

Thursday, November 1, 2018

Dear Educators and Partners of WE,

This year, I was immensely grateful and deeply humbled to receive two notable teaching awards: Toronto District School Board's Teaching Excellence (May 2018) and OTIP's Ontario Elementary Teacher of the Year (September 2018). I feel that any recognition that is bestowed upon me reflects the people and the opportunities that I am privileged to have connected with and who have inspired me to hope, help and contribute to the well-being of others. WE Charity, and the leaders and facilitators on this remarkable team have been pivotal in fostering "shameless ideals" to make the world a better place. I have always upheld the notion that gratitude, appreciation and celebration go hand in hand in spotlighting the goodness in our world. WE has worked tirelessly over the past twenty-some years to build a vision of championing youth to care and for educators to collaborate with our students to raise the empathy quotient in our society. Please allow me to take a few moments of your time to share what impact the work, the organization and WE's philosophy have on education.

We live in times ruffled with growing challenges, serious problems and uncertainty. Our young people now more than ever need to know of messages of hope and possibilities. WE's philosophy of "making doing good doable" is profoundly simple and attainable for all. As an educator of eighteen years, I know that young people dream, hope and care for the world around them. From learning from and working with WE over these past twelve years, I know firsthand that you, your staff and your organization are the catalyst, the bridge and the guide that our youth need to see themselves as activators and social change agents of kindness and compassion.

I read about the lofty ideals from the first generation of "Free the Children" club members, led by Craig and several of his grade-school classmates. As a young teacher in the TDSB, I applauded how both the Kielburger brothers collaborated to develop the motto of "Me to WE" into a movement of moving beyond self-centred thinking to that of caring for our communities and one another. I was most fortunate to be invited to be a teacher representative on the inaugural TDSB Me to WE planning executive. It was an honour to be able to help develop teaching kits for the elementary panel around the pillars of clean water, education, alternative income, health and global citizenship. In recent years, the WE philosophy has evolved to encompass teaching, celebrating and sharing the noble tenets of WE with families, communities and businesses. I am most impressed that the organization is not struck by stagnation. Amid new obstacles that our youth and world face, WE has always responded with timeliness and effectiveness. It is laudable and responsible that WE has seen a gradual evolution and transformation in your organization's model for outreach to youth, supports to educators and extension into the wider society. WE's growth reflects responsive and adaptability to the changing world around us. Thank you for being forward-thinking, even courageous in the multitude of ways your organization "thinks outside the box" to help youth, educators and our communities get on board being intentional and thoughtful in caring for issues of social justice, the environment and the well-being of people.

Over the past twelve years of adopting the WE philosophy into my teaching, I have personally witnessed the positive benefits to the students, families and staffs whom I have worked with. As a WE club staff advisor, I marvel at how dedicated the students are in learning of and examining issues such as inequities in access to education, gender disparity, health, environment and Indigenous issues. Every year when school starts and it's time for students to choose which clubs they wish to partake in, the WE club is always brimming with returning and new members. With the support of relevant WE created educational supplements to curriculum, along with the opportunities for students and teachers to learn from WE facilitators, we in the schools are well equipped with knowledge and opportunities to take part in caring campaigns. From collecting non-perishable foods for the "We Scare Hunger" food bank campaign, to "We are Silent" to bring focus to marginalized groups such as girls with limited access to schooling opportunities in impoverished countries, to "We Walk for Water" to highlight the importance of taking care of our planet's water supplies, each WE campaign, theme and project raises awareness, builds understanding and heightens conscious and purposeful advocacy to make it better and make it right to help others.

As a teacher at Eastview Public School, with the largest population of Indigenous-identified students in the TDSB, it was a pleasure to have WE launch "We Stand Together" to put concrete meaning of true 'truth and reconciliation' at the ground level that was



appropriate for children to understand. When my kindergarten class had the phenomenal opportunity to have Craig and the Right Honourable Paul Martin visit our classroom, answer questions and do a read-aloud, both of our honoured guests made my young children feel so important. It is remarkable that WE Charity reaches out to the heroes and celebrities who influence our young people and forges meaningful and positive connections.

The powerful performances and speeches delivered during WE Days serve as a call to action for attendees to listen, to think and to respond to what they can do together to mobilize a chain reaction of empathic actions. Throughout the school year, each year, I am well supported by the innovative and relevant teaching resources, seamlessly woven into our curricula. I appreciate these resources doubly when I know for a fact that these resources are created in tandem with teachers and experts in the field. It is incredible that these learning materials are free, applicable to teachers and enjoyable to students. WE's presentations, motivational messages and educational resources are easily accessible and seamlessly delivered, uncluttered by loud front-facing corporate branding.

I am highly impressed that WE has successfully forged business partnerships so that educational opportunities and resources are readily made available, without cost, to educators and students. Myself personally, I have always taught at inner-city schools where fundraising monies are minimal, if non-existent. Consequently, I am particularly grateful that companies in the private sector have donated to and supported WE causes. I recognize and am truly thankful for the importance of corporate sponsorship in the creation of these terrific resources. The teaching of critical literacy skills is one of my areas of expertise and as such, I am especially perceptive to WE's keen attention and conscious decision-making not to place corporate logos front and centre on any publications pertaining to student viewing or educational resources.

The elephant in the room is that we indeed live in an era of technology and consumerism in our Western culture. Young people are exposed to a plethora of business advertisements. Many educators, myself included, acknowledge that we need to teach our students to ask the important questions about company policies on issues such as unfair wages, environmental hazards and child labour practices. Our youth have many options and are incessantly bombarded with messages to buy, buy, buy. None of WE's products or materials are company-brand student facing. The businesses that do speak during WE Day presentations have consistently spoken of the power to do good deeds and that they are happy to support the dynamic and thoughtful young leaders of tomorrow. Young people need to hear that there are companies that have decent and helpful goals to contribute to the betterment of the world, not simply to make money. I am absolutely confident that WE's philosophy towards building business partnerships aligns with careful and sensitive vetting of only endorsing companies that uphold thoughtful and fair business practices.

Whether, I facilitate the school's WE Club or I use the resources as a classroom teacher, children from kindergarten to my grade 7/8 ESL students benefit in the activities and rich learning stemming from the learning resources provided generously from the WE organization. In addition, I have taken classes and student groups down to the WE Learning Global Centre throughout the year to engage firsthand in thinking and problem-solving sessions with world-class speakers and motivational presenters. At every session, be it a WE Speaks Educators' talk or a G7 Environment Summit on Water, WE's facilitators and programming have consistently presented issues in youth-friendly ways, positioning the students to be the leaders in brainstorming and implementing solutions. I love how my students think more critically and with greater compassion whenever we work with WE. I am a wiser and better teacher having the material and people resources offered from WE.

Unequivocally, WE's philosophy/charity/movement is engrained in my teaching and in my students' appreciation and awareness for the world beyond our classroom walls. I truly believe that the world needs more 'WE'. Most importantly, our schools, our neighbourhoods, our country and our planet are kinder and wiser because WE is a compass of compassion, inviting us to be caring and accountable to one another. Miigwech, qujannamiik, merci, thank you.

With joyful gratitude and respect,

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