educate children to understand their philanthropic citizenship ties directly into how we operate philanthropy in wider society and explains why systems change may be so difficult.
- While virtue and benevolence are important, **philanthropic citizenship can also involve children in the active participation of decision-making and responsibility for their own ethical actions and, importantly, reflection on these actions.** This shift moves towards a children’s rights approach beyond a “good citizen” image.
- **In this view, children are seen as “citizens of the world” and are linked to the ecosystem of philanthropic actions.** The actions they take are seen in context of other social change efforts and can extend their identity beyond individual actions, but as part of the larger group efforts.
- **Children are empowered to develop civic courage and responsibility for caring for their world and the decisions they make.** They are encouraged to create their visions of a future world and take action toward those visions – critically examining underlying problems, analyzing root causes, and determining ethical and effective approaches for tackling social and environmental challenges.



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