

# Introduction

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While the North American education industry goes far beyond the use of the school environment as a marketing medium, some of the clearest examples of business applications to classroom learning may be summarized as, simply, the commercialization of public education.

Few individuals—indeed, few corporations—are willing to resolutely defend blatant advertising in the classroom. Commercialization of education is unconscionable, they will maintain. What education needs, and what good corporate citizens are willing to provide, is non-commercial, *educationally-sound* donations. Or computers. Or software. Or extra-help programs. Or team uniforms. Or scoreboards. Or corporate volunteer instructors who will not replace but only *supplement* the teacher and bring the “real world” directly into the classroom.

However, when public discussion separates “commercial” from “educationally-sound” corporate donations, what is ignored are the much more fundamental questions: why, and to what extent, are education budgets being slashed (the effect of which is to provide a “practical incentive” for schools to approach the business community for

handouts)? Which programs are more readily funded by the corporate sector, and what does this indicate about the corporate view of education? How do corporate donations potentially change the scope and direction of public education? And why do we assume that for education to incorporate, reflect and imitate the “real world” of business and the demands of the corporate sector is necessarily a good thing?

Children provide a market to advertisers and the corporate sector, the scope of which has largely been ignored until the early 1990s. Consumer Kids conferences and Marketing to Teens and Tweens seminars are occurring at an alarming rate, and are chock-full of interesting and innovative ways to accurately target these “evolving consumers.”

One company interested in school marketing, and providing corporate clients with the means and forum to directly target students, is ScreenAd. A powerful incentive, taken from an influential study conducted by child marketing guru Jim McNeal of Texas A&M, is provided on this web site to explain the reasons for taking the buying power (direct and indirect) of these young consumers “seriously.”

“There are two sources of new business: one involves trying to convince customers to switch to you over your competitors; the other is children. The former strategy is often short-term and presumes disloyalty; the latter builds for the long term and is based on nurturing customer loyalty...

The A&M University study confirmed what all parents know: toddlers are fussy, and often vocal, shoppers. After interviewing 222 moms, the study concluded that children are well on their way to becoming avid consumers by age two. At that age, children already recognize certain product names and brand characters, particularly breakfast cereals. By the time they are four years old, kids are making value judgments about these brands, based on input from their parents, playmates, and from television.

The central conclusion of this study is that children begin playing a consumer role long before they possess the appropriate language or physical ability: consumer behaviour takes place before walking. Parents are preparing their children for consumership almost from day one. Children start accompanying parents to the marketplace as early as one month old, and begin to make independent purchases as early as 4 years old.”

(Screen Ad marketing info, pg 1, <http://www.screenad.com/Kids.html>)

Not surprisingly, marketers are advised to “go where the kids are,” and most of the time this means school. According to Cunningham Gregory and Company (a self-declared educational development firm), “a well-designed educational initiative is a vital cornerstone of a corporation’s communication and marketing strategy. It increases the corporation’s profile in the community and it allows the corporation to directly influence today’s consumer and the future work force.”

Obviously, corporations stand to benefit a great deal from their involvement in education, both by improving their social image, but also by gaining direct access to students, or, as Elliot Ettenberg maintains, “evolving consumers” (What! A Magazine Promotional Material). Why the classroom, though? Because it’s an environment “that kids love and adults trust.” Because these

educational programs “ensure that vital messages can be delivered where they may most effectively change behaviour or attitudes.” It’s significant that Cunningham Gregory’s description of what constitutes an educational program does not once mention accurate, unbiased, or even well-researched information.

The classroom is, clearly, a unique and powerful environment in which to target students; for one thing, according to What! A Magazine promotional material, it’s uncluttered, so your advertised message is more likely to stand out. It’s an environment of trust and familiarity, where what the teacher as authority figure says is likely to be thought of as true by the listening students. What better way to target “future consumers” (as called by Procter and Gamble) than in this environment where the teacher becomes the most effective corporate

spokesperson, and where parents (or “gatekeepers”) are not there to monitor corporate content?

Several companies have been able to capitalize on the rising interest in the school market. Market Data Retrieval and Qualitative Education Data (to name only two) accumulate lists of virtually every school in North America, as well as statistics on staff and students—ethnic makeup, educational records, curricular and extra-curricular emphasis, educational “effectiveness”—and sell these mailing lists to companies that wish to target these schools directly. And it’s not only American schools are on these comprehensive lists—QED and MDR have been busily compiling information on schools in Canada, too, at the request of some of their larger corporate clients who are interested in targeting the Canadian school market.

QED’s web site includes a section called the QED Education Network which offers Free Marketing Resources, and asks corporate clients: “Do you have a new product you want educators to know about?”

To encourage teachers to use this online forum often, QED is “offering what they like best—a revolving market basket of free stuff. And that’s where you [corporations] come in. [QED] would like to include your best free product offer for three months on the QED Education Network...We will promote the QED Education Network at all major education conferences, in professional journals, and by mail and telephone as part of our regular research program” (<http://www.qeddata.com/freeprogram.htm>).

Corporate intrusion in education takes many forms, from the blatantly commercial to the more subtle and arguably much more effective incarnations which are inappropriately titled and seemingly non-marketing-oriented “partnerships.” This report will examine in-school advertising, corporate-sponsored curriculum and “partner”ships (sometimes called sponsorships), and provide more intensive analysis of several case studies which reveal the effects of corporate content in education.

# Advertising

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“The cost of reaching kids through in-school media may be competitive with print advertising and certainly lower than TV advertising, but its main advantage is that it provides a targeted opportunity to market to kids, through parents and/or to parents, all at once.”

([Selling to Kids](#). “In-School Marketing Programs Satisfy Marketers’ Appetites” 1)

The search for ad space is reaching monumental proportions. Not content with print or electronic media, billboards, clothing and public transportation, marketers are turning to new and imaginative means of reaching their target audiences. Zoom Advertising and New Ad have made names for themselves by putting ads on the backs of wash-room stall doors and above urinals “for the truly captive audience.”

Billboards can be launched into the atmosphere to reflect the corporate logos beamed onto them from earth, rivalling the moon. Space shuttles will carry corporate messages into space. Cows in the British countryside will sport ads for the benefit of passing automobiles. Children’s television programs are entirely built around marketing concepts: Strawberry Shortcake, Power Rangers, Sailor Moon. Edible dyes are being formulated to apply corporate logos onto eggshells and ice cream cones. The quest for innova-

tive ad surfaces is never-ending and ever-more intrusive. It was inevitable that attention would eventually be turned to the school.

The classroom is less cluttered, according to [What! A Magazine](#), so advertised messages are more likely to stand out, without any competition. And merely by being associated with the school, the product and the sponsoring corporation appear to have additional legitimacy (“tasty, and good for you, too!”) and the implicit endorsement of the education system.

The classroom provides an incredibly influential environment for marketers—indeed, for anyone involved with the classroom as a means of promoting a message. After all, children are in school to learn, and are required to be there approximately 6 1/2 hours a day, five days a week, nine months a year till the age of 16. They are expected to remember, and in fact are regularly tested on, the information they are

taught, which is reinforced year after year until graduation.

There are, in addition, authority figures—teachers—who have enormous influence on the students. It is for these reasons that the school is an extremely powerful environment, and the messages taught within it carry such weight. And it is for these same reasons that corporations are approaching schools and inundating them with a barrage of advertising, products, curriculum and enforced relationships under the guise of “school-to-work” training, or “strategic philanthropy” or “win-win agreements”—which can be translated to mean “lose-win bigger.”

ScreenAd was one in-school advertising endeavour which tried to set itself up as a partnership, but its intent was clearly to sell ad space (of a sort which had previously been unavailable) to corporate clients. ScreenAd would provide screen savers bearing corporate logos and messages to schools in Ontario. According to ScreenAd’s mission statement, the goal of the project was:

“To provide the best means of reaching the students of Canada through our partnership with Educational Institutions.

To constantly work to improve our product and service to meet the needs of the Advertising community and the Institutions we serve.

To become a truly broad based advertising medium and not allow our ideals or those of the In-

stitutions we support to be influenced in any way by our Corporate Clients.”

(ScreenAd’s Mission Statement, <http://www.screenad.com>)

But this data reflect only the background information for ScreenAd’s sales pitch. It is the marketing literature for ScreenAd which is most interesting, because it clearly and enthusiastically explains the benefits of ads-as-in-school-screen savers. Benefits to marketers, that is. On the “marketing to kids” web page, ScreenAd includes a section called “some interesting facts about our smallest consumers” which include sub-sections called “you grow your consumers from childhood” and “born to shop, how children develop into consumers.”

ScreenAd’s literature continues: “Wouldn’t you like to expose your brand identity to over 1.5 million students in Ontario classrooms every 15 minutes of their school day? Well, you can, we are pleased to introduce this exciting new and innovative way to capture the minds of the dynamic Student market in Ontario...Our interesting programming, a mix of Trivia, Information, Motivation, and of course your Advertising Message make ScreenAd an irresistible visual medium perfect for reaching the media savvy student population. It’s a silent, behind the scenes innovative way to place your campaign in front of these eager consumers.” If one were to judge from the grammatical errors, spell-

ing mistakes, questionable punctuation and typos in their marketing information, academic excellence is clearly not a priority of ScreenAd's.

But ScreenAd is only one of the more recent attempts to use the school environment for commercial purposes. Selling to Kids is a bi-weekly newsletter which provides up-to-the-minute marketing information for those interested in targeting the youth market; this past September's issue contained an article elaborating on some recent in-school ad campaigns we may very well see in the near future. Cover Concepts is a Massachusetts-based firm which provides ad-laden book covers to students, often complete with free samples. The January 1997 Education Supplement of the New York Times described covers featuring Calvin Klein models; students were also provided with CK tattoos (Stead 33).

School Marketing Partners offers marketers the opportunity to pitch to kids in the cafeteria through customized "Tooned-In Menus,"—colourful booklets with advertising and product coupons as well as the

school menu. Marketers pay \$34,000 to \$88,000 and up, depending on where the ad is positioned in the menu. "A vehicle such as the in-school menu also offers other benefits, such as minimal clutter (there is a maximum of 10 ads in each menu) and category exclusivity" (Selling to Kids 5). In addition to the actual menus, a web site (<http://www.schoolmenu.com>) was also launched to reinforce the corporate messages, or, in marketing-lingo, "provide kids with extra entertainment value," and its effectiveness is currently being evaluated by Gap Kids and Kelloggs who are running ads on this site. One menu advertiser explained the benefit of in-school marketing programs: "With [kids] TV viewing declining and becoming more fragmented, advertisers have to look for other ways to reach children. It's a new vehicle for us. Certainly, we look at redemption [of coupons] as an indicator [of effectiveness], but you temper that with the knowledge that you are reaching kids" (Selling to Kids 5).

# Curriculum

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“Teachers face a crowded curriculum, and **are only capable of dealing with information once it has been translated** to meet their curriculum needs... (C)orporate information must **undergo a process which finds the curriculum links**...and provide activities for teachers and students alike **to make use of it.**”

(Cunningham, Gregory and Co. 4)

In-school advertising takes on a very different significance when it is disguised as curriculum. Not only do the corporate products and ads appear to be endorsed by the school environment, but the corporate messages—some more blatantly commercial than others—are actually taught as a classroom lesson, and often accompanied by product samples. As explained by one educational development firm, involvement with the classroom, and particularly the production of curriculum, is an increasingly popular means for corporations “**to increase [their] profile in the community and [to]...directly influence today’s consumer and the future work force**” (Cunningham Gregory and Co. 1).

Several companies have made the creation of curriculum – Sponsored Educational Materials (SEMs)—on behalf of their corporate sponsors an actual business, as in the case of Modern Educational Serv-

ices, Lifetime Learning Systems and Video Production Worldwide (which promises that corporate videos can find “new life in the classroom”). Cunningham Gregory assures potential clients that they will find the links between the corporate materials and the classroom lessons, since teachers do not have the time or expertise to do so.

All SEMs are not created equal, and there are times when it is painfully clear how far the limits of one’s imagination must stretch in order to consider sponsored curricular supplements remotely “educational.” Hunt-Wesson’s “Kernels of Knowledge” salutes great scientists and inventors who “made a difference”—George Washington Carver, Gregor Mendel, Louis Pasteur...and Orville Redenbacher.

Prego’s contribution to the classroom was a science experiment in which children were asked to test the thickness of the competition’s spaghetti sauces compared to

Prego's by forcing them all through slotted spoons. Presumably the science component of this unit was provided by the use of words like 'hypothesis,' 'theory' and 'prove.'

However, while those examples are evidence of corporate use of the classroom to promote product use and familiarity, there are more problematic examples of corporate bias disguised as classroom lessons. Recently, Canadian and American teachers received a kit from Dreamworks, a Steven Spielberg company. This kit coincided with the release of Spielberg's movie "Amistad." This kit was intended for use in history classes where students were encouraged to think of the role famous actors played in the civil rights movement, directly incorporating Spielberg-invented characters into the history curriculum...and promoting the movie at the same time.

Included in the package was a postcard addressed to Lifetime Learning Systems asking teachers if they would like to continue to receive FREE (corporate-sponsored) lessons from LLS. One of Lifetime Learning Systems' industry ads was, significantly, an image of a crowd of students clutching fistfuls of money under the heading "They're ready to spend and we reach them."

The Bank of Montreal's "My Money Investment Kit," designed to "help students understand not only the value of saving and investing some of their money, but how to go about it in a fun way" (Bank of Montreal 1) is also purported to improve

math skills. Over 14,000 kits were distributed across the country. Apparently, the Bank of Montreal feels that children—in grade school, remember—need to "understand the impact of their money management decisions. [The kit] teaches them which investments pay interest or dividends, how to minimize investment risk while also maximizing their returns, and where taxes must be paid" (1).<sup>1</sup>

The Bank of Montreal hooked up with the Junior Blue Jays to distribute this kit (which includes "easy-to-teach in-class lessons, a board game, and other educational materials that reinforce the fundamentals of money management"). The Junior Jays is an extremely well-received feel-good in-school program which has garnered a great deal of attention from marketers because of the many products which are distributed directly to kids in a school environment with the positive association of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Blue Jays. Clearly, the Bank of Montreal has chosen its partners carefully, as is also evidenced by the department which developed this kit—the *marketing* department.

Procter and Gamble (currently in partnership with several Ontario schools) has produced an attractive and extensive package called Decision: Earth to enlighten students on the relationship between consumerism and the environment. This supplement, produced by Modern Educational Serv-



ices, was discontinued in the United States because of glaring inaccuracies, but it is still distributed free on request to Canadian schools. In this section, Grade 7 students learn about P&G's version of clear-cutting:

“Clear-cutting removes all trees within a stand of a few species to create new habitat for wildlife. P&G uses this economically and environmentally sound method because it most closely mimics nature's own process. Clear-cutting removes large tracts of timber, just as a forest fire would, except in a more controlled manner. Clear-cutting also opens the forest floor to sunshine, thus stimulating growth and providing food for animals.”

Some time ago, a reporter from the progressive magazine Mother Jones played the part of a potential client and held the following discussion with a representative from Modern which clearly illustrates the intentions of the “educational development” firm:

**Mother Jones:** This is the company's pet project. They're very concerned about putting out material that will correct the anti-nuclear bias in most educational materials. So we don't want much tampering with the material. Is that a problem?

**Modern:** I understand exactly what you're saying. We wouldn't want to write anything our client didn't want us to. It would have to be factual, of course.

**MJ:** Of course.

**M:** But we try to be sensitive to our client's aims...We wouldn't want to write anything that makes the sponsor unhappy.

**MJ:** Now, we're talking national—we want to get this into every school in the country. Can you handle that?

**M:** We've done that for a lot of our corporate clients—Procter and Gamble, IBM...We know how to get materials into the hands of educators.

**MJ:** I understand there's quite a demand for these kinds of materials now.

**M:** Educators just eat them up.

**MJ:**...And, by the way, we're looking at distribution in Third World countries: Mexico, South America, part of Africa...

**M:** I'm sure we could help you.

(“Kiddie Corps,” *Mother Jones*, July-Aug. 1992, 14, qtd. in Molnar 37)

With slashed budgets, schools and teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to provide students with basic learning materials, so donations—particularly deluxe, pre-packaged and multi-faceted—are increasingly welcome. I am not implying here that all teachers use all the sponsored educational materials sent to them, or that they use them uncritically. But, with the government and corporate sector's insistence that teachers are already underworked, that prep time is little more than time wasted, and with growing class sizes, there will be less and less time to spend critically

analyzing supplemental material for bias. And this reality is reflected in the names of web sites providing links to curriculum sources, such as “The Busy Teacher’s Web Site.”

The corporate creation of

curriculum as standard policy is not far-fetched or a rarity. In fact, it is clear that private sector involvement in the development of curriculum—not just supplements, but entire subject areas—is going to increase in frequency in the very near future. <sup>2</sup>

# On-line curriculum

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“Already there are many signs of the coming marriage between education and entertainment, with computer and telecommunications technology serving as matchmaker. The two cultures that dominate children’s lives—education and entertainment—are merging, as entertainment companies seek to legitimize their products in the eyes of parents and educator by making them educational, while educational technologists strive to incorporate the magical motivational ingredient of video games into their lessons.”

(Noble 18)

In the spirit of what Marita Moll (Research and Technology, Canadian Teachers’ Federation) has dubbed “techno-optimism,” where *anything* can be improved merely through the application of technology (the “if something is broken, try applying technology; if it’s still broken, try more technology” philosophy), curriculum and delivery of services (read: learning) is being subjected to the Internet, to computers, and to the World Wide Web.

“The information super highway cannot be outside the curriculum, it must be integrated into the activities of the school,” maintains the Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC). And this technology delivery model has many manifestations, from providing cur-

riculum on a global scale, courtesy of Viacom in the case of Education Management Group in Arizona, to downloading curriculum which is self-correcting and self-marking—freeing up teachers to monitor students’ emotional well-being. EDEN, (the Electronic Distance Education Network) made these claims in a Toronto Star article, and mentioned that then-Minister Snobelen was “very interested in some of the possible repercussions of [EDEN’s] work, particularly as they fit in with plans to restructure the high school system (White K3). When we consider the restructuring plans that have taken place not just in Ontario but across the country, including increased emphasis on computer instruction, technology in the class-

room, reduced teacher prep time and fewer teachers, it becomes clear why endeavours like EDEN pique the interest of Ministries of Education.

ScreenAd's marketing literature makes it abundantly clear how useful the emphasis on technology in the classroom is to in-school advertising campaigns. "Digital Billboards reach students where they spend most of there (sic) time, right in the classroom. **Whether it is a vast open lab or an intimate library corner students are never far from a computer. We allow you to take advantage of the fact that schools have made it a priority to put more and more computers into the hands of their students**" (<http://www.screenad.com> p. 1).

The Internet offers students access to innumerable and previously non-existent sources of "information," and computer familiarity, as will be examined in greater detail later in this report, is becoming synonymous with education. According to Dr. Douglas Noble, "Educational materials and instruction are now viewed by corporate America as one small category of 'software' or 'content' on the information superhighway, alongside computer games, electronic mail and bulletin boards, news, books, magazines, movies, pornography, television shows, interactive TV, consumer advertising, gambling and home shopping capabilities" (Noble 18).

And so, with "a computer on every desk" ringing in my ears, I logged on to several of these *sug-*

*gested* educational sites. The M&Ms lesson plan requires teachers to direct students to the M&M web site, lead students on a tour of the M&M factory, and encourage students to create a flow-chart "showing the process involved in making M&Ms." It is unclear to what subject area this "educational activity" actually belongs. The MacMillan/McGraw-Hill "new mathematics program" (subtly titled "Crayola\*Crayola\*Crayola") tours through the Crayola factory (where students are encouraged to think of ways that math might be used in the crayon manufacturing process) and also requires a visit to the Crayola web-site by clicking on the Crayola logo. The Hershey Food Corporation's lesson plan avoids any pretense and simply instructs students to "click **Gift Catalog** and **Hershey's Chocolate Gift Items....** Have students select items from the on-line catalog that they wish to order and fill in the order forms." The educational component, apparently, is met by students calculating how much they have spent.

But technology is also the corporate donation of choice. Of course, this relies on the belief that technology is synonymous with education, which marketers refer to as the "if it's on the computer, it must be educational" syndrome of parents. Mind you, marketers aren't complaining about this—far from it, in fact. Business/education relationships and technology are two of the top 10 "Hot Marketing Areas" for marketing to kids. And convincing

the public of the importance of technology in their children's lives shouldn't be too difficult, explains Sue Edelman of the marketing firm "Big Blue Dot"—parents are already frantic that if their child isn't on a computer by age two they'll never get into Harvard.

The Great Chocolate Experience II begins with telling teachers to purchase enough packages of M&Ms for their class—students will learn how to graph the results of how many M&Ms of each colour are in each package. And M&M/Mars and Hershey both have packages which correspond with the Great Chocolate Experience, complete with "really cool stickers and coupons." Hershey also has a cross-disciplinary teaching unit about Milton Hershey, as well as a history supplement that explains the history of Hershey chocolate in relation to the history of the United States—bear in mind that this package and lesson plans were also distributed in Canada due to our "overwhelming response" to the Great Chocolate Experience. All schools involved in the program will receive a certificate of participation, and all students will be involved in creating a recipe book of favourite chocolate concoctions, no doubt perfect to try on mom and dad. The lesson plans, recipe ideas and visuals are all available on the corresponding web site: <http://www.iceberg.org/~gbequette/gce2.html>.

M&Ms are apparently interdisciplinary, and have been used as the subject of a variety of lesson

plans. 3rd Planet Science Kits and Experiments provides information for K-3 students on how to construct a "candygraph" for math class: "Melts in your mouth not on your graph. Count and sort M&Ms by color. Record the data on a chart, nibbling as you go...."

(<http://members.aol.com/C3rdplanet/math.html>). And Science students in K-3 are asked "Can you find prehistoric M&Ms and bring them home? Discover how paleontologists work." (K-3) <http://members.aol.com/C3rdplanet/games.html>.

The Plastic Bag Association has produced a board game and "Grime Fighters poster" on waste garbage disposal, with a corresponding interactive game on their web site: <http://www.plasticbag.com>.

And Coca Cola has a series of links on their educational site (<http://tjunior.advanced.org/4501/>). Students can make a musical instrument out of a soda bottle (<http://www.menc.org/IHWE/insts/splash.html>), answer the Coca Cola CryptoQuiz (who created Coca-Cola, and how much did the first bottle cost?) and complete the Cola Crossword which includes words such as "olympics," "deliciousandrefreshing" and "alwayscocacola."

Increased teacher and student use of the internet is also an incentive for marketers to advertise more intensely on educational web sites. Video Production Worldwide (discussed earlier in this report as providing corporate videos to the

classroom for “new life”) trumpets in a recent press release that “The world’s leading distributor of free sponsored educational materials” has just won the Web Marketing Association Award for PartnerPages. PartnerPages allows “sponsors to speak with teachers directly. It is

this targeting of specific audiences that makes PartnerPages so effective. Teachers are both consumers and opinion leaders, and by sponsoring a PartnerPage companies can reach educators with their message in a comfortable and impressive environment” (VPW).

# Technology

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“When are the schools going to stop treating our kids as equals? All children may have been created equal in the eyes of God. But once they get into a classroom, it’s another story. As any teacher can tell you, students don’t learn the same things at the same speed....There’s a tremendous need for individualized instruction, say our educators. And thanks to some modern new learning aids, schools are beginning to get help in this area.....Each student sits in front of a closed-circuit TV set with a pair of earphones. What he sees and hears is a lesson. Not everybody’s lesson—his lesson.... Meanwhile (and this is an important meanwhile), the teacher is free to work with each student on a one-to-one basis. So far, more than half a million students in more than 400 schools are using our new system. Which means it’s a success. But then, how could the idea miss? Doesn’t every mother and father think their kid belongs in a class by himself?”

(General Telephone and Electronics advertisement)

Technology is a pet project of our federal and provincial governments, as evidenced by the TIPPS project and the former Ontario Education Minister’s “computer on every desk” vision—of course, there isn’t enough money for desks, but that’s another one of those mysterious contradictions like the Ministry’s suggestion to improve literacy by cutting English.<sup>3</sup> ITAC actually insisted that “we need an education system that supports the rapid development of technologies” (ITAC press release),

a vision in which students are not mentioned once.

But the mythic proportions of technology continue to grow. Computers as instructors are actually being cited as “superior to their human colleagues” because they’re never too tired or harried to answer a question or spend extra time with a student (Cetron 19).

So, given the superior nature of computers over the human components in the classroom, in order to make full use of what technology

has to offer, we must restructure education so that the technology provides the curriculum and delivers the education students receive. Evidently, the fact that computer use has not been proven to enhance literacy is unimportant in this discussion of academic excellence. Consider the draft document leaked from the Ontario “Minister’s Round Table on Technology in Learning” which dreams of the day when there will be a single Ministry of Education and Economic Development and envisions paperless, blackboardless classrooms where teachers are “freed-up” to be facilitators, not “downtrodden” content experts.

It seems that there is no such thing as too much technology, particularly where school is concerned, and not just in the politicians’ pipe dreams. State education officials in Texas are considering a proposal that would see money for textbooks instead put toward leasing laptop computers.

“There’s been no definite decision made yet, but the board feels this is an idea that bears consideration,’ given the rising costs of textbooks and the vital need for K-12 students to become computer literate,” explained a board spokesperson. The board of education would have to change the way in which “curriculum updates” would be delivered to students, probably over the Internet. In anticipation of approval of this concept, the legislature has broadened the definition of “textbook” in the state education code to

include electronic devices (ZDNet, “Texas may trade schoolbooks for laptops.” Nov. 19/97).

In the spirit of such techno-optimism, the “Anytime Anywhere Learning Summit” was held this past February in the U.S., sponsored by Microsoft, Toshiba, Compaq, Acer and AT&T’s Learning Network (ZDNet, “Teacher’s new pet isn’t a brownie...it’s a laptop” Feb. 19/98).

It is significant, as ITAC has illustrated in its press release, that corporations dedicated to technological development have been such vocal and avid proponents of education restructuring. It seems that there is no problem that cannot be solved by technology, and according to the rhetoric of the day, the education system is rife with problems that require immediate attention. But there are those who are concerned with the suggestion that technology provides the anecdote to any and all crises—and if it doesn’t appear to, we simply haven’t used *enough* technology. “Companies marketing computer-based education have typically invested themselves in a rapid series of strategic overhauls in attempting to attain access into schools. Technology is dressed up in one guise after another in order to appear as [the] perfect solution to the latest educational fashion, whether it be remediation, accountability, individualized instruction or special education. More recently, this list of fashions has come to include school restructuring and authentic assessment, as firms



stumble over themselves to demonstrate that computers are the perfect solution both to portfolio assessment strategies and to the overall reinventing of school organization” (Noble 17).

Marketers aren’t the only people excited about the potential for the new markets offered by IT. In this climate, it’s not only schools and students which are hot commodities: it’s knowledge itself. According to ITAC, we are living in a “knowledge economy” in which “business cannot simply offer technology but they must also be concerned with the bottom line. **Investing in education is investing in the**

**future of business.”**

The coveting and commodification of knowledge has serious implications. What does it mean for knowledge to become part of the market economy? Who will be able to “afford” to learn? Of course, one can argue that there have always been some economic restrictions on access to information, but it is the public infrastructure we have in place in our libraries and schools which has attempted to guard against this knowledge segregation. This is what is being privatized. This is what is being taken from all of us—a society with access to knowledge as a basic right.

# Partnerships/Restructuring

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“Business-education partnerships are mutually beneficial relationships between employers and educators that are designed to enhance learning for students and other learners....Most business-education partnerships are co-operative relationships in which partners share values, objectives, human, material or financial resources, roles and responsibilities in order to achieve desired learning outcomes.”

(Conference Board of Canada, Ethical Guidelines for Business-Education Partnerships)

Virtually all segments of society have lauded greater interaction between the private sector and schools; business itself is among the loudest proponents of this trend. In 1994, the Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC) released its education statement, in which it stressed the importance of partnerships in education from not just an IT perspective, but from a social and democratic context as well: “Working together all governments, educators, businesses and society must develop a new approach to education. The separation of schools from society, (family, work and community) combine to undermine the best efforts of enlightened leaders.”

This is mirrored by the political rhetoric, as illustrated in former Ontario Education Minister John

Snobelen’s address to the Third Annual Partnership Conference: We need “the cultivation of innovative partnership between schools and their communities...When I use that term ‘community partners’ I’m speaking of business” (Hill and McGowan).

Accountability to the outside community, then, really means accountability to the corporate sector. But should accountability to a system based purely on profit and financial efficiency be the goal of our public schools?

According to several dictionaries and the Conference Board of Canada, the requirement of partnerships is that both parties benefit equally. So, if these so-called partnerships are by nature “win-win,” let’s see who wins what. Schools get the goods: the computers, pen-

cils, paper, sponsored curricular supplements, textbook covers, gym uniforms, scoreboards, sports equipment, screen savers—more often than not with some tasteful (or blatant) corporate logo as recognition for this generous gift. And the corporate donor gets: enormous public recognition, a captive student audience made up of present and future workers and consumers, the use of the teacher as corporate spokesperson, the benefits of a legitimizing school environment, and last but certainly not least, a tax receipt. These benefits are all well-documented in industry literature as incentives for taking an “interest” in education.

But according to “pragmatists,” schools will have to set limits, learn how to say No. They’ll have to police these gifts and make sure the school environment and students are not being compromised. After all, these new relationships are the way of the future.

So let’s think about this. What happens if the “free market” philosophy is extended, and all schools are encouraged to enter the marketplace of corporate partners? There are many more schools than businesses, which would require the “laws of the market” to come into effect: schools would be forced to “compete” for sponsors. And businesses would be able to choose from the schools which promised to provide the best “deal”: the most customers, the least anti-commercial stipulations, the fewest guidelines.

According to the government, the business community, the media, and a barrage of partially-analyzed tests and their results, schools are simply not doing their job. Evidently, the “job” of schools is to teach what students need for employment in today’s global marketplace, but there is currently a gap “between skills taught and skills required by the corporate sector,” according to the National Alliance of Business. This presupposes three fundamental, yet questionable claims: 1) there is a “problem” with our system of education which has potentially crippled virtually every sector of society; 2) skills = knowledge; and 3) the primary purpose of education is to provide jobs for graduates.

All three of these claims are apparent in the following education statement by the Information Technology Association of Canada: “The vast majority of the young people who pass through Canadian schools are ultimately destined for the labour market. There are, however, growing concerns that our children are not learning the skills and acquiring the knowledge they will need in tomorrow’s global economy. Employers are worried about finding qualified workers; the government links education to the economic prosperity of our country and the ability to remain internationally competitive; municipal governments link problems in schools to drugs, dropouts and crime.”

ITAC is quite clear in its Education Statement on the direction governments should take to restructure education and “prepare learners for life in the 21st century; “the CMEC should develop joint education/industry/parent bodies to make decisions about the role of schools, skill sets, knowledge requirements, and curriculum needed to take students into the 21st century, including the accelerated use of IT in the schools and emphasis on foundation skills.” As if directly in response to the IT lobby, the CMEC assures the public, “We are well aware of the challenges to the education systems posed by our rapidly changing world: globalization of the economy, openness with regard to their cultures, pressing needs for skilled labour, and technological advances that are having an impact on our daily lives as well as in the job market. **These changes require constant adjustments to our educational practices to ensure high quality, accessibility, mobility, and accountability**” (CMEC Joint Declaration).

The editor of one Ontario business magazine put this in plainer terms for me. Apparently, the business community feels that we’ve been educating 100% of students to go where only 30% will end up—post-secondary institutions. Why not educate all students to go where the majority will end up—the workplace—because those who want to go to university—the 30%—will probably end up there anyway

because their backgrounds are more stable and more financially secure? We’ve been teaching them Shakespeare and Plato, they complain, when what we need in the corporate sector is for kids to know how to read a spreadsheet and work 9 to 5 without complaining or thinking they might have other career choices (Kelly).

As may be predicted from multinational corporations applying to MERX for their chance to develop Ontario curriculum, we are experiencing a global corporate push to blur the lines between education and training. While McDonald’s Canada provides curriculum supplements on nutrition and sponsors phys-ed departments, in Australia McDonald’s is already in schools as curriculum and for course credit. Students who work for McDonald’s in Victoria can now do a Year 12 subject while they work for the Victorian Certificate of training. And while students get credit for the in-house training (including courses like food preparation and hygiene), schools can’t find out what is actually taught because this course is only available in the store, and is assessed by the McDonald’s staff, not by teachers.

Questions have been raised as to whether McDonald’s can claim that the students are officially classified as trainees, which means that the corporation is eligible for a government subsidy (Thompson). In addition to this practice, students at McDonald’s can earn points towards

their college entrance score merely by having their performance assessed by the McDonald's bosses (Cheney).

This practice is not so far removed from the Canadian experience as one may think. Welcome to the Canadian Institute of Hamburgerology in Toronto, Ont., where McDonald's personnel learn the procedures in virtually every aspect of the business through classroom and lab equipment instruction. In July of 1987, McDonald's Restaurants of Canada Ltd. reached an agreement with George Brown College for the accreditation to McDonald's employees upon successful completion of the in-house training (McDonald's "The Canadian Institute of Hamburgerology").

And this sort of "partnering" between schools and the corporate sector is on the increase. With the increasing insistence that the role of school is to provide trained employees for the workforce (and therefore the direction and emphasis of school must be flexible to the demands of the global marketplace), we can expect even more examples like the one below. "To meet the demand for a skilled, trained and experienced work force, new educational, co-op and job-related opportunities for young people in the travel and tourism field must be created. In response, the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, with the corporate support of AmEx and other partners, will launch a new Academy of Travel and Tourism at

Northview Heights Secondary School" (CNW).

"Partner"ships in education are increasingly characterized by an emphasis on technology. Two schools considered to be highly innovative—predominantly because of their large number of corporate sponsors and their technological focus—are River Oaks and Gordon Graydon, both in the well-heeled cities of Oakville and Mississauga, Ontario, respectively. In the frenzied discussion surrounding education reform, these are two of the very few schools receiving any positive media attention.

Gordon Graydon Memorial Secondary School has an astonishing 78 corporate partners for the International Business and Technology (IBT) program. And they arguably get their money's worth for their donations of software, training and money. At Graydon, "executives are consulted about what business and technology skills students should be learning. The executives are also invited to participate in the interview process through which students are selected to join the IBT program" (Canadian Business 37). Again, the concerns of the marketplace are front and centre as the corporate donors set the terms of what constitutes a Graydon education, and participate in the selections process where the donors can determine which students will attend the program. The school selecting the students is directly at odds with the philosophy of public education.

In a recent article entitled “Computers in the Classroom: opening the realm of possibilities,” River Oaks principal Gerry Smith provided a ringing endorsement of Apple computers, but also clearly spoke to the role of education in the new global economy. According to Smith, “the ultimate role of education is to help students learn the skills necessary to play a productive role not only in the workplace but also in the community....Glance through the classified ads and you will realize the number of jobs that require knowledge of computers. We as educators have the responsibility to prepare students for their future and

help them learn the skills necessary to be productive members of our society” (Florence Guily Communications 1). This quote provides a succinct encapsulation of virtually every rationale behind restructuring education along business lines, and incorporating more technology into the classroom. The purpose of school is to train future workers. Society needs computer operators—just check the classifieds. Preparing students for the future means giving them job skills. Productive citizens are determined by their pay stub. What business wants, business gets, and if these demands are not met, schools and educators are not fulfilling their roles in society.

*Purpose:* “To create a dynamic environment through which business and education partner, inspiring youth to be self-sufficient” (2).

*What is Junior Achievement?:* “Junior Achievement is a not-for-profit charitable organization providing curriculum enhancing programs, at no charge, to all school systems within Metro Toronto and York Region. Available to students from grades 6 through OAC, Junior Achievement is funded by the private sector and is run by educators and business leaders” (3).

*What is JA’s role?:* “JA is now being seen in its most significant role ever; as a driver of a major social trend that is creating a shift in attitude from dependence to self-sufficiency. JA programs are making students aware that they will have to be self-sufficient as adults while equipping them with the skills to get there.”

(Junior Achievement, “Vision 2002” 6)

## “Investing in Our Youth, Investing in Our Future: Junior Achievement”

JA intends to provide its own special blend of business instruction, volunteers, motivation and practical, hands-on training to “100% of [its] market, some 218,000 students, by the year 2002” (5). That’s quite a reach, but apparently not a pipe dream. Already, over 47,000 students have been “reached” by the corporate sponsors of JA, so they must be well on their way to true self-sufficiency.

The list of corporate investors in Junior Achievement reads like a Who’s Who of corporate Canada. They are divided into: “Gold Club” investors (Bank of Montreal, Bell Canada, IBM and Royal Bank Financial Group); the “Governor’s Club”

(Arthur Andersen & Co., Canada Trust, Coopers & Lybrand, Manulife Financial and Consumers Gas); the “Chairman’s Club” (AmEx, Bank of Nova Scotia, Imperial Oil, KPMG, TD, Shell and Sears); the “President’s Club” (CIBC, Canadian Tire, Deloitte & Touche, Hongkong Bank of Canada, Kraft, Lucent Technologies, National Trust, Nestle, RBC Dominion Securities, Sony, and XEROX), and the more mundane Shareholder’s Club which requires only 15-249 shares to join.

Just listen to the ringing endorsements from students, parent volunteers and the corporate players. JA has been instrumental in teaching kids that the No. 1 reason to stay in school is to “acquire the skills necessary for a good job” (Carolyn Sunich, student, 9). John Lam, JA director and senior VP of the Ontario Region Hongkong Bank of Canada puts the rationale for JA into

the global market context, and illustrates the need to teach students the competitive skills needed by employers: “They will be living in a very competitive and global marketplace. They will have to be the best they can be to be successful” (16).

But not only students and the marketplace profit from JA in the educational and employment arenas—parents benefit, too. Listen to the glowing endorsement from this father, whose relationship (“coaching and counseling”) with his son was improved enormously when he became a parent volunteer with JA, because thanks to the program he could understand the “needs and interests [his son] was developing outside the home.” JA, therefore, provides a significance to parents that they may not otherwise have had: “My time in the classroom was instrumental in being able to relate to [my son], his friends and his teachers. By accepting an invitation to enter the classroom, in any number of JA programs, we, as parents, have a unique opportunity to get better connected to our communities and to be more relevant to our kids” (Steve Brecher, parent volunteer, 12).

JA programs, in the words of the National Alliance of Business, ITAC and Cunningham Gregory and Co., “bridge the gap between the education sector and the community” (11). Of course, here *community* really means *business community*. And this is to be achieved by offering JA’s own unique blend of cur-

riculum and programs that are “distinctive and relevant to today’s business environment” (11). Evidently, the way to bridge the gap between education and the corporate sector is for the members of the corporate sector to become the educators.

The benefits for the private sector with programs like JA are clearly outlined in the section entitled “Investment Opportunities – Business Partnering With Education.” The accompanying visual in the promotional literature is of a diapered child reaching out towards a computer screen.<sup>4</sup> “[JA] provides business with the opportunity to help **shape the educational programs that will ultimately yield future generations of employees, suppliers, and consumers.** Whether you are a large multi-national corporation, a small neighbourhood store, or an individual consultant, the [JA] experience generates a wide-range of benefits:

- A chance to educate students on career opportunities within your sector.
- Positive exposure to students and families on a community level.
- Training and development opportunities for staff.
- Opportunity to reinforce corporate goals.
- Participation in a full media relations program attached to an important social issue.
- Excellent networking and business development opportunities” (11).



Programs such as JA are upheld as apparently mutually-beneficial examples of “partnership” between the corporate sector and schools. However, the influence is clearly one-sided, and incredibly thorough. Parents, students and the private sector work together to reinforce workplace requirements. Curriculum is developed and taught by the private sector to reach these ends, but concealed in the rhetoric of “bridging the gap” between schools and the community. And let’s not forget the positive exposure and media attention harvested by the corporate sponsors for what is, in their own corporate words, “a chance to educate students on career opportunities within your sector.”

## **A new role for parents in education restructuring**

In the spirit of making schools and teachers more accountable to the “public” in general and parents in particular, the Ontario Ministry of Education has followed the example of the Alberta government in mandating a stronger role for school advisory councils. However, as no additional money has been set aside, and with the demand to cut the “fat” out of administrative

spending, we are seeing a very new role evolve for these councils: fundraising. This new role, however, goes far beyond bake-sales and selling chocolates door-to-door, although we shouldn’t expect the end of these events. What we will see in the near future are these councils soliciting the corporate sector for donations, from computers to in-school-advertising-for-revenue. This is particularly good for the corporate sector, which no longer needs to look as though it is taking advantage of the budget cuts to education because it is the parent advisory councils, on behalf of the schools, who are taking the initiative in seeking corporate handouts. And it provides a precursor to charter schools, where the parents are required to raise additional funds to supplement the per-student grant from the government in order to provide for both extra-curricular and core supplies and programs.

With this in mind, consider the following quote, which has been taken from a form submitted to the School Advisory Council from the Waterloo County Board of Education. It not only attempts to naturalize enforced relationships with the business community, but also tries to dissociate commercialization from any corporate involvement in education without examining their common roots.

“The Waterloo County Board of Education and its schools work with the community in many ways to provide the best education possible for students. Several initiatives bring together our schools, parents, businesses, industry and other members of the community.

“Over the years, the Board and its schools have developed hundreds of partnerships and co-operative ventures throughout the community with local businesses, service clubs, social agencies, individuals and others.

“The Board strongly supports partnerships that enhance student learning and create important links with the community...

“Within this current climate of fiscal restraint, the Board and many schools have also pursued initiatives which involve the advertising of products, solicitation of donations and sponsorships to raise funds....

“We need the opinion of each Council to help the Board make informed decisions as it develops the guidelines. The guiding principle must be that any initiative should enhance and support student learning.

1. As a School Advisory Council, what is your opinion on schools and the school board encouraging donations from businesses and other outside sources to help support educational programs? For example, a company donating a creative playground.<sup>5</sup>
2. As a School Advisory Council, what is your opinion on schools and the school board developing partnerships with businesses for the purpose of supporting student learning? For example, a local service club provides a breakfast program.
3. As a School Advisory Council, what is your opinion on schools and the school board raising money through sponsorships from businesses or other sources where the name is prominently displayed in the school? For example, a company name/logo on a score board.
4. Last June, trustees approved advertising on the *exterior* of school buses operated by the Board. This initiative is part of a shared agreement with several school boards to generate revenue for each school system. Trustees want to get the opinion of the School Advisory Councils before making a decision about advertising on the interior of school buses. As a School Advisory Council, what is your opinion on the school board raising money through advertising on the *interior* of school buses?”

(Waterloo County Board of Education)

In all of these scenarios, individual cases of corporate involvement are the foci, while the broader issues and implications of such enforced relationships between public education and the corporate sector are ignored. Partnerships are constructed as a reality that will *by nature* improve the direction of education.

Completely ignored is the fact that, if it were not for massive

budget cuts to education, the growing interest of the private sector in education, the unprecedented profitability of the education industry, and a series of education restructuring policies which reshape and re-direct education by mandating closer relationships with and accountability to the business community, soliciting corporate donations would not be necessary. In fact, it would be unthinkable.

# Individual Analyses:

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## The Tale of the Great Bunny

Recently, for the second year in a row, teachers across Canada received packages from Cadbury Chocolate and Kidsworld Magazine entitled “The Tale of the Great Bunny: A delightful story about the magical underground world of chocolate.” Approximately 35% of all students under the age of 9 were exposed to this classroom supplement, which included a poster, a teacher’s kit with suggested lesson plans (“the Choc Board”) and individual copies of the story, complete with a maze and poem.

Dale Hooper, then senior brand manager for Cadbury, explains that the goal was “to make Easter more special and more memorable for kids and families...Cadbury is synonymous with chocolate, and we tried to create a fun package that people will adopt and that adds value” (Grange). Considering the content of the package, readers may well ask, value for whom?

The clearly commercial nature of the package is evident in virtually every component. The maze to “Find the Great Bunny” is to be completed in purple and gold ink—

is it a coincidence that these are the Cadbury colours? The classroom poster resembles the in-store display that students are encouraged to look for in neighbourhood stores. But these are only two examples of the way that Cadbury is not only incorporated into the classroom lesson—in fact, the lesson actually becomes a justification for the Cadbury corporate literature. And it was reinforced again, when the YTV Special “The Tale of the Great Bunny” was aired later in April, with children being encouraged to watch it.

It was suggested to the teacher that “you start by reading your instructor’s version of ‘The Tale of the Great Bunny’ out loud to your group. It’s (sic) simple rhyming cadence makes it easy for enthusiastic students to learn a stanza or two by heart.” Can Cadbury possibly have had this particular stanza in mind to teach students memorization?

“Let’s call this wondrous chocolate world  
The Land of Cadbury.  
For ‘Cadbury’ is the bunny word  
For chocolate, don’t you see.”

Then, to reinforce the “Tale of the Great Bunny,” the teacher’s kit

suggested several activities: perhaps students could put on a puppet show acting out aspects of the Cadbury story.

Students could practice their letter-writing skills by composing a note for someone who did a good deed the way the Great Bunny did. The instructions continued: “In the enclosed material, we learn that the Great Bunny delivers chocolate to children in appreciation of their help in preventing the world’s chocolate from disappearing...By asking the students to think about and recognize good deeds, we are encouraging them to perform such deeds themselves” (3).

Ah, so Cadbury has more altruistic lessons other than just pure chocolate consumption. But students needn’t stop at letters to people they know: “Just like Santa, the Great Bunny writes back!” Consumers—oops, *students*—can write to the Great Bunny (1 Chocolate Treat St., The Land of Cadbury) who will respond after Easter with a personalized note.

The Great Bunny also helps students with their cutting and pasting skills. Why not have students make a shoebox world complete with Great Bunny figures, and an underground world mural illustrating the underground Land of Chocolate?

And no classroom supplement would be complete without a technology component. Cadbury assured teachers that, while students may be a little young, they can have

their introduction to the web through the Great Bunny on-line. The Cadbury web site was prominently displayed (<http://www.cadbury.chocolate.ca/easter>) and students were encouraged not only to visit the web-site to download recipes and craft ideas (which they could take home to their parents, the real consumers) but to e-mail the Great Bunny himself.

While most parts of the Cadbury curriculum cannot be reproduced, one page in the teacher’s kit can be photocopied—a game for students where they decipher Easter code words including “egg,” “chocolate” and “bunny,” which are all clearly the most significant aspects of Easter in Cadbury’s Land of Chocolate.

But Cadbury needs its money’s worth: after shelling out some cash to provide students with this invaluable lesson, the corporation wanted to know how effective this exercise was. In the feedback form on the back page, teachers were asked several questions: Which activities did teachers use? How many students were exposed to the kit? For how long? Did you display the poster? Visit the web-site? How did you use it? How would you rate this program (children’s interest, age appropriateness, visual appeal, organization, overall)? Would you order this free program again? And, finally, room was provided for additional comments and personal data.

So, based on the teacher response, we may or may not see “the

Tale of the Great Bunny” for a third year next spring, a tale which ends with the concise Cadbury analysis of Easter:

So now you know Great Bunny’s tale  
And all the friends he keeps,  
And where his chocolate comes  
from,  
And why he leaves you treats.<sup>6</sup>

## Youth News Network

“The Youth News Network (YNN) is a privately-owned, Canadian-based enterprise spearheaded by Montrealer Rod MacDonald. At the core of the Network’s ambitious proposals is the production of a commercial news/current affairs television show targeted at teenagers, that would be broadcast daily across the country into the nation’s classrooms. Following forceful public opposition, the controversial project failed in its initial approach to Canadian schools in 1992-93. It was back in the news in early 1996. However, it is being closely watched by concerned educators, parents and the media.” (Media Awareness Network)

YNN is based on the American commercial news program Channel 1, brainchild of Chris Whittle and sold in 1994 to K-III Communications corporation for \$250 million. Whittle would approach schools and offer them free equipment (TVs, VCRs, satellite dishes) and wiring—for free. Or almost free. In return, students would have to watch a daily program—Channel 1—10 minutes of “news” and two minutes of commercials.

If the program is not watched, the school is found to be in violation of the contract and the equipment is removed from the school premises. Advertisers pay approximately \$200,000 for each 30-second spot of carefully directed “stealth advertising,” as Whittle described it to potential advertisers. Currently, approximately 40% of American schools—8 million students—watch Channel 1 each day. In a year this amounts to one week of school time spent watching television, and one entire day of each year spent watching nothing but commercials.

Several thorough studies, some commissioned by Channel 1 to demonstrate the educational validity of the program, determined that educational benefits to students were in fact negligible—although students did overwhelmingly remember the commercials.

YNN offers a similar program to Channel 1, with an additional 30 seconds of commercial time, and has added computers and CD-Roms to sweeten the deal, with Interactive Distance Learning Centres in some schools. According to Rod MacDonald, “YNN represents a unique partnership of the public and private sectors to provide advanced technology that is paid for by commercial sponsorships and **not** taxpayers.”

The 1996 YNN prospectus anticipated that by June of 1998 it would be reaching “1,000,000 high school students or nearly 50% of the

high school population in Canada.” And, by the way, these are not *commercials* that the students would be watching as part of YNN; rather, they are *sponsored messages*. The actual difference between the two remains unclear.

In 1996, the Canadian Teachers’ Federation issued a press release reaffirming its opposition to YNN and calling on the Council of Ministers of Education to do oppose YNN. The Association for Media Literacy, as well as various parent action groups and Home and School Associations, have also provided strong opposition to Youth News Network.

Recently, YNN has begun another attempt to enter the schools—but this time with a new twist. Seven school boards have agreed to enter into a pilot project, and research about the results of YNN in schools is being conducted by Les McLean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. However, though the project was expected to begin last September, it appears to be on hold—which means, presumably, that the research has also been deferred.

But, while disturbed at the negative press and supposed “misinformation” circulating, YNN is certainly not forthcoming in providing information—lists of confirmed advertisers, corporate information or media kits. The results of this latest YNN endeavour apparently remain to be seen.

## Merx

“The MERX service is an exciting new electronic tendering system, connecting suppliers of goods and services to people who purchase on behalf of governments and public sector organizations across Canada.” (“All About MERX”)

Earlier this year, the Ontario Ministry of Education announced that, like other public sector contracts, curriculum development would henceforth be open to bids from the private sector. The MERX web-site, maintained by the Bank of Montreal, was set up to allow electronic bids, and to provide some information about the bidding process. However, some of the guidelines were questionable. “Conflict of interest” was defined as “when an individual’s private interests may be incompatible or in conflict with their public service responsibilities. For instance, a conflict of interest would exist in a situation where an individual has, or appears to have, confidential information that could provide him or her or someone else with a real or potential benefit at the expense of the public interest. Confidential information means information that is not available to the public and if released to any person or organization would, or might, result in loss or damage to the Crown or advantage to that person or organization in dealing with the Crown or others” (MERX Opportunity Abstract, 3). However, where the publishing

*industry* is concerned, there is no conflict of interest...although the conflict of interest statement “applies equally to all individuals and companies” (4).

MERX accelerates the bidding process to unprecedented speeds. “Curricula that used to take years to develop will now be rushed into production in weeks or months. Bidders will be notified in April if they’ve won; their first draft is due in June and the finished product must be available by next fall, to be implemented a year later” (Landsberg).

But it appears that not all potential bidders will have the same opportunity to bid, as a result of the financial restrictions. For one thing, it costs money to place a bid (\$500,000), and requires \$1,000,000 in liability insurance. And, as low-

est bid tends to win (at least according to the laws of the marketplace), those bidders who can best afford to keep their bids low—predominantly the private players—will undeniably have better luck. Not coincidentally, KPMG has placed a bid in all areas of curriculum, and the Bay Consulting Group has expressed an interest in several areas of instruction.

Ministry spokespeople dismiss public concern over the potential multinational involvement in curriculum development by insisting that only Canadian companies will be able to place bids. However, often this requires little more than opening a Canadian branch office—and, considering the lucrative nature of the education industry, even this meager national restriction will likely be subjected to the terms of NAFTA. ☹

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Such educational endeavours by the banking communities appear to be extremely effective. According to a 1995 survey by Teenage Research Unlimited, a substantial percentage of American youth owned stocks or bonds. Educators attributed this to “an increased classroom focus on market issues” (Seebacher). Only a generation ago, studies showed that high school students “had fundamental misconceptions about profits, corporate competition and the effect of government regulation” (Seebacher).

<sup>2</sup> For elaboration and analysis, see the MERX case study in the last section of this report.

<sup>3</sup> See Ontario Ministry’s suggested curriculum changes, 1996, and the OSSTF’s “Secondary Reform Committee’s Background and Briefing Notes on the Latest Draft of the Secondary Reform Document.” Revised May 21, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> And let’s not forget the required dose of instructional technology (IT), especially considering the number of sponsors from the telecommunications sector. JA (specifically the Toronto-based Junior Achievement Metro Toronto York Region) has begun to establish itself as its own sort of instructional facility, coupled with the influence of IT: “we have developed Information Technology Strategy to ensure that JAMTYR becomes one of the most technologically advanced teaching organizations in the province” (15).

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, although the former PTA and Waterloo County Board of Education donated funds to help build the playground, only the corporate donors were recognized and had their names placed on the plaque. (From discussion with member of Waterloo County School Advisory Council, March 13, 1998.)

<sup>6</sup> This section on “The Tale of the Great Bunny” was also printed in the CCPA Education Monitor, Spring 1998.



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# Web Site Resources

**Cadbury/The Tale of the Great Bunny** <http://www.cadbury.chocolate.ca/easter>

**Coca Cola** <http://tjunior.advanced.org/4501/>  
<http://www.menc.org/IHWE/insts/splash.html>

**Curriculum Sites** <http://www.TeachFree.com>

**MERX** <http://www.merx.cebra.com/marketing/about/index.htm> 1

**Plastic Bag Association** <http://www.plasticbag.com>

**Quality Education Data** <http://www.qeddata.com/freeprogram.htm>

**ScreenAd** <http://www.screenad.com>

**The Great Chocolate Experience II** <http://www.iceberg.org/~gbequette/gce2.html>

**3rd Planet** <http://members.aol.com/C3rdplanet/math.html>  
<http://members.aol.com/C3rdplanet/games.html>

<http://www.cccnet.com>

<http://www.k-12world.com>

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CORPORATE CONTENT: INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

BY ERIKA SHAKER

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