



Engagement in Philanthropy Among Children from Wealthy Households

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This article explores how children, aged 9 - 11, from wealthy households in the UK engage with philanthropy. It is prompted by the predicted £5.5 trillion wealth transfer and evidence that early childhood experiences with philanthropy lead to higher participation levels in adulthood and shape adult philanthropic behaviour.

The key question of this article is to determine what kind of philanthropic citizen children from wealthy households are becoming.

The author finds a group of children learning to become so-called “personally responsible philanthropic citizens”. These children exhibit a strong philanthropic impulse and a desire to give and participate in philanthropy, which is desirable for encouraging future charitable giving. However, understanding is often narrow, one-dimensional and framed by traditional notions of benevolence and individual acts of generosity. They do not have the opportunity to engage critically with philanthropy.

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Background

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Context



- In this article, **philanthropy** is broadly defined to include **acts such as giving, donating, volunteering, and activism** and is used interchangeably with the term “charity”. Research indicates that **engaging in philanthropy during childhood influences philanthropic behaviour in adulthood**. Pre-adolescence is a particularly important developmental stage in terms of the socialisation of such behaviours.
- Westheimer (2015) talks about **three types of citizen**. They are the **‘personally responsible’ citizen** (one who might make charitable donation), the **‘participatory’ citizen** (one who might plan a charity drive) and the **‘social justice oriented’ citizen** (who might question the structural reason for the charity’s need to exist).
- There are a **lack of studies that examine the philanthropic behaviours of children** in the UK. This study places **children at the centre of the research process**, as experts in their own lives, research with and not on children.
- The study uses a **mixed-methods approach** including surveys, focus groups and interviews to gather insights from **222 financially secure children aged 9 to 11 and 113 parents and four teachers**. Philanthropic activities at home mostly involve donating money and items, while school activities focus on fundraising.

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Take aways & Learnings



- Despite talking about helping people, the **children in the study prioritise animal charities when donating money**. School fundraising favours smaller, local charities rather than major campaigns such as Comic Relief.
- The **children do not appear to be motivated to engage with philanthropy for self-interested reasons**. Yet, fundraising is presented in terms of rewards such as dress-up days, bake sales or certificates for good citizenship. Articulated motivations for giving include a desire for fairness, equality and in response to need they see as well as connection to the cause and the **psychological benefits associated with giving such as the ‘warm-glow’ that comes from donating**.
- The **children describe charity as individual acts** (rather than collective action) of helping, donating or giving, acts primarily enabled by money. Philanthropic understanding is one-directional often with the expectation of gratitude from the recipients (see drawings). **Children lack a broader awareness and knowledge of the wider benefits of philanthropy** and do not consider alternative solutions to social issues or the role of donors perpetuating inequality. The children are learning to become ‘personally responsible philanthropic citizens’ as engagement focuses on individual activity, not collective or structural solutions.
- The study revealed a **gendered angle to the findings** - girls were significantly more likely to be involved in giving decisions at home (62%vs45%), and when it comes to asking for advice about donating, children were more likely to ask mothers (31 mentions) rather than fathers (6 mentions).

Figure 1: The below are two of the pictures that children in the study drew when given the prompt “what charity means to me”. Fig. 1 is an example for the expectation of gratitude that was found in the study, and Fig. 2 illustrates the perception of charity as one-directional.

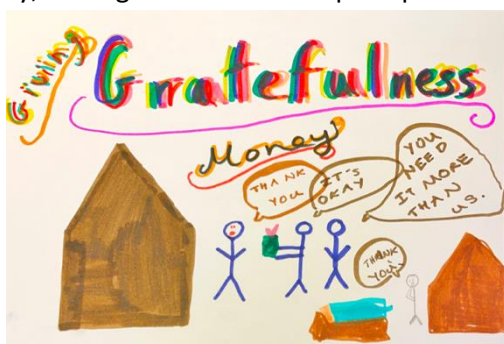


Fig.1



Fig.2

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