Engaging children in meaningful charity: Opening-up the spaces within which children learn to give

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents qualitative evidence from an in-depth, participative action research project with 150 children aged 4-8 years old, exploring their experiences, perceptions and preferences regarding charitable giving. Most children positively engage in charitable giving through home, school and their community, however less than 20% are aware of the cause area they are being asked to support, and most have little decision-making in their giving. Children's willingness to engage increases when they critically examine the cause area and are facilitated to lead on giving decisions, often resulting in increased and sustained efforts to support cause areas that matter to them.

Keywords: children, charity, giving, prosocial, civic engagement

INTRODUCTION

Civil society in the UK and beyond is facing unprecedented challenges which fundamentally alter the landscape of children's futures, from persistent poverty to the unparalleled decline in natural spaces (Cabinet Office, 2018; Civil Society Futures, 2018). Philanthropy, defined as *'voluntary action for public good'* (Payton & Moody, 2008) is widely recognised as one mechanism by which citizens can help combat these challenges. As a result, there has been an increased focus on adolescents as future political and social actors and a plethora of programmes developed to increase their voluntary action in civil society, both in terms of giving time and money, for example the *#iWill* campaign for 10-20 year olds and the National Citizen Service for 15–17 year olds.

Significantly less attention has been paid to younger children, nonetheless the UK Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office, 2018) clearly recognised the importance of involving children from the earliest stages possible in *'action for the benefit of others'* to develop a longer term 'habit' of social action and participation. Furthermore, promoting children's rights and providing positive experiences in the early years of life helps children to develop personal ownership and identity in their beliefs, actions and responsibilities (George et al., 2017). Indeed, research (Arthur et al., 2017) suggests that if children are involved in charitable actions before the age of 10, they are twice as likely to sustain it throughout their lifetime compared to young people who only start at age 16 to 18. Viewing charitable giving through this lens of *'action to benefit others',* therefore including fundraising, gifting and volunteering for charities and charitable type causes to achieve social good, we wanted to explore younger children's perceptions and preferences about charitable giving. We explore this through the understanding of children as active social and democratic citizens, who have an inherent right and important part to play in civil society. In doing so we seek to answer the research question *'what are young children's perceptions and experiences of charity?'*

This paper is divided into four sections. Section one offers a discussion of the literature about the importance of socialisation in the early years on children's giving behaviours, children's charitable giving and the educational focus on citizenship. Section two outlines the participative and child-centred research methods used to explore this topic. Section three presents the findings from our in-

depth analysis, whilst section four offers up some discussion about what this means for children's future engagement in charitable activities.

Socialisation of the Prosocial Child

Within literature exploring philanthropy and charitable giving, there is an intense focus on how to encourage individuals to give more, more frequently. Less attention is paid to how individuals develop their giving behaviours, especially pre-adolescents. The impact of socialisation on children's sense of *fellow feeling,* that is the 'emotional connection of empathy, sympathy and concern' (Roughley & Schramme, 2018:3) is well documented, both in the home environment and within their educational setting (Eisenberg, 1983; 2018; Sierrksma et al., 2015). Both parents (Dahl & Brownell, 2019) and educators (Berliner & Masterson, 2015) can influence children's dispositions to thinking empathetically about others and subsequent prosocial behaviours (Dahl & Brownell, 2019). Influenced by these factors, children start to show a variety of positive social behaviours between 12 and 18 months of age within a wide range of contexts; for example, they comfort others who are in distress, help others in need (e.g., Warneken & Tomasello, 2008).

As such it is often assumed that there is a correlation between empathy and prosocial behaviours, presuming that if empathy is taught this will result in a child displaying more altruistic caring actions towards others. However, studies suggest that this is not necessarily the case (Berliner & Masterson, 2015). Instead the development of empathy into prosocial behaviour is a much more complex process; it requires both an affective and a cognitive response (Gibbs, 2019). To be able to empathise a child needs to recognise and correctly identify particular emotions, differentiate between their own and other's feelings, as well as interpret possible reasons. Regardless, there is some evidence that children as young as 18 months can show concern and subsequent prosocial behaviour by affective perspective taking (Vaish et al., 2009) and that children as young as 24 months exhibit empathetic responses which can lead to prosocial behaviours. For instance, McHarg et al. (2019) noted their caring responses to a 'baby' who appeared distressed. This early social competence might lead to the assumption that socialisation does not play a significant role in their social development. However, if the parent in the 'baby' study responded to their child's empathetic curiosity about the 'baby' the likelihood of the child demonstrating caring behaviours was increased. This highlights the importance of parental socialisation in the development of empathy in young children (Dahl & Brownwell, 2019; Zahn-Waxler et al., 2018).

The spaces and places which encourage this development can be a home or a more formal environment such as school (Eisenberg, 1983) where an adult, parent or educator, supports children in both identifying and describing different emotions (Berliner & Matterson, 2015) and engages them in thought and discussion about empathy. These practices position the child as active within their own empathetic development and subsequent acting out of prosocial behaviours (Dahl & Brownell, 2019). In everyday life, children are further confronted with prosocial acts in a variety of ways such as adult and peers modelling, directing or rewarding such behaviours (Eisenberg, 1983). Especially the latter practice of rewarding prosocial behaviour can be problematic. Given the early onset of positive behaviours such as helping and sharing even before the formal onset of socialisation (Warneken & Tomasello, 2008), an internalised motivation of such behaviours can be assumed. Overriding this intrinsic motivation with an external incentive can eventually replace its initial intrinsic origin (Warneken et al., 2008) and therefore have the opposite effect.

It is also important to note that prosocial behaviour by definition (Grusec, 2002) is not always truly selfless representing 'real' altruism. Such behaviour can be selfishly motivated as well ('pseudo-altruism', for example see Eisenberg, 1983). Along these lines it is suggested (Berliner & Masterson,

2015; Feigin et al., 2014) that empathy does not always lead to altruistic action and indeed could lead away from it. The origins of altruism are a desire to interact and cooperate with others (Dahl & Brownwell, 2019); thus children might initially participate in helping behaviours because they want to be involved or because they see such behaviour as the social norm (Feigin et al., 2014). Dahl and Brownwell (2019) give the example of the young child helping to tidy up initially from the perspective of joining in. The fact that the adult will praise this 'helping' could act as a positive reinforcement so that the behaviour happens again. Dahl and Brownwell (2019) stress that the initiator in this scenario is the child and argue therefore that adult impact on prosocial behaviour is limited in children who are more passive when opportunities for social encounters present.

Thus, despite its internalised motivation and natural development, socialization plays a crucial role in the further development of early empathy and prosocial behavior. Socio-psychology can support an understanding of how children develop first as social beings and then as those who will demonstrate altruistic acts towards others (Feigin et al., 2014). From this we begin to understand how children's dispositional characteristics can positively influence giving behaviours. For example, research highlights that children are willing to donate money and help others from a young age, even when they do not benefit themselves and when that person is a stranger (Wildeboer et al., 2017; Warneken & Tomasello, 2008). In short, parents and educators should be encouraged to rely more on this intrinsic motivation and the natural course of its development and reinforce feelings of autonomy and competence as much as possible rather than to provide superfluous material incentives, which can have detrimental effects.

Children's Charitable Giving

Charitable giving has grown in importance in the western world. The overall estimate of household giving in the UK was £10.1bn in cash terms in 2018, but this was as a result of a smaller group of dedicated donors giving more (CAF, 2019). Similarly, although the amount given to charity rises on a global scale, the proportion of donors giving money is falling (CAF, 2018). Whilst established literature explores why donors give (e.g. Bekkers and Wiepking, 2011), less attention is paid to how individuals learn to give, particularly from a young age.

Whilst limited, research into children's charitable giving suggests that children are often willing and generous with their time and treasure. Research by Power and Smith (2016) which asked children aged 10 to 15 what would they do 'if someone gave you £1 million today', revealed high levels of altruism, countering concerns about the commercialisation of childhood. Half said that they would give a significant amount of the money away, whilst one quarter said they would give all the money away. A survey of over 1000 young people aged 9-11 and 16-18 revealed that young people are positive about charity and have high expectations of charities to solve social ills (CAF, 2013; Power & Taylor, 2018).

Alongside the importance of socialisation, situational factors play an important role in the formation of children's prosocial behaviours. Research has explored how an individual's experiences of situational factors including parental giving behaviours, influences of peer attitudes, school and community engagement with charities, and exposure to well-known media campaigns can all influence giving behaviours (Silke et al, 2018). The conclusions drawn by Silke et al. (2018) are supported by wider research, focusing on the impact parents, peers, schools and media can have on children's attitudes to giving or giving behaviours (Adriani, 2009; Agard, 2002; Leimgruber et al, 2012). Research studies by Eisenberg (1979), and more recently Ottoni-Wilhelm et al. (2017), suggest that heightened parental giving behaviours do not always mean children give higher amounts, although they do present some evidence that the amounts given by parents and their

adult children are correlated (Wilhelm et al. 2008). Peer influence is more straight-forward, evidence suggests that children are likely to change their giving decisions when influenced by peers due to 'situational manipulation' (Leimgruber et al., 2012; Wildeboer et al, 2017).

Spaces in which Children Engage in Charitable Giving

One of the most significant spaces where children engage in giving is school (CAF, 2013). Exploring charity and giving in more depth in the educational context facilitates a more democratic approach to learning about complex issues even at a primary level (Biesta, 2011). Democratic learning is founded in critical enquiry and decision-making. A recent report on education and democracy stated that: *"education for a complex world in a supposedly democratic society must seek to equip students with the capacity to handle complexity and uncertainty, to deliberate with others exhaustively, to solve problems creatively, and to reach decisions on that basis"* (Gilbert, 2017 p.1). The learning experience should therefore include deliberation, creative problem-solving and decision-making.

Citizenship education has a potentially important part to play here. Whilst it is not formalised in English Primary schools, the Department for Education promote that 'children should have opportunities to contribute to the improvement of the community' (DfE, 2013). Additionally, an OFSTED report published in 2013 praised the approach of over 146 Primary schools in the England focusing on the students understanding of democracy, human rights, care for the environment, awareness of sustainability and highlighted the commitment of senior leaders and teachers for the creative ways in which they made it part of children's learning. Furthermore, just as changes have been made to the OFSTED framework, recent education policy has seen also a renewed focus on the notion of character and the importance of developing skills outside academic learning. In January 2019 the Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds gave a speech on the 'five foundations of character' focusing on virtues and values, emphasising the huge role schools can play to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their pupils. He outlined examples of the range of additional activities schools can provide to facilitate the development of character and virtues; exploring charity, philanthropy and social justice fit within these examples.

While this continues to build a case for exploring a more holistic and rounded education, it is however important to recognise that the concepts of both citizenship and character education are contested across the education sector (for example see Allen & Ball, 2018; Morrin 2018). While there exist frameworks for the types of values educators can encourage and develop in children, critics suggest that this concept of moral education is rooted in a constructed notion of what makes a good citizen, which requires exploration through a more democratic approach (Jeffrey & Troman, 2012; Westheimer & Kahne, 2002). However, educators often opt to take a neutral stance on difficult issues, maintaining the status-quo in an attempt to reach a non-bias consensus in the classroom (Annette & Mayo, 2010; Ross & Vinson, 2014). As Peterson (2019) points out, engagement in communities and deliberation with others is central to developing individual character, alongside recognising and challenging structural injustices

Power and Taylor (2018) identify charities are increasingly becoming mainstream in schools and most of the big charitable campaigns have established resource packs to assist schools in fundraising or social action endeavours. However, we raise concern with this, whilst such activity may increase children's experiences of charitable fundraising and volunteering, it is at risk of marginalising their critical enquiry into the cause areas, as well as offers a very limited view of the charitable sector. Hart (1992) and Shier (2001) writing in response to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child published in 1991, exposed how despite a pledge to recognise children as active citizens, many participation initiatives continued to involve children in a "tokenistic" or "frivolous" way that

"trivialises their involvement" in important issues (Hart, 1992:1). Tokenistic participation means children are engaged in serious issues, yet crucially only at a superficial level, rather than engaging in decision-making, or taking roles of power and responsibility. Examples of school engagement in charitable events often tends to describe participation in high profile media campaigns such as BBC Children in Need[1] and Comic Relief's[2] Red Nose Day. Research by Power and Taylor (2018) with young people aged 10 to 15 years indicated that Children in Need was the 'most frequently mentioned school-supported' charity. However, we argue that this type of involvement runs the risk that children, especially younger children, may only be engaged in a purely transactional way, turning up with a donation in return for a treat or fun experience. This is not to suggest this is an unethical practice, but more that without critical discussion and debate children remain distanced from and unaware about the charitable cause they are seeking to support. Furthermore, research highlights that increasingly habitual activities such as non-school uniform days and dress-up days are problematic for families facing poverty (Mazzoli Smith & Todd, 2019), and that schools in wealthier areas fundraise significantly more than those in more deprived areas (Body et al., 2017). Indeed, Power and Taylor (2018) conclude that *'the current mainstreaming of charities into schools is not necessarily a self-evident 'good' and that this under-researched phenomenon deserves greater critical attention within and outwith schools'* (p.702). In part we respond to this call with what we believe is the first research of its kind exploring younger children's perspectives and experiences of charitable giving.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a snap-shot study of children's perceptions of charity and giving. It was designed as an exploratory participatory action research style study, exploring children's experiences of giving, with the hope of informing a much wider and longer-term research agenda, as we think about charity and the way individuals 'learn to give' in the future. Participatory action research is a 'stance' the researcher takes towards the researcher-participant relationship (Stuart et al., 2019); it recognises a co-constructed research process in accordance with democratic principles and social justice orientated motivations.

Engaging children in participatory research resonates strongly with wider debates around children's participation. This idea has risen in prominence since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 which was propelled forward in practice by Hart's influential ladder of participation (1992) and Clark and Moss's popular mosaic approach (2011) to researching with children. It has redirected the traditional focus of research 'on' children as objects in research to replace it with one that seeks to research 'with' children. Significantly this approach promotes children as capable social actors so that they are fully included in the research process and their ongoing collaborative participation is facilitated (Lundy et al., 2011).

Sample

To complete this research study 150 young children, aged 4 to 8 years old, engaged in a participatory action research project. Of the 150 children 48% were female, and 52% were male. As figure 1 shows, whilst relatively evenly split in terms of gender, children aged 6 and 7 years were more

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[1] Children in Need is a British grant-making charity. The Children in Need appeal is an annual telethon. The campaign includes a mascot bear named Pudsey

[2] Comic Relief is a British grant-making charity. The highlight of Comic Relief's appeal is Red Nose Day

represented in the sample than children aged 4 or 8 years old. Children were engaged through schools and community settings located in the English counties of Kent, Medway and Sussex. This area includes some of the wealthiest and the most deprived areas of the country, however, individual socio-economic status of children was not collected.
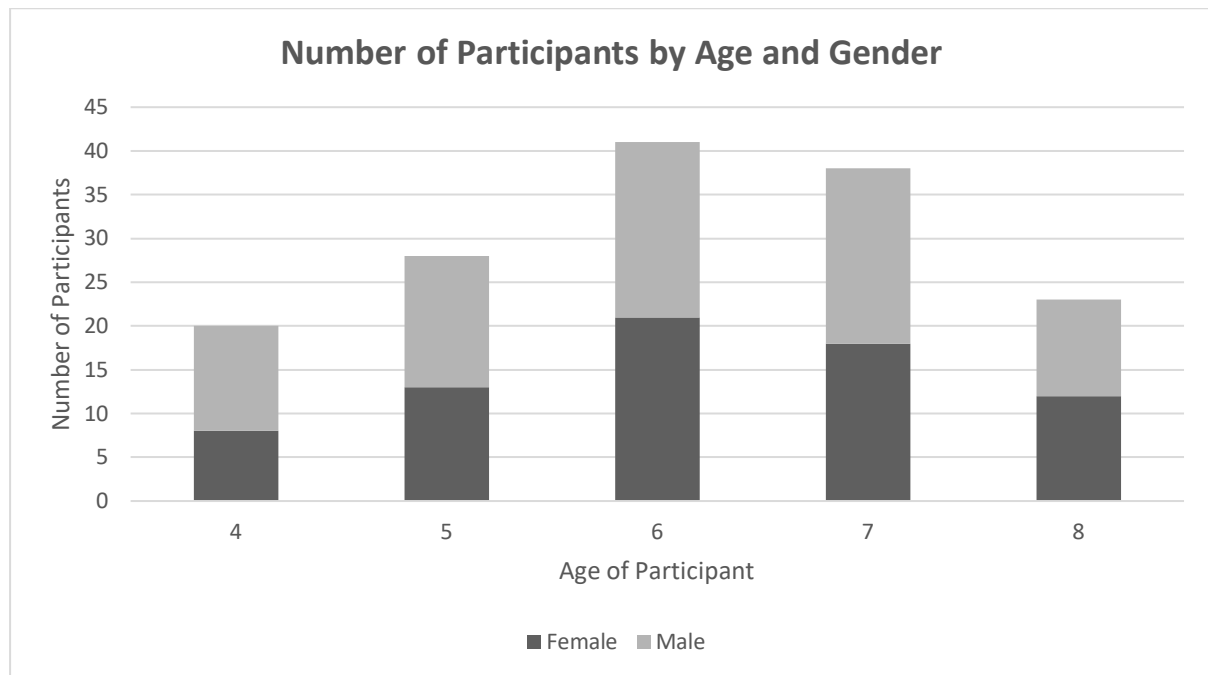
Number of Participants by Age and Gender

Figure 1: Number of participants by age and gender

Research Process

Participatory action research approaches are time and resource intensive. With the aim of engaging a breadth of children on a small group or one-to-one basis a team of researchers was required. Therefore 60 students in their final year of study for an undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Studies were employed as research associates and trained in participative action research and child-led research methods. Each student worked with a single or small group of children over a period of six weeks exploring their experiences and understanding of charity. Each child was engaged in the project for six to ten hours. The research all took place in settings which were familiar to the children, including home, school and community buildings. This was agreed on an individual basis between the researcher, child, parents/carers and schools. It took place between the months of October and December in 2018, where it must be noted prominent campaigns such as Children in Need and the Poppy Appeal take place. These research associates were further educated in narratives about charity and appropriate methodological practices which would allow children 'to speak for themselves' (Einarsdottir, 2007: 197).

Research associates worked with the children to explore their views and experiences of charity. Throughout the process research associates documented with the child the giving decisions made and the accompanying rationale. The documentation, inspired by Rinaldi's work on visible listening (2005), took the form of a research journal which captured both the student and the child's voice as co-researchers. The journals were designed and developed in partnership to include anything both parties found relevant such as photographs, drawings, annotations, leaflets, captured discussions and observations.

Ethical approval was granted by the students host university. Data was analysed in four different ways. Firstly, the research associates presented their findings to a team of academic staff and engaged in questions to increase clarification and detailed knowledge. Secondly, the compiled documentation was shared and analysed for themes, trends and interesting points. At a third stage all research associates completed a summary response outlining key findings, noteworthy considerations and personal reflections. Finally, the academic research team drew together the findings from these three stages to discuss the summary findings as set out in this paper.

The child appropriate data collection methods (Einarsdottir, 2007) chosen were effective in providing answers to the research question: *'What are young children's perceptions and experiences charity?'* It was children themselves who were able to provide these answers as they were encouraged to be fully engaged in the research process from designing data collection methods, to recording findings and finally reflecting on what had been found out. Co-construction of knowledge took place on four levels i) children engaging with the researchers, ii) researchers engaging with each other, iii) researchers in their role as students engaging with academic tutors, iv) the academic tutor team engaging in the final analysis.

The research however was not without its limitations. Whilst the sample size of 150 children is relatively large for an in-depth qualitative piece of research, we do not have data to link responses to socio-economic status or cultural background. Furthermore, data gathering techniques, which included multiple research associates and a variety of research approaches, due to the child-led nature of the work produced huge variation in the type of data analysed (for example films, photos, interviews, drawings) making it challenging to analyse themes. The ethical consent did not allow for the sharing of videos, photos or pictures – so presentation of data relies on the written word.

FINDINGS

In keeping with previous research, we find that children demonstrate high levels of altruism and understanding about charity and charitable giving, recognising it as a space in which to achieve social good (Power & Taylor, 2018). However, this ethnographic style study about children's experiences revealed two key features, which ultimately present as two sides of the same coin. Adults play a crucial role in how children 'learn to give'. Thus, here we present two dominant and contrasting experiences discussed by children in this research process. First, how adults, be that teachers, parents or community leaders, however unintentionally, can 'close-down' children's space for exploring ideas around charity and charitable giving, potentially missing opportunities to help develop children's understanding around social issues. Second, in contrast, alternatively adults can help 'open-up' these spaces and facilitate children to question social issues and develop their own responses through ideas around philanthropy and charitable giving.

Closing-down thinking about charitable giving

In inviting children to discuss their views of charity with us, we first started by asking them about how they defined charity. The children demonstrated a multitude of understandings about what charity meant; some defined charity as an 'act', something they 'did' to help others, for example:

> *"Charity is when you donate to people to help them live a better life" (Girl, 6)*

> *"When we use our hands to help people" (Boy, 4)*

Whereas other children saw charity as more of a set of behaviours, closely associated with kindness, for example:

>*"Charity means being kind to people and animals" (Boy, 6)*

>*"I think it is about being good and helping" (Boy, 4)*

Other children associated charity with the idea of place, often linking it with charity shops and spaces to donate, or for people to receive help, for example:

>*"A place where you give to other people, old people, poor people, where you give money, and food for animals." (Girl, 6)*

>*"Charity is somewhere where people go who haven't got a home, they give them food and water and a bed" (Girl, 6)*

Finally, others understood charity as an organisation set up to help different causes, for example:

>*"You can get different charities, some are for toyless children for children who don't have toys, and another type for saving lives." (Boy, 8)*

As a result, we understand that being charitable from a child's perspective encompasses a mass of prosocial actions and behaviours. These actions included environmental behaviours, like recycling, collecting litter, planting trees and supporting nature; or helping others, such as befriending other children, helping a child if they were sad, or helping in their community. For example, children highlighted actions such as, *"doing good things, like recycling" (Girl, 4)*, *"helping to grow new trees" (Boy, 5)*, and *"being kind to children who haven't got anyone to play with" (Girl, 7)* as charitable.

However, in tension with this our findings suggest that children are often, through the fundraising and charitable engagement afforded to them, encouraged to take a more transactional approach to charitable giving. Transactional giving refers to giving processes in which what is being given is closely tied to what the individual receives in return. For example, children discussed fun events organised at school and how they bought and sold novelty cup-cakes or paid to dress up in *'funny clothes',* without really being aware of what charitable cause they were supporting. Whilst all the children could discuss recent fun and engaging fundraising and giving activities, such as Children in Need, the Poppy Appeal and Harvest Festivals, less than 20% of the children *(n=28)* were able to identify the cause area they were supporting and what their fundraised income aimed to achieve – each of these children had been involved in how they fundraised and supported charity, as well which charities they sought to support. Just under 30% *(n=44)* could identify what that they were supporting but were not sure about the cause area, for example, supporting the Royal British Legion poppy appeal, but not sure why. More commonly, just over half of the children *(n=78)* reported engaging in fundraising and charitable activities with very limited or no understanding of why or what charitable cause they were supporting. For example:

>*"I've done fundraising at school. We sold cakes on the playground at break time and people put money into the pot, but I don't know what charity it was for though…" (Girl, 8)*

There is a risk that just simply creating fun activities, which neglect to discuss the cause funds are being raised for, potentially trivialises children's involvement (Hart: 1992:1).

Certainly, our findings highlight children are involved in a huge amount of engaging fundraising activities, predominately at school, but also at home, at after-school clubs and within the community. In terms of developing a 'habit of service' as proposed by some (e.g. Arthur et al., 2018;

Taylor-Collins, 2018) this is promising news; however, we argue requires greater investigation. Where a reason for giving was not shared with children or indeed where it did not come from children themselves, a void was created about 'why' they give, giving rise to misunderstanding and misinformation about charitable giving, for example:

> *"We raise money because Pudsey Bear needs a new eye patch" (Girl, 6)*

> *"We gave food at the Harvest festival, I think God must be hungry" (Boy, 5)*

Instead, they engaged in certain behaviours because they were told to, because that was what was expected or because their peers were. This meant that their charitable acts were often passive, within which children had little or no decision making. For example, in some schools, charitable giving often occurred as a separate, one off, fun activity, which was separate from wider citizenship initiatives. One child (Boy, 7) discussed playing 'splat the teacher' at school. This was a fundraising activity chosen and designed by the teachers to raise money for a local foodbank. Commendable as a successful fundraising activity and indeed enjoyable for the children, as a learning experience, it was less successful as the child had no recollection of why the activity took place or for what cause and is an example of a more transactional action, giving money in return for a fun opportunity.

These experiences were common across the children. Children often associated giving to national campaigns such as Comic Relief, with getting a Red Nose - or Children in Need being associated with Pudsey bear and treats - whilst having very little awareness of the cause. This is not to say giving should not be fun and engaging for children, nor is it to suggest transactional giving is wrong, or that every giving experience should turn into a life-lesson, teachable moment. However, consistently setting giving up as a transactional process limits children from engaging in the cause areas which sit behind the charitable giving, and further risks over-riding intrinsic prosocial behaviours with an external incentive (Warneken et al., 2008). To achieve the ambition set by Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office, 2018) to engage children 'in action to benefit others', the limiting of these giving experiences, which lack pro-active critical engagement in giving decisions, potentially undermines the very purpose of charitable and philanthropic giving in our society, which by definition requires the pro-active and conscious engagement of individuals in 'voluntary action for public good' (Payton and Moody, 2008). Such an approach with younger children also under estimates their capabilities for actively and critically engaging in social issues (George et al., 2017; Hart, 1992).

Opening-up thinking about charitable giving spaces

However not all children experience fundraising and charitable giving in the same way. To start with, our findings do highlight that there is no one single place within which children learn about charities and charitable giving. Their views and experiences are informed through a multiple of interconnected spaces including home, school, media, social media, peers, places of worship, and even within the supermarket. What is apparent is the importance of children being able to critically engage with their ideas through conversations, questions and critical enquiry, within these spaces.

For example, a young girl, aged 6, spoke of her experiences at the supermarket, several months earlier. Each week her parent would give her a token received at the check-out after paying for groceries. The child was then tasked with choosing one of three boxes, each representing a different charitable cause, within which to put this token in. The child could not decide which charity was more 'worthy' of her token. She instead pocketed the token and took it home. With her parent she researched each of the three charities, and still felt they all merited support. Her answer was simple,

she attended the supermarket three weeks in a row, got three tokens, and shared them out equally, one in each box.

This vignette highlights the capability of this child to critically consider her role in supporting the charities. Scaffolded by her parent, the child was able to critically engage with the giving decisions, learn about three charitable causes and reflect her own views of fairness. Her decision to save up three tokens, week on week, showed a prolonged engagement with the task and the ability to discuss it several months after the event, showed a deeper, engrained critical engagement with the topic at hand.

What was perhaps most exciting from this research project though, occurred after the formal research had finished, highlighting the potential power of actively engaging in their giving decisions as part of a wider understanding of citizenship and social issues. Just over one third of the children *(n=51),* inspired by the project chose to undertake charitable activities, fundraising and giving, of their own volition. This phase of the project emerged from the children themselves and was led by them individually - inspired by their co-researching journey and supporting charitable causes of their own choice. In doing so children participated in multiple acts of charity such as preparing donation boxes or fundraising for charities they had researched. These children chose the charity and led on fundraising or social action. For example, a girl, aged 5, undertook a co-researching project which led to her exploring donating clothes abroad. Supported by her co-researcher, she had found a charity which prepared parcels of clothes which would be donated directly to another child. She then gifted a parcel of her own clothes and toys to donate to another child. In another example, a boy, aged 5, used his pocket money to adopt a black rhino after co-researching animal charities. When asked by the charity whether he wanted a toy included in his adoption pack, he selected no, as it *'means more money goes to the charity to save the rhinos'.*

What became clear through our research activities is that children initially and unsurprisingly associated giving based on the limited charitable choices they had been exposed too; however, after researching further and exploring issues which they felt mattered them, most children re-evaluated their ideas of giving. Findings highlighted even the youngest children's ability to think about the size, popularity and need of the causes they were looking at. Children began to discuss and form firm orientations in their views on giving, with a heightened awareness of the issues of equality and engaged in discussing the ways charities should work and how people should give in the future.

We find this the most exciting and perhaps the most important part of this research. Whilst it was not initially structured as part of the project, the children leading on and critically engaging in their own giving decisions gave rise to several important and critical conversations between the researchers and children, including discussions about homelessness, poverty, climate change and inequalities in education. Here, we see a real power in engaging children in charitable giving, not to tell children where or what to give, but giving them the space, tools and support to ask, and critically explore, giving decisions themselves and the reasons behind the cause areas.

DISCUSSION

This paper has focused on how children understand charitable giving. The analysis of children's experiences of charitable giving is perhaps the first step to acknowledging that children play an important role in charitable giving and civil society more widely. This acknowledgment is noteworthy in itself but also helps us understand how we can create more meaningful spaces for children to engage in charitable giving. As Power and Taylor (2018) suggest, fundraising has become increasingly

mainstreamed in schools, with many larger charities providing resource packs to assist schools in their fundraising endeavours. In terms of fundraising this has achieved much success for these organisations, for example, according to Children in Need (2018) schools alone raised over £5.6m in 2018, important funds that are redistributed to children's charitable causes across United Kingdom. However, as the quantity of these activities increase, we question the quality of the learning experiences which accompany these opportunities. As a result, we suggest we need to take a more critical approach to 'how' that fundraising takes place and carefully consider what children's experiences are of those fundraising activities.

Current approaches to 'giving' located in citizenship and character are often perceived as a representation of a version of children's moral education. It is important that the aim of introducing children to moral and civic virtues should not be to shape children into one constructed notion of the *'good citizen'*, rather the introduction should be a space where children can explore and challenge the ideas of virtue and values. The concept of the "hidden curriculum" (Taylor, 1963), is also important here and its role in the 'socialisation' process of schooling (Kentli, 2009). Schools exist in a particular socio-political context and the hidden curriculum and the way school rules and values are ingrained can be seen as a reproduction of unequal power relations (Giroux, 1978). Educationalists have long argued that teachers need to be aware and move beyond this reproduction through social education (Cornbleth, 1990) by allowing children to question, respond and be participants in the rules and activities the school is framed around.

As identified in the previously discussed literature, citizenship is also a contested concept which is both framed differently and altered by context. In response to social problems among children and young people, ideas around citizenship can become part of a politicised narrative that uses a deficit model of children and young people. This narrative can assume that they lack morals and claim increased moral education could be an answer (Jeffrey & Troman, 2012). In response to the growth of character education in schools, there has been a steady critique suggesting that teaching the concepts in a prescriptive way can actually inhibit children and young people's civic engagement. We suggest a more nuanced approach can be taken, one which does not seek to separate the development of the individual but instead uses these opportunities to question and assess wider social issues. As Peterson (2019) states:

> When pupils are engaged in their communities, including in deliberation with others, such engagement is not separate from questions of who they are and who they wish to become….Rather, the political community is a sphere within which character can be cultivated and expressed (p.11)

In short, we argue that a focus on transactional engagement in giving risks inhibiting children's understanding of charitable giving and in turn may inhibit longer term their propensity to engage in prosocial behaviours (Dahl & Brownwell, 2019), by over-riding their intrinsic motivations with external drivers (Warneken et al., 2008). Our research suggests that by promoting the limited number of mainstream charities such as Children in Need and Comic Relief, educators continue to maintain the status quo and attempt to always reach a non-bias consensus in the classroom (Annette & Mayo, 2010; Ross & Vinson, 2014). Taking a neutral stance on difficult issues, rather than encourage democratic thinking, can limit civic participation' (Ross & Vinson, 2014). Philanthropy, charitable giving and social justice are, and indeed should be, contentious, debated topics (Morvaridi, 2015). Recognising children as social actors and current citizens means it is imperative that they too are provided with the opportunity to critically explore these challenges and debates around giving and equality (Weinberg & Flinders, 2018). Our research suggests that even the youngest of children are capable in engaging in these debates in an appropriate and meaningful way.

Parents, educators and community organisations can all offer a space to grow and nurture these voices at a key point in children's development.

Whilst younger children get to engage in a breadth of charitable activities and giving, they often lack the opportunity to explore the values, ideas and debates which lie behind charitable giving. Proponents of democratic education (e.g. Biesta, 2011; Gilbert, 2017) would suggest this is not just a 'missed opportunity' but instead is fundamentally undemocratic.

CONCLUSION

Schools, parents and communities often go to great lengths to encourage, support and engage children of all ages in charities and charitable giving, creating a strong enthusiasm for giving and supporting others (CAF, 2013; Power & Taylor, 2018). However, less common was a deeper, more critical engagement in the reasons for this fundraising and volunteering activity and the cause issues that sit behind this giving. This surface level giving, led and decided on by adults, is viewed as fun, but rarely acts as a space within which children can explore their own ideas and values in a more democratic way. Instead this activity encourages more transactional giving, a sense of giving for a reward.

We suggest learning to give, be it at schools, home or within community settings, should draw on more intrinsic motivations and development of caring for the other rather than become part of a prescriptive moral education. In short engaging with cause and consequence and exploring debates allows children to learn to give through critical consciousness, rather than passive engagement. Such an approach can foster children's active citizenship and their wider engagement in civil society.

As research suggests children develop consistent and persistent social and political orientations at a young age (van Deth et al., 2011), we propose how and where children learn to give should become a research and practice priority. Indeed, if we want to challenge the issues of contemporary society, and civil society is identified as central to achieving that, it becomes vital that we include young children's voices as active, capable and knowledgeable social actors, to support pro-social democracy, social action and political participation and allow them to help shape their future society.

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