

# **Working Towards Anti-Oppressive Schools – Lessons from WE Charity: A Critical Review**



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institutionalized to contribute to systematic oppression of historically marginalized communities (e.g., the Indian Act in Canada; ETFO & TDSB, 2021). As such, even though the TDSB will be suspending its agreements with WE, to prevent collaboration with similar organizations in the future, it is critical to build capacity to center core pedagogical competencies that can allow interrogation of systems and structures of oppression.

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cultures, to imagine different futures and to take responsibility for decisions and actions” (Andreotti, 2006). CGCE helps students embrace a need to critically reflect on hegemonic structures and become agents of change in imagining radical futurities to solve the most pressing issues facing our world (Andreotti et al., 2018).

Instead of engaging in CGCE, however, organizations like WE frame social justice as a salvationist notion of “help as the burden of the fittest” (Pashby & Sund, 2019, p. 3). WE particularly framed social justice work through the orientation of saviourism, which “connotes the way in the global North, the global South is defined as (having) a problem, the global citizen or humanitarian is constructed as the solution to that problem, and the way it is the [white] “saviour” who has the power to delineate these roles and this relation” (Jefferess, 2021). Jefferess explains further:

“WE provides a variety of school-based Global Citizenship Education initiatives, including extra-curricular projects focused on entrepreneurship (i.e. fundraising), curriculum modules and workshops, as well as annual WE Day concerts, in which thousands of students pack into sports arenas to hear pop stars, celebrities, politicians, CEOs, and motivational speakers. While these activities are presented as providing much needed social justice education and personal empowerment, they provide what Andreotti (2006) calls ‘soft global citizenship education,’ constructing global inequality through a Northern lens that is ahistorical, depoliticized, and ethnocentric, offering simple solutions that reflect Northern paternalism and salvationism (Andreotti 2012).” (Jefferess, 2021, p. 3).

To effectively teach values of social justice in schooling it is important to shift from soft GC style global citizenship education to CGCE, which takes into account the inequities in the local contexts where such work is undertaken as well as the role of power and privilege as a result of structural and institutional injustices globally.

In an analysis of WE lesson plans in contrast to the Ontario Social Sciences curriculum, Jang (2018, p. 3) shares, “The current generations of youth are encouraged and highly motivated to “make a difference” and/or to pursue self-improvement by being responsible citizens that save the world through mission trips or NGO-sponsored activities in faraway countries (Andreotti, 2006),” but as Jang goes on to explain, while “this motivation has good intentions...it ultimately demonstrates the lack of awareness of the underlying power relations that compel one to act or think in this sort of civilizing way.” In 2018, a group of 15 economists explained this as, “Aid projects might yield satisfying micro-results, but they generally do little to change systems that produce the problems in the first place. What we need instead is to tackle the real root causes of poverty, inequality and climate change” (Alkire et al. 2018). Jefferess (2021) illustrates this as follows:

“The outflow of wealth from the South to the North, historical dispossession and ongoing displacement of people from their land (i.e. for industrial agriculture, mining, and wildlife







priorities of anti-racism and anti-oppression. Frameworks like HEADSUP can also be useful starting points to identify the types of critical perspectives that are necessary to establish core pedagogic competencies; yet across other educational contexts, they are also actively adapted to meet varying local needs of educators (Pashby & Sund, 2019). As such, it should be explored how CGCE frameworks can be adapted to meet specific contextual and capacity building needs of schools in the TDSB.

## Further Reading

- ” Andreotti, V. (2006). Soft versus critical global citizenship education. *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, 3: 40-51.
- ” Andreotti, V. (2012). Editor’s preface: HEADS UP. *Critical literacy: Theories and practices*, 6(1): 1-3.
- ” Idrissi, H., Engel, L., & Pashby, K. (2020). The diversity conflation and action ruse: A critical discourse analysis of the OECD’s framework for global competence.



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different conversations about global justice in education: Toward alternative futures in uncertain times. *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, 26, 9–41.



