**Melhor que nada? uma revisão e crítica do patrocínio infantil**

**Better than nothing? a review and critique of child sponsorship**

**¿Mejor que nada? una revisión y crítica del apadrinamiento de niños**

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**Resumo**

O objetivo deste artigo é revisar e sintetizar pesquisas focadas no patrocínio infantil (CS) e, ao fazê-lo, apresentar uma crítica fundamentada em conceituações de justiça, solidariedade, relações éticas e educação para o desenvolvimento internacional. Conforme discutido neste artigo, uma revisão da literatura fornece oito motivações para se envolver no patrocínio de crianças: Conexão pessoal; altruísmo; culpa; pequena vitória; parte de algo maior; desconfiança do governo; não sem rosto; avanço do desenvolvimento. Após a síntese da pesquisa e a discussão dessas motivações, constrói-se uma crítica visualizando essas motivações por meio de três lentes teóricas: conceituações do bom cidadão, do complexo público-alvo e, finalmente, de uma ferramenta e estrutura pedagógica denominada HEADS UP. O artigo termina com perguntas centradas no poder, pobreza, responsabilidade, cumplicidade, justiça e paz e, em última análise, fornece uma resposta à pergunta "é melhor que nada?" O argumento apresentado neste artigo é que, em sua notável ausência de um exame mais crítico das causas profundas da pobreza e das injustiças globais, o patrocínio infantil não é, de fato, melhor do que nada.

**Palavras-chave:** Patrocínio infantil; Crítica; Educação para o desenvolvimento; Cidadão global; HEADS UP; Justiça; Revisão da literatura.

**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to review and synthesize research focused on child sponsorship (CS) and, in doing so, to present a critique grounded in conceptualizations of justice, solidarity, ethical relationships, and international development education. As discussed in this paper, a review of the literature yields eight motivations for becoming involved in child sponsorship:

Personal connection; altruism; guilt; small win; part of something bigger; distrust of government; not faceless; advancing development. Following the research synthesis and discussion of these motivations, a critique is constructed by viewing these motivations through three theoretical lenses: conceptualizations of the good citizen, the complex audience member and, finally, a pedagogical tool and framework referred to as HEADS UP. The paper concludes with questions centring on power, poverty, responsibility, complicity, justice and peace, and, ultimately, provides a response to the question of "is it better than nothing?" The argument put forth in this paper is that, in its noted absence of a more critical examination of the root causes of poverty and global injustices, child sponsorship is, in fact, *not* better than nothing.

**Keywords:** Child sponsorship; Critique; Development education; Global citizen; HEADS UP; Justice; Literature review.

**Resumen**

El objetivo de este trabajo es revisar y sintetizar la investigación centrada en el apadrinamiento de niños (CS) y, al hacerlo, presentar una crítica basada en conceptualizaciones de justicia, solidaridad, relaciones éticas y educación internacional para el desarrollo. Como se discutió en este documento, una revisión de la literatura arroja ocho motivaciones para involucrarse en el apadrinamiento de niños: conexión personal; altruismo; culpa; pequeña victoria; parte de algo más grande; desconfianza del gobierno; no sin rostro; avanzando el desarrollo. Siguiendo la síntesis de investigación y la discusión de estas motivaciones, se construye una crítica al ver estas motivaciones a través de tres lentes teóricos: conceptualizaciones del buen ciudadano, el miembro complejo de la audiencia y, finalmente, una herramienta pedagógica y un marco denominado HEADS UP. El documento concluye con preguntas centradas en el poder, la pobreza, la responsabilidad, la complicidad, la justicia y la paz, y, en última instancia, proporciona una respuesta a la pregunta de "¿es mejor que nada?" El argumento presentado en este documento es que, en su notoria ausencia de un examen más crítico de las causas profundas de la pobreza y las injusticias globales, el apadrinamiento de niños no es, de hecho, mejor que nada.

**Palabras clave:** Apadrinamiento de niños; Crítica; Educación para el desarrollo; Ciudadano del mundo; HEADS UP; Justicia; Revisión de literatura.

## 1. Introduction

In 1985, the *New Internationalist* wrote that "[h]owever well-intentioned [child sponsorship] may be, the kernel is the creation of a paternalistic relationship which is unnecessary and potentially harmful" (NI, 1985, p. 150). According to that NI issue, child sponsorship "plays on Western individualism and the donor's desire to visualise and obtain feedback from the recipient of the aid" (p. 149). Now, thirty-five years later, the number of sponsored children is "estimated to be between 8 to 12 million children across the world" (Noh, 2019, p. 1420) with more than CAD 2 billion raised in Canada alone. In 2018, one child sponsorship organization, *World Vision Canada*, reported sponsoring 415,113 children during the year, at $39 per month each (Charity Intelligence Canada, 2020). What is clear from these few statistics is that child sponsorship has become a global fundraising machine. Yet, as I argue here, its kernel remains in tact: child sponsorship is an example of a charitable act which "target[s] symptoms and short-term fixes, not root causes, thus promoting band-aid solutions to complex systemic problems" (Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation (SCIC), 2017, p. 3). In this paper, my aim is to review and synthesize research literature focused on child sponsorship; to view that literature through key theoretical lenses; and to establish and articulate a clear and specific position on child sponsorship. That is, in this paper, I make an argument against child sponsorship (CS).

As I reviewed literature and shared with family, friends, and acquaintances the fact that I was engaged in writing this critique, I was frequently confronted with one question: "... but isn't it better than nothing?" In other words, the complex issues and motivations for becoming involved in CS were being reduced to an implicit binary-based question of "should I sponsor a child or do nothing?" The argument put forth in this paper is that, in its noted absence of a more critical examination of the root causes of poverty and global injustices, child sponsorship is, in fact, *not* better than nothing.

The paper begins by presenting working definitions and assumptions about CS, including how/if this action aligns with the bigger picture of justice, global citizenship, and development education. Following this, the results of the review are presented in the form of a collection of reasons or motivations for becoming involved in CS, as teased out of the research literature. These reasons or motivations are then viewed through key theoretical lenses, always with an eye focused on whether these motivations, and those non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promoting CS, reflect the tenets of higher levels of

justice, solidarity, and ethical relationships. In other words, I focus on producing a summary for how/why people become involved in CS programs and formulating a critique of these reasons based on conceptualizations of the good citizen (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and the complex audience member (education student) (Andreotti, 2016). With these discussions forming the ground work, I then move into a deeper analysis and critique of child sponsorship by drawing on a pedagogical tool and framework conceptualization referred to as HEADS UP (Alasuutari & Andreotti, 2015; Andreotti, 2012b, 2016).

## 2. Contexts, Caveats, and Confessions (Some Background)

In addition to outlining here what this paper aims to do, I also find it valuable to discuss what the paper does *not* aim to do. In this text, I do not endeavour to provide a history on the development of CS programs; several others have done this elsewhere (Fieldston, 2014; Watson, 2015).  It is significant to note however that, even though CS programs have recently become large-scale fundraising machines, this situation is not reflective of how or why they were originally developed in the 1920s. According to Watson (2015), "a key feature of the early child sponsorship programme seems to have become lost, namely, that it was designed for the short-term support of undernourished children, primarily within family or institutional settings at times of chronic food shortages" (p. 877). This short term, less widespread support soon evolved into much larger-scale, longer-term international programs, presumably "because of their usefulness as a marketing tool for mobilizing resources in rich countries to reduce poverty in poor countries" (Wydick, Glewwe, & Rutledge, 2013, p. 400), or so they were marketed.  In this text, I also do not aim to discuss specific arrangements of different child sponsorship organizations nor into whether evidence exists for how/if they are doing what they say they do and the corresponding impacts. Wydick et al. (2013) set out to study the impact of one organization, *Compassion International*, by conducting interviews with previously sponsored children who are now adults. These authors state that "[g]iven the number of individuals involved in child sponsorship relationships and the billions of dollars committed to them, it is surprising that almost no research exists that evaluates the impacts of these programs" (p. 397-398). Watson and Clarke (2014) also point to how the topic is under-researched, and "[t]hat so few scholars and industry insiders have sought to interrogate the emergence, evolution and contribution of CS INGOs makes it difficult to evaluate their legitimacy" (p. 3). These authors claim that available information is primarily in the form of

journalistic/newspaper type stories or in-house publications from the NGOs themselves, and only a small quantity of "fragmented scholarly literature" (p. 3).

## 3. Some Foreground on Child Sponsorship

This paper begins from the premise that child sponsorship (CS) is a form of charity, not justice. A clear distinction between the two is provided by Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation (SCIC) in stating that "... charity is aid given to those in need; justice is fairness, equitable distribution of wealth, resources and power among all members of society" (SCIC, 2017, p. 3). While charity may be defined very simply by these few words ("aid given to those in need"), Rabbitts (2012) reminds us of the messiness of charity, that it "is ethically and practically embedded in everyday life [through] a constellation of decisions, values, strategies and practices" (p. 926). According to SCIC (2017), "[o]ne of the biggest risks of doing charity only work is that charity often satisfies people's impulse for change. If they feel like they've already 'done their part' or created change, then they may move on without actually having made any long-term difference" (p. 18). This paper seeks to carefully and critically examine one (ubiquitous) form of charity known as child sponsorship – "an attractive charitable scheme for people in the Global North that has enjoyed enduring, indeed increasing, popularity since its inception in the 1930s" (Rabbitts, 2012, p. 926).

While this paper presents an argument against CS, I feel the need to begin by acknowledging the complexity of the issue and to note that I am not suggesting child sponsors have been duped into participating or that they are always unaware of where CS 'fits' in the big scheme of things with respect to justice, global citizenship, and development goals. Ove (2018) found in his study that many sponsors "described sponsorship as a way to help that was relatively minor but something they could manage" (p. 112), that "it was easily something they could do" (p. 115) and it was perceived by them as providing "valuable and straightforward benefits to the child" (p. 11). However, in spite of unintentional and misrecognized outcomes on the part of child sponsors, it is critical to raise awareness that "well-intended interventions might circularly reproduce the very patterns that they seek to transform" (Andreotti et al., 2018, p. 14).

I position myself in this text in a similar manner to Yuen (2008) in believing that child sponsorship reflects "well-intentioned but misguided acts of charity" (p. 2). Thus, I am careful not to approach this task of reviewing and critiquing with disdain for those involved since I

recognize that "sponsors of children donate out of a genuine concern for underprivileged 'others'" (Yuen, 2008, p. 2). However, as Andreotti (2012a) aptly points out with regard to Northern initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty in the global South, we must become more aware of "the reproduction of historical harm through the solutions we propose" (p. 21), and comprehend the connection between our 'good' intentions to *stop* harm and our complicity in *doing* harm in relation to poverty interventions. In other words, Andreotti (2012a) argues that "if we understand the problems and the reasons behind them in simplistic ways, we may do more harm than good" (p. 25).

### 3.1 What is Child Sponsorship?

As defined by Yuen (2008), child sponsorship "entails a personal relationship between a sponsor and child, with monthly payments being sent by the sponsor in exchange for a picture of the child, letter exchanges, an annual report on how the child is progressing, and a general sense of connection" (p. 3). Simply stated, child sponsorship programs "are based on the concept of a one-to-one relationship between a donor in a developed country and a child in a developing country" (Noh, 2019, p. 1420).

CS is, by far, "the most successful fundraising tool of all time" (Smillie, 2017, p. 116). For example, Smillie (2017) reports that, in 2014, World Vision "raised CAD 270 million in cash donations, of which almost 83 percent were in the form of child sponsorship" (p. 116). That is close to CAD 225 million raised *because* of CS (*because* is italicized here since organizations confirm that, while CS may be the tool to raise the funds, not all of the funds raised through this tool are actually used for CS).

Descriptions of child sponsorship programs, including their purpose, activities, audience and effectiveness vary somewhat across contexts, making it important to carefully outline a few working definitions and assumptions for this paper. Firstly, child sponsorship (CS) is an activity of many, but not all, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs or just NGOs). These NGOs are typically, but not always, associated with a church/denomination and, in Canada, include (among several others) World Vision Canada, Plan International Canada, Compassion Canada, Chalice, and Canadian Feed the Children. While these organizations exist and operate in Canada, they are generally part of larger multinational (globally-based) organizations.

As noted by Watson and Clarke (2014), the CS activities of NGOs share "a number of common characteristics including a historic emphasis on regular giving, the motivation of donating to benefit individuals, and the provision of regular updates for the benefit of sponsors" (p. 2). In addition, of course, the one common characteristic across all contexts is the focus on children, though it has not always been on children in the global South but on short term support throughout the world in times of food shortages (as briefly discussed in the previous section).

## 3.2 Connections between child sponsorship, justice, global citizenship and development education

As offered earlier, justice can be described as "fairness, equitable distribution of wealth, resources and power among all members of society" (SCIC, 2017, p. 3). According to social theorist Nancy Fraser (2007), parity of participation is "the most general meaning of justice" (p. 20), where "justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life" (p. 20). Westheimer and Kahne (2004), in their work on educating for democracy, ask the question of what kind of citizens support such national and global goals. Noh (2019) defines 'global citizens' as people "who have critical understanding of interconnectedness, share values of responsibility, respect for differences, and commit themselves to actions" (p. 1422). Notwithstanding the tendency of NGOs to "associate child sponsorship with the booming concept of the 'global citizen'" (Noh, 2019, p. 1422), such an association is, it seems, a far cry from the truth. This paper draws attention to why acts of charity (in the form of child sponsorship or other), initiated to help the 'other', do not construct/educate global citizens. In fact, MacQueen and Ferguson-Patrick (2015) refer to charity as a "reflexive response" which should be avoided since it positions those in the global south as the less fortunate 'other' and does not achieve lasting change (p. 115). Educating to construct global citizens takes "a more reflective and critical pedagogy and curriculum... [which] examine power and privilege" (MacQueen & Ferguson-Patrick, 2015, p. 115).

While it has already been noted there is a paucity of research overall on child sponsorship, including its effectiveness and its impact, perhaps the greatest deficiency of information is with respect to how CS advertising impacts young people in the North (Tallon & Watson, 2015, p. 298). Tallon and Watson (2014) support, overall, the promotion of child

sponsorship in schools; however, they also admit that even a well-intentioned teacher's use of CS in development education "is potentially complex and can reinforce binary divisions regarding the world... [and] this may undermine effective development education for young people whose depth of understanding and motivation for informed engagement will impact North-South interactions in the future" (p. 298). Hennick et al. (2012) claim "there is little empirical research to understand how those at the centre of development practice define and implement programmes that promote empowerment as a route towards development and poverty reduction" (p. 204). This paper argues that, "in the absence of a pedagogically sound development education curriculum" (Tallon & Watson, 2014, p. 299), advertising, promoting, and facilitating CS in schools is not an empowering route toward development. Addressing root causes of poverty and inequality in the South (which unavoidably implicate those in the North) along with "advancing student understanding of poverty, exclusion, geographic disadvantage, unfair trade, colonial legacies and a range of related issues" (Tallon & Watson, 2014, p. 299) are essential components of development education. Such issues, however, challenge many aspects of privileged lifestyles in the North and so tend to be only superficially discussed, or avoided altogether. In fact, Andreotti's (2016) research on international development and global citizenship education in higher educational contexts focuses "on the difficulties of starting important conversations about social historical processes that systemically reproduce material, discursive and political inequalities" (p. 101).

## 4. What the Literature on Child Sponsorship Says

In this section, I present my results of the review in the form of a collection of reasons, or motivations, for becoming involved in child sponsorship as a sponsor, as synthesized from the research literature. For consistency of presentation, I will use the word motivation, rather than reason, in this discussion. Motivation can be defined "in terms of drives, urges, hopes, or aspirations that trigger a progression of events leading to a behavior" (Prendergast & Maggie, 2013, p. 131).

A careful reading and synthesis of the literature on child sponsorship revealed eight (8) different motivations for becoming involved in child sponsorship. In essence, the motivations serve to foreground, in this paper, why/how CS has been so 'successful' before moving into the critique. In reality, the motivations overlap, intersect, contradict, and, often times, even erase each other, though the way in which they are presented and discussed here

does not accurately reflect those complexities and intersections. The eight motivations discussed are: personal connection; altruism; guilt; small win; part of something bigger; distrust of government; not faceless; advancing development.

### 4.1 Personal connection

According to Rabbitts (2012), the "popularity of child sponsorship within the landscape of global charity rests on its offer of felt personal connection and dialogue with specific others" (p. 934). Wydick et al. (2013) suggest that those who market child sponsorship programs realize that "contact with an individual child creates a commitment device to help donors contribute a fraction of their monthly income to alleviating child poverty in developing countries via a relationship with a particular child living in poverty" (p. 400). That is, "international sponsorship programs mobilize resources by drawing on the psychological and moral instincts people possess to care for their own children" (p. 400-401). Other research supports this; for example, based on interviews with their child sponsor participants, Prendergast and Maggie (2013) recommend that, from a marketing perspective, child sponsorship organizations would be wise to capitalize on the sponsors' reported importance of feeling like their sponsored child is a friend or family member; that such a personal and familial link ("birds of a feather" phenomenon (p. 135)) further drives the commitment and leads to satisfaction. Similarly, Rabbitts (2012) highlights the importance of the ordinary, everyday contexts in noting that "child sponsorship is experienced and made meaningful through the familiar, and particularly the familial" (p. 930). This author contends that "[c]entral to the appeal of child sponsorship is the promise of personal connection... [and] the satisfying feeling of making a difference" (p. 929).

### 4.2 Altruism

Some research points to the action/behavior of charity (charitable donations) as being driven by a combination of four motives: altruism, egoism, accountability and guilt (Prendergast & Maggie, 2013, p. 131). These four motives are, however, generally associated with one-time charitable giving behavior and so do not fully represent an understanding and

untangling of the motivations behind the more sustained, long-term charitable action of child sponsorship.

Altruism can be defined as the belief in, and practice of, unselfish concern for the well-being of others, even at the expense of it being risky or costly to the giver. Merely defining charity, and correspondingly child sponsorship, as altruistic acts done for public benefit fails to acknowledge "that charity is a socially situated practice, inseparable from wider relational contexts, as well as more intimate geographies within bodies, minds, hearts and souls" (Rabbitts, 2012, p. 927). It could be said that "[d]espite the common association of charity with altruism... charitable ethics are irreducible to it" (Rabbitts, 2012, p. 929) since charitable "gifts are shown to be inextricably bound up in webs of reciprocity and relations of power" (p. 929), demonstrated in, for example, child sponsorship letter-writing correspondence between donor and child.

Prendergast and Maggie (2013) elaborate on altruistic motives by explaining them in terms of wanting to enhance the lives of those who are considered disadvantaged and also in connection with humanitarian goals and emotions of simply wanting to help others (p. 131). Like Rabbitts (2012), these authors also suggest that "reciprocity has been linked with a wide variety of ostensibly altruistic behaviors," as well as the expectation of "some future return" (p. 131).

### 4.3 Guilt

Wydick et al. (2013) claim that "[i]nternational sponsorship programs arose because of their usefulness as a marketing tool for mobilizing resources in rich countries to reduce poverty in poor countries" (p. 400). Prendergast and Maggie (2013) position a discussion on guilt central to a key motive for becoming involved, specifically existential guilt (p. 131). Equating existential guilt with social responsibility guilt, these authors state that such feelings "arise when one feels guilty about being more fortunate than other people" (p. 131). In Ove's (2018) study, one research participant (child sponsor) was quoted as saying: "I feel almost guilty living in the lap of luxury in this beautiful part of the world that it eases my conscience somewhat that I am contributing, even though it is in a minute way, to a child of the Third World" (p. 118).

**4.4 It's a 'small win'...**

It has been suggested that "[p]eople often define social problems in ways that overwhelm their ability to do anything about them" (Weick, 1984, as cited in Mittelman & Neilson, 2011, p. 385). Accordingly, Weick (1984) "recommends a strategy of 'small wins', where people identify a series of smaller, less overwhelming actions which can lead to visible results" (as cited in Mittelman & Neilson, 2011, pp. 385-386). In other words, child sponsorship is seen by the public (potential donors) as a 'small win' in the face of so many overwhelming problems that seem out of the realm of any control or influence. As will be discussed later, Andreotti (2016) suggests that focusing on the small win that child sponsorship offers serves to highlight a person's need to be affirmed as doing good and making a difference without the risk of "paralysing and alienating" the person (p. 106). Many CS organizations highlight this need in their marketing, such as Canadian Feed the Children's statement: "Sponsoring a child is recognized more and more as a terrific way to make a difference in the world" (Canadian Feed the Children, 2020). The language of "make a difference", "help", "personally rescue" and "save a life" appears throughout child sponsorship promotional materials, and was drawn on extensively by sponsors and sponsorship organization staff in Ove's (2018) study. However, as noted by Ove (2018), these promotional materials seldom, if ever, attempt to educate the donor on the issues; that is, they fail to raise awareness of the deeper injustices and inequities, or the role played by the North in producing and reproducing them. Unfortunately, the 'small win' here, which is designed to make sponsors feel good and avoid paralysing or alienating them, often comes at a huge ethical cost: leading sponsors to believe that they are involved in a valuable development intervention, while failing to understand that child sponsorship "is primarily a fund raising tool *even though* it is routinely described as something else" (Ove, 2018, p. 68). That is, "the ethical value of child sponsorship comes disproportionately from its misrecognition as something other than an effective way to raise money" (Ove, 2018, p. 68).

**4.5 ... but it's also part of something bigger**

Following the previous motivation for becoming involved in CS—that is, because CS is seen to represent a small win— Rabbitts (2012) offers that that such a small win can also provide "a sense of being 'part of something bigger'" (p. 934). In fact, CS organizations are

strategic about interweaving their presence into the everyday lives and concerns of donors. Rabbitts (2012) offers an interesting metaphor for why CS is so successful in describing how it works "through familiar faces, languages and practices" (p. 934) to define a collectivity (or 'community of the faithful') which can be seen to combat "the aches and pains of poverty through the generous movements of its healthier limbs" (p. 934). In other words, the metaphor depicts how CS organizations will often seek to enfold their fund-raising efforts into familiar, already-existing networks and spaces of potential sponsors, and (some would say) none any better than churches, "a context where hearts and minds are (in theory) predisposed to care about and through charity" (*Ibid,* 2012, p. 934). In fact, several of Rabbitts' (2012) research participants were significantly influenced by "Biblically-based frameworks for self-development" (p. 929) and, for them, "sponsorship becomes a performance of individual obedience to God" (p. 929). Some of these participants expressed excitement at the thought that their performance of obedience could lead to evangelism through charity. Based on her research interviews, Rabbits (2012) suggests that "[f]or many Christians, enabling evangelism through their giving is as important as fighting poverty, or even more so" (p. 930).

The 'something bigger' is found in the interweaving of "Christian moral landscapes with landscapes of charity" (Rabbits, 2012, p. 934), serving to demonstrate "how charities seek strategically –even evangelistically – to enter into familiar networks and spaces of supporter lives... Churches can become key nodes in webs of advocacy, forming networks of encouragement to responsible action and providing both involvement opportunities and a culture in which charity is highly valued" (Rabbits, 2012, p. 933). O'Neill (2013) writes of the "evangelical Christian imperative" that arose in the 1980s which "ultimately put a premium on those charitable organizations that could deliver bite-sized bits of caritas to the masses" (p. 209), which child sponsorship delivered "in spades" (p. 209).

### 4.6 Distrust of foreign aid and government programs

Some argue that CS emerged at a time when "a climate of public disillusion and distrust surrounded foreign aid programs" (Mittelman & Neilson, 2011, p. 372), leading to "a turning point in international development efforts focused on children" (p. 371). As noted by Noh (2019), "[w]hile support for foreign aid tends to wane due to some negative images of developing countries with growing concern about security... children are perceived as innocent victims of chronic poverty and civil wars" (p. 1421). Similarly, Fieldston (2014)

offers that "[c]hild sponsorship programs promoted a new understanding of world affairs that transformed foreign relations from the realm of politicians and diplomats into the province of ordinary men, women and children" (p. 240). This, however, raises the question of whether distrust in government aid has been replaced by a naïve trust in aid through non-governmental organizations. Perhaps the new concern with development aid is that "today it goes largely unquestioned that its purpose is to help meet the basic needs of the less-fortunate who are unable to meet those needs for themselves… In reality, however, basic needs—as defined today—are a modern fiction" (Esteva, Babones & Babcicky¸ 2013, p. 17).

### 4.7 Child sponsorship is not faceless

Wydick et al. (2013) consider CS programs to be "among the most effective means of mobilizing resources to benefit children in developing countries" and even in harsh economic times, CS survives quite well compared to another "large, well-intentioned – yet relatively faceless—nonprofit organization" (p. 401). In these "faceless" charitable situations, donors do not generally expect or anticipate personal, direct contact with the beneficiaries of their giving. While donors may be driven to donate by the highly influential motives of altruism, egoism, accountability, and/or guilt, it is the faceless, nameless, and impersonal nature of their commitment which enables giving to end with much less pull on the heart strings.

In the study by Prendergast and Maggie (2013), a key finding was that because sponsors had a close knowledge of and relationship with the child, and strongly believed that the money was directly impacting the lives of the children, the sponsors expressed concern "about the impact on the children if sponsorship was withdrawn" (p. 138). In some cases, the sponsors admitted to sustaining their sponsorship because they felt guilty and did not want to damage/lose the close relationship with the child. Prendergast and Maggie (2013) share that "[e]ven though some sponsors may face financial problems and think of giving up, they will be reluctant to stop because they have already established a close relationship with their sponsored children and do not want to let the children down and damage the current relationship or the child's living conditions" (p. 134). Eekelen (2013) confirms this advantage for NGOs to keep a name and a face for child sponsors, as the strategy makes sponsors feel important by "tell[ing] each sponsor that much depends on his or her monthly contributions as nobody else sponsors this child" (p. 471). The website of *Canadian Feed the Children* states: "Remember: there is no such thing as a selfish reason! **Children will benefit whatever your**

**reason**" (Canadian Feed the Children, 2020, emphasis in original). Whether the motivation is fed by loyalty, guilt, or other is unknown, but it does make "sponsorship an unusually lengthy and stable source of NGO income" (Eekelen, 2013, p. 472).

It is key to note that even though some NGOs have transitioned to a community-based model, their fund-raising strategies still involve the selection of a specific child to sponsor. Perhaps this makes sense in light of Eekelen's (2013) comment that "people find it easier to empathise with an individual than with a group, and are thus attracted to programmes in which their contributions benefit a needy person with a face and a name" (p. 469). In other words, Eekelen (2013) refers to "the 'empathetic telescope' effect: by nature, people are most easily persuaded to assist when they hear a cry for help from a single individual" (p. 471). Charitable organizations who fundraise through child sponsorship know "the central tenet of marketing: understanding the needs and wants of their customers (donors)" (Prendergast and Maggie, 2013, p. 130).

### 4.8 To feel that one is advancing the project of 'development'

Eekelen (2013) proposes that CS "provides the sponsors with a window into the lives of people in a developing country [which] may lead to more active interest in international development efforts" (p. 472). Ziai (2013), on the other hand, advocates for abandoning the discourse of 'development,' calling it an "all-too-vague concept with dubious implications" (p. 133), including the (re)production of a less/more dichotomy (further discussed in section 6.2). In later work, Ziai (2017) refers to present day as the post-development period, 25 years after *The Development Dictionary* (Sachs, 1992). Through metaphors of obituaries, corpses, and zombies, Ziai (2017) (and others; see NI, 2020) draws on the work of several post-development scholars to assess the condition of development, wondering whether it is "alive and well, rotting away or already undead?" (p. 2555). He notes that "[w]hat is clear is that the problems often referred to under the heading of 'underdeveloped'—misery and inequality, violence and hunger, to name but a few—have not disappeared" (p. 2555). Escobar (2012), who traces critiques of development discourses back to the 1960s and 1970s, points out that "the term underdeveloped—linked from a certain vantage point to equality and the prospects of liberation through development—can be seen in part as a response to more openly racist conceptions of 'the primitive' and 'the savage'" (p. 227).

Escobar (2012) is optimistic, even hopeful, in offering that "a growing number of researchers, activists, and intellectuals outside of the academy are heeding the urge to provide alternative understandings of the world, including of development" (p. xi). He refers to these as "complex conversations" (p. xi) and, in my assessment, they are becoming audible in the conversations and debates across the field focused on rethinking and renaming international development (Büscher, 2019; Fischer, 2019; Horner & Hulme, 2019). In fact, Horner & Hulme (2019) advocate for a more holistic understanding by "[m]oving from international to global development [as] a recognition that we live in 'one world'—albeit with major inequalities—and not in a 'North' or 'South' or in First and Third Worlds" (p. 368). When it comes to development and child sponsorship, *New Internationalist* has some valuable advice: "Whenever you encounter the word 'development' try and substitute another word or phrase that makes it clearer what is meant," offering "that the best substitute word in this case would be 'justice'" (NI, 1992).

On the topic of development education for sponsors, Clarke and Watson (2014) note that "the 'marketing' of development has seemingly overtaken development education" (p. 326). Even these authors, who are strong advocates for CS, acknowledge a lack of deeper engagement and call for sponsors to receive "information that considers larger issues of inequity, power imbalances, national security, et cetera" as a way to "strengthen development education and decouple—to a large extent—knowledge transfer of development from further fundraising appeals and campaigns" (p. 326).

## 5. Theoretical Perspectives of Critique

Having presented a collection of several motivations for people becoming involved in CS programs, as teased out of the research literature, in this section I focus on formulating a critique of these motivations grounded in, primarily, conceptualizations of the good citizen (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and the complex audience member (education student) (Andreotti, 2016).  I draw on these conceptualizations due to my strong identification with the school classroom and the education of future teachers as global citizens; others, however, have conducted more specific citizenship education research with in-service and preservice teachers (see, for example, Buchanan & Varadharajan, 2018; Tupper & Cappello, 2012). With these two conceptualizations forming the ground work, I then move into a deeper analysis and critique of child sponsorship by drawing on the pedagogical tool and framework

conceptualization of HEADS UP (Alasuutari & Andreotti, 2015; Andreotti, 2011, 2012b, 2016). In the following three subsections, I provide an overview of each of these conceptualizations, referring (where relevant) to illustrations of their application.

### 5.1 Through the lens of the good citizen

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) draw attention to "the spectrum of ideas about what good citizenship is and what good citizens do" (p. 237), proposing a framework to "highlight several important political dimensions of efforts to educate citizens for democracy" (p. 239). Their framework includes three conceptions of citizenship: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. A poignant illustration provided by these researchers to illustrate the distinction between the 3 kinds of citizens is offered in terms of actions completed by each citizen to address, for example, the issue of hunger in a local community: the personally responsible citizen would be donating food, the participatory citizen would likely organize the food drive, and the justice-oriented citizen would be "asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover" (p. 242).

In relation to schools and citizenship education, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) note that these three types of citizens "embody significantly different beliefs" and "carry significantly different implications for pedagogy, curriculum, evaluation, and educational policy" (p. 263). These authors claim that, by definition, the personally responsible citizen has a "focus on individual acts of compassion and kindness, not on collective social action and the pursuit of social justice" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 244). Their "focus is conservative and individualistic in that it emphasizes charity, personal morality, and the efforts of individuals rather than working to alter institutional structures through collective action" (p. 266). Considering these 3 types of citizens, informed by the literature reviewed on child sponsorship, my claim here is that the child sponsor is an example of the personally responsible citizen.

To address the question of whether people will normally shift, or evolve, through the different levels of citizenship as they become more engaged and educated, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) claim "initiatives that support the development of personally responsible citizens may not be effective in increasing participation in local or national affairs" and "programs that champion participation do not necessarily develop students' abilities to analyze and critique root causes of social problems" (p. 264). In fact, these authors even

suggest "there are some indications that curriculum and education policies designed to foster personal responsibility undermine efforts to prepare both participatory and justice-oriented citizens" (p. 264). Consider, for example, one particular organization operating throughout Catholic schools in Canada (*Chalice*); in effect, their promotion of child sponsorship programs falls into the category of championing the personally responsible citizen which, I would claim, comes at a cost of neglecting the deeper issues and concerns of the justice-oriented citizen.

### 5.2 Through the lens of the complex audience member

Andreotti (2016) describes her challenges as an educator and educational researcher in the areas of global citizenship and international development. With some notable parallels to Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) three conceptions of citizenship, Andreotti offers a four audience-orientation conceptualization which "reflect different levels of willingness to engage with [international development] issues in depth" (pp. 105-106). For her, the audience is primarily university students; however, the applicability of the conceptualization, I would argue, extends beyond that specific audience and into the realm of the general public.

The four audience-orientations are (p. 106): Seeking awareness for inspiration; problem solving for personal affirmation; circular criticality; education for existence otherwise. Students in the first two audience orientations are generally described as those willing to pay attention to an issue as long as practical solutions are readily available and the issue (or solution) does not threaten their existing investments or privilege. In other words, there is a need "to feel, to look, and to be seen as doing 'good'" (p. 106). The third audience, which might be considered comparable to Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) justice-oriented citizen, includes students who are open to deeper critiques of injustices and they can even begin to recognize their own complicity in historical asymmetries and structural harms. However, it is only the fourth audience that appreciates the full complexity and uncertainty involved in reframing and re-centring the modern subject, vocabulary, and institution. Andreotti (2016) suggests that the majority of her students are situated in the second audience. With respect to the topic at hand in this paper, child sponsorship can be seen to fit into the "feel, look and be seen as doing good" characterization of the first or second audience, with critiques of injustices and/or awareness of complicity in (re)producing injustices being mostly absent from the CS discourse.

### 5.3 Through the lens of HEADS UP

Andreotti et al. (2018) claim "...initiatives that attempt to address global challenges without critically examining historical and systemic patterns of oppression and inequality tend to promote simplistic understandings of global problems and solutions, paternalistic North-South engagements and ethnocentric views of justice and change" (p. 14). Andreotti (2012a) asks the question: "How can one ethically and professionally address the hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticization, paternalism, and deficit theorization of difference that abound in educational approaches benevolently concerned with (helping, fixing, defending, educating, assimilating, or giving voice to) the Other?" (p. 22). Her response to the question is to propose HEADS UP, the acronym for a pedagogical tool and framework designed "to start conversations about local/global initiatives… that may inadvertently reproduce seven problematic historical patterns of thinking and relationships" (Andreotti, 2012b, p. 2):

> H: Hegemony
>
> E: Ethnocentrism
>
> A: Ahistoricism
>
> D: Depoliticization
>
> S: Self-congratulatory and self-serving
>
> U: Un-complicated solutions
>
> P: Paternalism

### 6. Viewing Child Sponsorship Motivations through HEADS UP

While I adopt the acronym and corresponding intentions of HEADS UP for my analysis, I adapt (with permission) the questions posed in the framework/tool (as in Andreotti, 2011, 2012b, 2016) as well as in other sources who have adapted the framework to suit their specific contexts (see, for example, Tallon & Watson (2014) who, coincidentally, adapt and apply the tool to suit their analysis of CS). I construct and present my analysis by naming and defining each letter of the HEADS UP acronym (predominantly drawing on the words of Andreotti), and presenting an example question associated with the problematic. Alasuutari & Andreotti (2015) describe these questions as "the kinds of questions that could be asked [of an

initiative] in the process of supporting Northern development workers to interrupt problematic patterns of representation and engagement with Southern communities" (p. 84). In asking the question, I turn to the topic of CS and offer important perspectives for arguing that CS does not interrupt problematic patterns but, instead, is more likely to be implicated in reinforcing the "seven problematic patterns of representations and engagements commonly found in narratives about development, poverty, wealth, global change, particularly in North-South engagements, as well as engagements with local structurally marginalised populations" (Andreotti et al., 2018, p. 15).

### 6.1 Hegemony

Andreotti (2012b) defines the problematic of hegemony as "justifying superiority and supporting domination" (p. 2). In essence, a hegemonic practice is one that lies unchallenged, while reinforcing and justifying the status quo (Andreotti et al., 2018). An important characteristic of hegemony is in how a well-intentioned action escapes questioning with regard to how it might be complicit in the reproduction of the problematic. Tallon and Watson (2014), in their application of HEADS UP to child sponsorship, pose the question corresponding to the problematic of hegemony as "How can an initiative like CS support or counter the idea that the Global North is superior?" (p. 309). Their response is, in my analysis, sketchy at best.

There is little chance that child sponsorship as it is presently conceived and operationalized can interrupt the hegemony problematic since, as discussed earlier in this paper, motivations for becoming a child sponsor centre on feelings of helping Others from a privileged and perceived superior (economically or otherwise) position. Not only are the standards of the west viewed as superior and conditions to aim for but a belief is perpetuated that those from the west have the power or capability to change and enrich the lives of Others. As claimed by *Chalice* (a Catholic-based child sponsorship organizational): "Since its inception, Chalice has been enriching lives, while restoring hope and dignity to people in developing countries through our sponsorship program" (Chalice, 2019).

As noted earlier, existential and social responsibility guilt are key in motivating and sustaining the charitable act of child sponsorship. SCIC (2017) states, however, that along with charity "it is imperative that we dig deeper to identify and understand the root causes of poverty. This can be done, in part, through a justice and solidarity approach to global poverty"

(p. 3). Such an approach, however, can represent a crisis for those whose own privilege risks being placed under a microscope. Taylor's (2011) work analyzes "the ways students resist crises of implication and difficult knowledge as well as moments in which they sit in the crisis in attempt to respond and self-position in exploratory, ethical ways" (p. 181). The problem, according to Taylor (2011), when pedagogical practices "offer *consolation* rather than critical and ethical tools to respond" (p. 181) is that "these practices operate to close down the anxious, violent crisis of learning selves exposed to the overwhelming, disorienting call to recognize and revise their habitual and hegemonic relationship to global Others, a closure wrought through the restoration of their moral superiority and authority" (p. 181).

### 6.2 Ethnocentrism

In Andreotti (2012b), ethnocentrism is defined as "projecting one view as universal" (p. 2), with this one view often seen (by those who have it) as superior to all other perspectives. The fact that other voices, or perspectives, are not heard or valued contributes to the (re) production of dangerous and simplistic binaries, such as us/them and have/have not. To clarify the problematic of ethnocentrism, Andreotti (2012b) asks if the initiative implies "that anyone who disagrees with what is proposed is completely wrong or immoral" (p. 2). About this problematic, Tallon and Watson (2014) ask: "How can CS address ethnocentrism and seek to portray a more complex notion of 'going forward' and alternative futures that include a range of voices?" (p. 309).

As noted in the discussion on motivations for becoming involved in CS, one common guilt-producing message used in CS fundraising is to imply that the sponsor is fortunate to be on the 'right' side of the have/have not binary and that if they choose not to sponsor (or to not continue sponsoring) the child, then no one else will. Instead of embracing greater complexity and encouraging a range of voices to be included, CS fundraising initiatives generally make a point of emphasizing how, in the face of overwhelming complexity, CS can be seen as manageable, as a 'small win,' and a means of doing one's part for development.

Arguing for dismissing or replacing the concept of development, Ziai (2013) states that the concept has "Eurocentric, depoliticising, and authoritarian implications" (p. 127). These implications include framing the 'Other' as lacking, backward, and inferior, and in need of social change "therapy" that will move them closer to the standards of the West, including being "more modern, more productive, more secular, more democratic, etc." (p.

128). On the idea of 'more,' Ziai (2013) proposes that if one is drawn to "measure the qualities of different ways of living and compare them" (p. 134) for the purposes of deciding who has a more 'developed' or 'better' life, then perhaps we should be sure to include in our measurement data reports on "incidences of suicide and violent crime, racism and sexism, the propensity to conduct wars, the relation to nature and other societies, and therefore the pressing question to what extent a certain way of living depends on the subordination of other economics and ecologies (their resources, their labour power) for its consumption patterns or on the production of exclusion and inequality" (p. 134). In proposing a radical manifesto for the future of development, Esteva et al. (2013) offer: "It is impossible and illegitimate to compare different notions of living well and to declare one of them better or worse than the others" (p. 20).

In citing international development scholars, Andreotti (2016) indicates that "to justify interventions and continuous exploitation that benefitted the 'First World', the 'Third World' was necessarily produced as 'backward, irrational, poor, terroristic, weak, exotic, fundamentalist, passive, etc. [so that the West could be produced as] civilised, rational, scientific, rich, strong, secular, active, etc.'" (Kapoor, 2014, p. 1127). From a psychoanalytical perspective, Kapoor (2014) shows:

> … exposing the production of these historical hierarchical dichotomies is not enough to change them because our attachments to these hierarchies are not only cognitive or conscious... we are libidinally bound to the pleasures of this uneven global imaginary and its by-products (nationalism, exceptionalism, consumerism, materialism and individualism) as we enjoy the (false) sense of stability, fulfilment and satisfaction that they provide (belonging, community, togetherness, prestige, heroism and pride). (Kapoor, 2014, as cited in Andreotti, 2016, pp. 103-104)

Decolonial scholars Mignolo and Walsh (2018) offer that "decoloniality seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought" (p. 17). Ove (2018), who presents a "critique of child sponsorship by attempting to locate it within the broader networks of power and knowledge referred to as the discourse of development" (p. 151), describes how the key "underlying tension surrounding the value of child sponsorship… comes from an ethical dilemma at the core of the idea of development: what defines a good life, who gets to decide this, and how can people best be allowed to achieve it?" (p. 151). In line with this critique of the discourse of development, Esteva et al. (2013) state:

… the entire development literature… frames the issue of development from the standpoint of those who haven't needing to catch up with those who have. The US and Europe are ahead; the rest of the world is behind. The task of development theory and practice is to guide 'the rest' toward catch-up with the West (pp. 28-29).

## 6.3 Ahistoricism

Andreotti et al. (2018) define ahistorical thinking as "forgetting the role of historical legacies and complicities in shaping current problems" (p. 15). A question posed from this point of analysis might be: "[D]oes this initiative introduce a problem in the present without reference to why this problem exists and how 'we' are connected to the making of that?" (Andreotti, 2012b, p. 2). Framed in the language of CS, the problematic named ahistoricism asks if CS introduces the problem of child poverty without reference to why child poverty exists and how the Global North (including the sponsors themselves) are connected to, and implicated in, the problem of child poverty in the Global South.

Instead of offering "a complex historical analysis of the issue" (Andreotti, 2012b, p. 2), the literature in support of CS suggests that CS will often lead to greater interest and involvement in development education. However, at the same time, other literature points to the fact that sponsors are generally disinterested in further, in-depth analysis of the issues connected with CS, such as global poverty, etc. (Ove, 2018). I return now to theory introduced earlier in relation to the kinds of citizens (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and the four audience members (Andreotti, 2016). Involvement as a child sponsor can be seen to demonstrate the first level of citizen: the personally responsible citizen who has a "focus on individual acts of compassion and kindness, not on collective social action and the pursuit of social justice" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 244); their "focus is conservative and individualistic in that it emphasizes charity, personal morality, and the efforts of individuals rather than working to alter institutional structures through collective action" (p. 266). In the language of the audience member, child sponsorship depicts level one or two, where the sponsor is inspired toward charity or awareness-raising initiatives as long as their self-image and existing investments/privileges are not threatened (Andreotti, 2016).

A possible response to this discussion on citizens could include rationalizing that these different levels of citizens and corresponding involvement will always exist and that there is a place in society for the personally responsible citizen just as there is with the justice-oriented. Rationalizing in this way, however, avoids digging deeper into root causes of injustices and

examining one's own positioning and perspective that demands a shift. According to Ove (2018), the shift in perspective "comes down to not seeing raising money as the key element to combating global poverty and inequality" (p. 149). What is necessary is a clear and honest portrayal of "the deeper issues involved in global inequality" (Ove, 2018, p. 149), which is seldom part of child sponsorship promotional and educational materials. Instead, CS educational and promotional materials advertise that "for little effort on the part of sponsors, they can make a profound impact in the world and on themselves… sponsors do not just get to feel good about themselves temporarily, but they become better people" (Ove, 2018, p. 145). Ove (2018) continues:

> More than anything, this ridiculous ease with which we are invited to throw off history and injustice and to consume our individual portion of the liberal pie is what makes child sponsorship problematic. As part of a movement that sees people doing good by enjoying or improving themselves, child sponsorship and its advertising helps reposition what it means to live ethically in a terribly unequal and unjust world (pp. 145-146).

### 6.4 Depoliticization

In the HEADS UP framework, depoliticization is characterized as "disregarding power inequalities and ideological roots of analyses and proposals" (Andreotti, 2012b, p. 2). A key question associated with this problematic is to ask "[w]hat analyses of unequal power relations between the parties involved has been performed?" (Alasuutari & Andreotti, 2015, p. 86). The parties involved, in this case, could be the CS organizations and the sponsors or the sponsors and the sponsored children.

Tallon and Watson (2015) express concern with the fact that CS "has been criticized in the past for being apolitical" (p. 309) and so they ask how such a criticism "can be addressed without confusing and alienating people, or dominating the debate with simplistic or idealistic solutions" (p. 309). The irony in this question is that, for the most part, CS organizations actually work to keep much of 'the truth' hidden (or at least not obviously visible) from sponsors, in matters ranging from how the funds are used through to issues of Northern complicity in global poverty and inequality.

With respect to the use of funds, Ove (2018) offers that "[w]hile no sponsorship organization is explicitly fraudulent in their marketing about where sponsorship money goes—it is always in the fine print that this money does not go directly to the child— they are

not terribly forthright about it either" (Ove, 2018, p. 148). In conveying the message that the money raised is either directly the solution, or serves to fund the solution, to the problem of global poverty, Northern sponsorship programs "create the perceived situation in which the more funds raised, the more 'development' done" (Ove, 2018, p. 68). Ove (2018) argues for a development philosophy which "should not blame the poor or exonerate the wealthy, should express a reliance on securing political will as much as promoting education, and should argue the necessity for change in the North as much as in the South" (p. 150). Esteva et al. (2013) simply and meaningfully declare: "People who are seriously interested in alleviating other people's suffering should begin by asking themselves if they are directly or indirectly contributing to that suffering" (p. 19).

### 6.5 Self-congratulatory and self-serving

Self-congratulatory and self-serving (also referred to as salvationism in Andreotti's earlier work) are the terms used in the framework associated with being "invested in self-congratulatory heroism" (Andreotti et al., 2018, p. 15), "oriented toward self-affirmation / CV building" (Andreotti, 2016, p. 108), and "framing help as the burden of the fittest" (Andreotti, 2012b, p. 2). The inter-connected questions posed by Andreotti in an attempt to interrupt this problematic are: "How are marginalised peoples represented? How are those... who intervene represented? How is the relationship between these two groups represented?" (Andreotti, 2016, p. 108). In referring to this problematic as salvationism, Alasuutari and Andreotti (2015) disavow how "marginalised peoples [are] presented as helpless and those who intervene as benevolent, innocent, heroic and/or indispensable global leaders" (p. 86).

This problematic ties in so closely with several of the motivations previously discussed (personal connection, guilt, altruism, and child sponsorship is not faceless) that it begs the question of whether this one problematic and its question about how marginalised people are represented stands out among the other six as signifying the face and body of this child sponsorship critique. As noted in a 1982 issue of *New Internationalist*: "It is hardly surprising that the sponsorship agencies choose children to be the focus of attention. Young children produce instant sympathy and a ready response" (NI, 1982). However, in response to the question of how marginalised people are represented, one need only look at how children are (re)presented to potential sponsors.

An article written by Mittelman and Neilson (2011) describes how the origins of child sponsorship strongly objectified/commodified children through the use of photos, a practice that continues today. Despite the fact that many organizations have altered this practice to ensure that the photos of children are no longer considered "development porn" (Mittelman & Neilson, 2011), organizations know the emotional draw of a child and this is played upon such that child selection is akin to catalogue shopping. In fact, it is common for CS organizations to "allow donors to choose from an array of 'profiles', which present information about individual children with a recent photograph" (Rabbitts, 2012, p. 930). As an example of such profiling, one of the participants in Rabbits' (2012) study was quoted as saying: "There were so many beautiful children *on the table* we couldn't choose" (p. 930, italics added). In Li's (2017) analysis of the "consumption-oriented philanthropy" practices of *World Vision Canada*, she writes:

> The World Vision Canada gift catalogue is a prime example of idealizing the transformative power of consumption—that is, the basic premise of the charity gift catalogue is that donors can "shop for change"... the catalogue is so invested in the idea that consumption is the most attractive and convenient type of action for donors that it does not shy away from representing child victims as the "Product." (p. 460)

Yuen (2008) synthesizes research which is critical of 'using' the child: "to represent the innocence of youth isolated from the political and religious turmoil often affecting their home countries" (p. 8); to be "emotionally manipulative" (p. 8), serving to either extract money from wallets or elicit despair and guilt for not taking care of "our future"; and to render the child as both consumer subjects and objects, with the latter reflected in the ability to shop in a child catalogue where sponsors can select a preferred country, age, and gender of the child.

In writing this text on Treaty 4 land (in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada), and mindful of the reference to objectification/commodification above, I find it challenging not to draw connections to the "Sixties Scoop," which one source (Spencer, 2017) describes as the practice of "how government authorities, often with no evidence of neglect required, took thousands of Indigenous children away from their families based on the widespread belief that Indigenous families were unfit to raise children" (p. 58). Bendo et al. (2018) claim "... the Sixties Scoop was predicated on child welfare that presented a positive facade" (p. 400) when it was really a cultural eliminationist strategy achieved through "forced removal and adoption

under the child-saving guise" (p. 401). Spencer (2017) adds that "removing indigenous children was viewed at this time as a public 'feel good' practice" (p. 58).

Bendo et al. (2018) describe a newspaper initiative (entitled *Today's Child*, written by Helen Allen) which began as a way to deal with the "hard-to-adopt" Indigenous children:

> In 1964, *The Telegram* began running the *Today's Child* written by reporter Helen Allen. Allen's column targeted would-be parents and advertised the child's characteristics, including appearance, race, sex and disability. Each edition featured a photo of at least one child along with an address to contact Allen if the reader was interested in adopting (p. 402).

As an example of settler colonialism, this sixties scoop worked to dominate the 'prior' Indigenous inhabitants (and by 'prior', Spencer (2017) refers to "an ancient past that is incommensurate with the nation, with its promise of progress and civilization" (p. 60)) through many "techniques, including more direct forms of genocide as well as deceptive approaches such as the normalisation and enculturation of Indigenous people into the dominant settler ways of life" (p. 400). In this paper, I am drawn to connect these attitudes and actions of the sixties scoop to a form of colonialism identified in the actions of CS— a colonialism that lays claim to a "feel good practice" aimed at addressing the neglect experienced by children of the Global South and, at the same time, promising the "progress and civilization" associated with the Global North. Martin and Pirbhai-Illich (2015) "argue that colonial ways of knowing and being, prevalent during the spread of imperialism, are still privileged in relations between the Global North and the Global South today" (p. 136).

This discussion leads to important points about ethics and the construction of the ethical subject. Ove (2018) offers:

> …the most important implication of the way the practice of sponsorship constructs (or facilitates the co-construction of) sponsors as ethical individuals is that it aligns with, and not against, the processes that structure the modern world in all its violence and inequality. In other words, far from being a definitive solution to the problems of world poverty, sponsorship is yet another way that contemporary relations of power are expressed (p. 110).

Embedded in these relations of power are the relative privileged/non-privileged positions of sponsor/sponsored; in fact, sponsors "are constantly reminded that their comparatively minor donations have miraculous consequences in the lives of Others" (p. 110). Thus, according to Ove (2018), "sponsorship not only plays a prominent role in the ethical identity of the sponsor

but also serves as a mechanism that helps reproduce the categories (such as race, nation, gender, class) that structure our lives" (p. 110).


### 6.6 Un-complicated solutions


In defining this sixth problematic in the HEADS UP acronym as "offering easy and simple solutions that do not require systemic change" (Andreotti, 2012b, p. 2), Andreotti poses the question of whether the "initiative offer[s] simplistic analyses and answers that do not invite people to engage with complexity or think more deeply" (p. 2). In later work (Andreotti, 2016), she rewords the question slightly, asking: "Has the urge to 'make a difference' weighted more in decisions than critical systemic thinking about origins and implications of 'solutions'?" (p. 108).

The phrase 'make a difference' comes across in many child sponsor testimonials (Ove, 2018), though what is troubling is the belief that one can make a difference (a small win) without damaging one's own privileged position. This is what Andreotti (2016) refers to as the first or second audience orientation and Westheimer and Kahne (2004) as the first level (personally responsible) citizen. According to Andreotti (2016), focusing on the small win that CS brings with it is akin to being a member of (at best) the second audience-orientation, where there is a need to be affirmed as doing good and making a difference without the risk of "paralysing and alienating" (p. 106). At the same time that CS can be seen as a small win, it is also very clear that it represents a small loss for those who have (and want to keep) privilege. In essence, I argue here that child sponsorship has been so successful because it is operationalized (intentionally) in such a way as to not threaten the sponsor's existing privilege.

Even Tallon and Watson (2014), self-claimed proponents of CS, state that the minor commitment associated with monthly donations has been a key reason for much criticism. They call for CS organizations to "move people beyond just a 'donate now' option to a deeper engagement with complex issues" (p. 309). However, the key message being conveyed here in this critique is that if child sponsors were compelled to pursue deeper engagement with the complex issues of poverty, power imbalance, inequity, etc., they would soon realize that child sponsorship not only reflects an overly simplistic and uncomplicated solution to a complex problem, but they might begin to see themselves and their privileged positions reflected in the actual (re)production of the problem. In other words, their "well-intended interventions might

circularly reproduce the very patterns that they seek to transform" (Andreotti et al., 2018, p. 14).

As Ove (2018) points out, it is "a complex relationship between Southern poverty and Northern lifestyles" (p. 74) but that child sponsorship organizations tend to maintain "a separation, or what might be more descriptively referred to as the 'Othering' of poverty" (p. 74). According to Ove (2018), if "the causes and direct solutions to problems of global poverty are disconnected from the North, [then] the role of Northerners is logically limited to charitable donations that are typically assumed to be generous for this very reason" (p. 74). In other words, "for charitable donations to be charitable there is often assumed to be no connection between, for example, one person's poverty and another's wealth" (p. 74); "systemic explanations of global poverty" (pp. 74-75) which strongly implicate the North are excluded from "the mainstream discourse on development" (p. 75) and thus this exclusion serves to ensure that "fundraising is perceived as an appropriate and *sufficient* Northern response to global poverty" (p. 75).

## 6.7 Paternalism

Andreotti (2012b) defines paternalism in the HEADS UP framework as "seeking affirmation of authority/superiority through the provision of help and the infantilization of recipients" (p. 2). To identify whether an initiative reproduces this problematic pattern, Andreotti (2012b) poses the question of whether the "initiative portray[s] people in need as people who lack education, resources, maturity or civilization and who would and should be very grateful" (p. 2) for the help. For this final problematic, it seems fitting that I have come full circle to the introduction of this paper, where I cited a *New Internationalist* article as suggesting that the kernel of child sponsorship "is the creation of a paternalistic relationship which is unnecessary and potentially harmful" (NI, 1985, p. 150). The article in that NI issue went on to offer:

> One-to-one sponsorship does not create genuine personal bonds between donors and foster children. It can, however, distort the recipients' vision of an unjust economic order and create aspirations far removed from the reality of their lives. Children and their families may be permanently marked by psychological and material dependence on their 'padrino' from the North (NI, 1985, p. 150).

Once again, as with the self-congratulatory and self-serving problematic, it is difficult not to draw parallels between child sponsorship and the Sixties Scoop in relation to the issue of paternalism. Canada-wide, settlers have forgotten the legacy of the sixties scoop and fail, in most cases, to notice the parallels between that practice of indigenous adoption (removal from homes and parents) and child sponsorship, especially with respect to its representation as the savior to the marginalised, highlighting this paternalistic problematic at work. Child sponsorship, according to Ove (2018), "reproduces colonial relations of power and knowledge, and it allows for the deterioration of conditions in the South despite the appearance of enormous efforts in the North" (p. 146).

In concluding this HEADS UP analysis and critique, I would argue that the discussion and analysis provided here strongly support a claim that child sponsorship "reproduces these seven problematic historical patterns of thinking and relationships" (2012, p. 2) and, in the words of Ove (2018), "if one accepts [the critique presented here], there is really no salvation for child sponsorship" (p. 147).


## 7. Closing Thoughts on Moving Forward with Justice


To close, I revisit the introduction to this paper, and the one question I was frequently asked as I shared with others that I was researching and writing this critique: "... but isn't it better than nothing?" Ove (2018), in his critique of child sponsorship, also draws on the phrase "better than nothing," though in his research he was drawn to conclude that child sponsorship *is* better than nothing, even though, he admits, that is about as strong a conclusion as he is willing to make. Reflecting back on this paper and the complexity behind the motivations— coupled with a critical reflection on descriptions of the good citizen, the critical audience member and the HEADS UP pedagogical tool — exposes how overly simplistic this binary-based question really is. Given my argument above that CS is implicated in reinforcing the "seven problematic patterns of representations and engagements commonly found in narratives about development, poverty, wealth, global change, particularly in North-South engagements, as well as engagements with local structurally marginalised populations" (Andreotti et al., 2018, p. 15), I am left with the insurmountable task of responding to 'now what?' In other words, the question looms (even on the minds of readers), "if not this, then what?"

In light of the theories and analyses presented in this paper, I suggest re-wording the question "… but isn't it better than nothing?" to one of the following:

• Does child sponsorship offer the possibility of moving people toward being a "justice-oriented citizen" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) who is positioned as a member of the audience oriented toward "education for existence otherwise" (Andreotti, 2016) in global citizenship and international development education?

• Do child sponsorship organizations encourage and support a critical analysis of the root causes of injustice and inequity, including "working to alter institutional structures through collective action" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 266)?

• Would you sponsor a child if you understood the process as supporting a condition which potentially "forecloses analyses of uneven power relations" (Andreotti, 2016, p. 105), emphasizes a belief that "people in poorer countries need the help of Canadians" (Andreotti, 2016, p. 109), and reinforces "stereotypes about 'children less fortunate than us'" (Yuen, 2008, p. 11)?

• Would you consider sponsoring a child if truthfully informed that child sponsorship programs "do not and can never amount to sustainable or integrated socio-economic development [because they] neither address nor outweigh the many and mutually reinforcing root causes of poverty at the level of the individual family, … community, … country, … and international realities" (Eekelen, 2013, p. 474)?

• Is it educationally responsible to advocate for "the pedagogical reduction of complexity and the softening of edges [in order] to be effective in inviting people into the conversations where their self-image and world views will likely not be affirmed"? (Andreotti, 2016, p. 105)

• Are you willing to be complicit in "practices that unintentionally reproduce ethnocentric, ahistorical, depoliticized, paternalistic, salvationist and triumphalist approaches" (Andreotti & de Souza, 2011, p. 1)?

• After reading this paper, is it still possible to deny "that economic poverty heavily subsidises economic wealth… an insight that needs to be denied if we want to continue to believe we are benevolent, charitable and innocent people 'helping the poor', only fulfilling our manifest destiny of heading humanity towards a future of justice and peace for all"? (Alasuutari and Andreotti, 2015, p. 65)

If, as a reader, your response to each of the above questions is no, then you probably support the argument and final response of this paper. No, child sponsorship is NOT better than nothing.

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