

Colonizing Our Future: The Commercial Transformation Of America's Schools*

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Introduction: The Propagandists

America's schools are indeed haunted. The uneasy spirit of John Dewey, as Bill Doll suggests, in "Ghosts and the Curriculum" [\[1\]](#) wanders the corridors of public education watching and waiting for his idea to, at long last, be made flesh in the daily life of schools. Doll dares to hope that the second millennium will belong to Dewey. I do not share Doll's optimism. In my view, it is the spirits of Ivy Ledbetter Lee and Edward Bernays that are more likely to be happily at home in America's schools and classrooms this century than the spirit of John Dewey.

The names Lee and Bernays may be unfamiliar to you. They are not discussed in educational history texts or curriculum guides, however, they are well known to students of business administration as the fathers of American public relations. A little bit of historical background will help explain the nature of their impact on schools and school curriculum.

Ivy Lee, a former newspaper reporter, made his mark early in the twentieth century working for the Rockefellers. He rose to prominence on the heels of a blood bath. On April 20, 1914, in Ludlow, Colorado, the state militia opened fire on a tent city of striking miners and their families. Fifty-three people including thirteen women and children were killed in the massacre. The events in "bloody Ludlow" aroused widespread public sympathy for the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company strikers and provoked outrage at the mine owners, the Rockefeller family. In response to inflamed public opinion, the Rockefellers hired Ivy Lee to change the public perception of their mining operation and their family.

To sell the corporate story and discredit the strikers, Lee oversaw the production of so-called "fact sheets," recruited prominent people to write widely circulated letters in support of the mine owners, and heavily publicized a trip to the Colorado mine site by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Mr. Lee's efforts helped create modern public relations and did, in fact, to a large extent succeed in quelling public hostility toward the mining company. Mr. Lee may have been paid well for his services but we can be fairly certain that whatever he was paid it was certainly a good deal less than it might have cost the

Rockefeller's toraise wages, reduce the hours worked, or improve safety in the mines. [2]

After his success in cleaning the stain of the Ludlow massacre off the Rockefeller image Lee was kept on the family payroll to transform the public view of John D. Rockefeller, Sr. In the early years of the twentieth century Rockefeller Sr.'s predatory business practices earned him a reputation as a callous villain. Wisconsin progressive Robert La Follette, for example, had called him "the greatest criminal of the age." To transform the public's opinion of Mr. Rockefeller Lee saw to it that Rockefeller's philanthropy was prominently showcased and that newsreel footage showed him in appealing settings such as handing out Christmas presents, joking with newsmen, singing with his family, and playing golf. By the time of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.'s death in 1937 his transformation from villain to civic benefactor in the public view was virtually complete. Lee was without question a master of the art of what he called "getting believed." [3]

A keen awareness of the importance in a democratic society of "getting believed" animated the work of Edward Bernays. Bernays, whose mother was Sigmund Freud's sister and whose father was Freud's wife's brother sought to harness social science research to the task he called "the engineering of consent." During World War I he worked for the Committee on Public Information helping the committee sell the Wilson administration's war policies. After the war Bernays signed on as "public relations counsel" to an impressive list of America's most powerful corporations. The American Tobacco Company, for example, hired him to increase cigarette smoking among women. In order to do so he persuaded socialites to march down Fifth Avenue in the 1929 New York City Easter Parade proudly smoking cigarettes as "torches of liberty" as a protest against women's inequality. [4]

In his career as a private "public relations counsel," and in a series of books such as Crystallizing Public Opinion, [5] Propaganda, [6] The Engineering of Consent, [7] and Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel [8] Bernays preached the gospel that public relations was essential in a democracy and the social science knowledge was essential to public relations.

Bernays articulated his views quite clearly in his 1928 book Propaganda. [9] He begins the book by arguing that, "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country." [10] He goes on to say that, "In theory, everybody buys the best and cheapest commodities offered him on the market. In practice, if everyone when around pricing, and chemically testing before purchasing, the dozens of soaps or fabrics or brands of bread which are for sale, economic life would become hopelessly jammed. To avoid such confusion, society consents to have its choice narrowed to ideas and objects brought to its attention by propaganda of all kinds. There is, consequently a vast and continuous effort going on to capture our minds in the interest of some policy or commodity or idea." [11]

In Bernays' view democratic civic life was a marketplace every bit as much as economic life. He took it as axiomatic that competing political interests would seek to put their views before the public just as competing economic interests would seek to promote their products and services. Bernays did not consider this an evil process nor did he regard propaganda as a dirty word. To him, propaganda was "a perfectly legitimate form of human activity." [12] He argued that, "Any society, whether it be social, religious, or political, which is possessed of certain beliefs, and sets out to make them known, either by the spoken or written words, is practicing propaganda." [13] Propaganda was, as he saw it, essential to keep the wheels of politics and commerce turning while preserving social stability.

The issue of how to have a democracy and at the same time restrain the mob and maintain social stability has occupied American political theorists throughout our history. In his historical analysis Bernays expounded the view that "economic power tends to draw after it political power...[and that] the industrial revolution shows how that power passed from the king and the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie. Universal suffrage and universal schooling reinforced this tendency, and at last even the bourgeoisie stood in fear of the common people. For the masses promised to become king.

"To-day, however, a reaction has set in. The minority has discovered a powerful help in influencing majorities. It has been found possible so to mold the mind of the masses that they will throw their newly gained strength in the desired direction." [14]

Bernays would have us believe that public relations and advertising are progressive tools of democratic governance and the market economy. The conflation of market choice and the democratic political process is, however, problematic. Although the advertising industry is very good at promoting the consumption of goods and services, at its heart it is profoundly anti-democratic. A brief review of the historical development of modern marketing and the tools deployed by marketers to promote their client's interests reveals the nature of the threat that modern mass marketing poses to democratic political institutions in general and public education in particular.

By the end of the nineteenth century American business and industry was, for the first time, able to produce more than Americans could consume. This did not mean that poverty had been abolished. It meant that more goods and services were available than American society as it was then structured could consume. The problem facing the American economic system was in large measure how to promote and make possible mass consumption without threatening the position of the existing political and economic elites.

As Stuart Ewen writes in Captains of Consciousness, "It became a central function of business to be able to define a social order which would feed and adhere to the demands of the productive process and at the same time absorb, neutralize and contain the transitional impulses of a working class emerging from the unrequited drudgery of nineteenth century industrialization." [15] Education was central to this process. It was, however, education of a very particular sort. Ewen quotes the Boston department store merchant, Edward Filene, to make the point. Filene argued that, "Mass production demands the education of the masses." [16] And that in their education, "the masses must learn to behave like human beings in a mass production world." [17] According to Ewen, Filene wanted to build an industrial and social democracy based on what he termed "fact finding." To Filene this meant that modern education should focus on "the 'facts' about what is being produced rather than questioning the social bases upon which those facts lay" [18] It should, perhaps, not be surprising that it was Filene who founded and initially directed Consumers Union, [19] an organization devoted to providing the "facts" about products and services to America's consumers.

The essentially conservative character of Filene's conception of education in an industrial democracy is suggested in Otis Pease's study of the development of American Advertising between 1920 ...1940. [20] In discussing the consumer movement's response to advertising Pease maintains that "while the consumer movement was forced to attack advertising on the issue of its literal truthfulness, the advertising industry itself recognized that the question of literal truth or falsity was largely irrelevant, since the appeal of the advertisement lay not in the factual assertions of its contents but in the associations which it set up in the mind of the reader. This psychological factor to a great extent shifted the battle to a field where...the barrier between literal truth and literal falsity was obscured and where, in consequence, it lost much of its effectiveness. ...The practices of the advertising men merely confirmed the suspicion that there existed in

the industry no operating concept which would encourage the public to exercise free or rational judgements as consumers." [21]

One might add to Pease's comments the observation that a powerful privately controlled institution that systematically sets out to undermine the ability of people to make rational judgements is inherently anti-democratic because it subverts the intellectual qualities and debases the civic relationships that make democratic life imaginable. What is, therefore, promoted to the detriment of genuine democratic civic culture is mass consumerism in commerce and politics. As Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen argue in Channels of Desire, which was published during the military build-up of the Reagan administration's early years, "The goal of the advertising industry is to link the isolated experience of the spectator with the collectivized impulses and priorities of the corporation. ...If *economic* consumerism tends to organize disconnected individuals into coherent and predictable markets, it is *political* consumerism that defines the current state of western democracy seeking to create a vast patriotic unity ...a unity without solidarity." [22] In other words, a unity defined by consumption rather than creation and participation.

In the false or virtual unity of consumer culture, the individual is thus more of a marketing icon than a social reality. Drawing on the work of Elizabeth Hurlock, the Ewens argue that although market research techniques "may be seen as ways of trying to understand how 'paralyze the critical powers of an individual with the result that he or she follows the lead, whatever that lead may be,' fashion merchandisers attempted to surround the actual sales process with an aura of individuality." [23] For the Ewens the individual in contemporary American society lives "in a visual space consumed by the imagery of commerce, a society organized around the purchase....The 'constant rapidity' with which we are encouraged to tire of consumable objects, of our elusive pleasures, is generalized as an axiom of existence. To buy is to succeed." [24]

What this cultural value might portend for democratic institutions was described by an advertising executive writing anonymously in The Nation over forty years ago, "Social scientists in the past have paid attention to the irrational patterns of human behavior because they wish to locate their social origins and thus be able to suggest changes that would result in more rational conduct. They now study irrationality ...and other aspects of human behavior ...together data that may be used by salesmen to manipulate consumers." [25] One outcome is no doubt the creation of what David Riesman termed the "lonely crowd" $\frac{3}{4}$ a crowd that represents the negation of both the individual and genuine community. [26] Members of Riesman's lonely crowd define themselves by their possessions and express their individuality by looking, smelling, and thinking like everyone else.

Educative vs. Mis-Educative Experiences

The views of Bernays are profoundly different from John Dewey's conception of science springing out of and inseparable from an engaged democratic community built on rational interactions. Indeed, in every aspect advertising ideology is the enemy of Dewey's philosophy. There is no room in the thinking and practice of Bernays and his public relations offspring for either Dewey's conception of democracy or his conception of an educative experience. Indeed, the edifice of American mass marketing is built on what, in Experience and Education, Dewey termed mis-educative experiences. Sophisticated marketing techniques conceal but cannot alter the reality that the purpose of mass marketing is to manipulate the many for the benefit of the few. It is, as Dewey characterized traditional education, imposition from above and from the outside. [27]

If advertising is, as I believe, the twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week, three hundred and sixty-five day a year curriculum of our culture then Americans young and old are being relentlessly mis-educated and, as a consequence, our society is

correspondingly less democratic.

In Experience and Education Dewey wrote, "Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted." [28] He goes on to explain that mis-educative experiences can land a person in a rut and limit further experience. Moreover, although mis-educative experiences may be pleasurable or exciting in the moment, because they are not linked cumulatively they simply dissipate energy.

Mis-educative experiences, according to Dewey, "may be lively, vivid, and 'interesting,' and yet their disconnectedness may artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits. The consequence of formation of such habits is the inability to control future experiences. They are then taken, either by way of enjoyment or of discontent and revolt, just as they come. Under such circumstances, it is idle to talk of self-control." [29] In Dewey's view, "It may be a loss rather than a gain to escape from the control of another person only to find one's conduct dictated by immediate whim and caprice, that is, at the mercy of impulses into whose formation intelligent judgement has not entered. A person whose conduct is controlled in this way has at most only the illusion of freedom. Actually he is directed by forces over which he has no command." [30] Thus, he held that an "[o]veremphasis upon activity as an end, instead of upon *intelligent* activity, leads to identification of freedom with immediate execution of impulses and desires." [31] Modern mass advertising turns Dewey's philosophy inside out. In the name of freedom and individuality, advertising encourages individuals to give in to their impulses so that they may be controlled more easily by others.

The last thing in the world that advertisers want is for a target audience to have self-control. For Dewey, in contrast, freedom is expressed through the control of impulse in the service of intelligent purposes. To his mind, "The only freedom that is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observation and of judgement exercised in behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worth while." [32]

In Experience and Education Dewey described an educative experience as being part of a continuity of experiences that promote individual and community growth. Continuity of experience is, as he saw it, necessary both to provide context and meaning to immediate experiences and to shape subsequent experiences in the service of individual purposes. In his words, "when and only when development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth does it answer to the criterion of education as growing." [33] To Dewey, "Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into." [34] Furthermore, he explained, "No experience is educative that does not tend both to knowledge of more facts and entertaining of more ideas and to a better, a more orderly, arrangement of them." [35]

Dewey's educational philosophy is rooted based in the belief that individuals are active members of real communities which shape and, in turn, are shaped by them. In his words, "Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective experiences under which experiences are had." [36] In contrast, advertising deploys a variety of non-rational appeals and attempts to create pseudo-communities based on consumption or the uncritical acceptance of a particular policy or point of view.

Educative experiences are the result of the interaction of the internal (or personal) and the external (or objective) in what Dewey termed a "situation." It is within the "situation" that the continuity of experience is made manifest, the individual and community changed, and the avenues of future growth created. Through this process the

individual advances in knowledge, self-control, and freedom, and the democratic community is progressively improved. Dewey explained, what is "learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations that follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue. ...A fully integrated personality ...exists only when successive experiences are integrated with one another. It can be built up only as a world of related objects is constructed. Continuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience." [37] Where Dewey seeks the integrative experiences in the service of the individual and the community, advertising seeks to destroy continuity, fragment experience, and encourages us to give into our irrational impulses for the purpose of manipulating our behavior.

The scope of modern advertising is almost impossible to quantify. It might well be easier to identify those areas where advertising is not present (there won't be many) than to document the volume of advertising unleashed on the American public. In 1994 Leslie Savan estimated that television watching American's see about one hundred commercials a day. Add other commercial venues such as billboards, shopping cards, clothing labels, and city buses, and the number of ads that clamor for attention from each American reaches 16,000 a day. [38] One need only consider the explosive growth of web based marketing over the past five years to realize that by now the number is likely to be much higher. There is little doubt that contemporary Americans live in an advertising-saturated environment and lead what Savan termed "sponsored lives."

The impact of advertising on our personal lives and our communal relationships has been explored in a number of recent books such as Stuffed: The Betrayal of the American Man, [39] Luxury Fever: Why Money Fails to Satisfy in an Era of Excess, [40] Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising, [41] and The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer. [42] The nature and impact of marketing in schools has been taken up in Giving Kids the Business: The Commercialization of America's Schools [43] and American Education and Corporations: The Free Market Goes to School. [44] Other recent books such as Harvesting Minds: How TV Commercials Control Kids, [45] and KinderCulture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood [46] have addressed advertising's impact on children.

If the methods of modern mass marketing to adults threaten the happiness of individuals and undermine the well being of our society, deploying them against children colonizes our future. No one can seriously suggest that children represent the rational consumer of market ideology; that is, children can in no sense be considered to have the same power, information, and freedom that adults are said to have to freely enter into contracts for goods and services in the idealized market place. Advertising to children is then a kind of immoral war on childhood, waged for the profit of adults who should be childhood's guardians. Furthermore, when advertising is conducted in schools the immorality is compounded because the power of the state is twisted to the service of special interests, the ethical standing of educators compromised, and orientation of the school shifted toward mis-educative experiences.

Schoolhouse Commercialism: Historical Background

Schoolhouse commercialism is not new. Its development parallels that of the public relations industry as a whole. As early as 1929, the National Education Association's Committee on Propaganda in the Schools surveyed school officials to determine what sponsored materials had been received and what policies or other mechanisms were in place to deal with them. The committee also conducted a review of

state education departments' laws or policies governing the use of such materials, interview sessions with groups of teachers, school visits, and an examination of advertisements for sponsored materials.

In 1953, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development issued "Using Free Materials in the Classroom." In 1955, the American Association of School Administrators followed with a similar pamphlet, "Choosing Free Materials for Use in the Schools." Both publications were written to assist teachers in the use of sponsored materials in their classrooms. Both guides warned teachers against uncritical acceptance of sponsored materials, but also recommended that they not reject such offerings outright.

In her 1979 book *Hucksters in the Classroom*, Sheila Harty described the results of four questions related to teachers' use of "industry [-sponsored] materials" in the 1976-77 annual Membership Survey of the National Education Association. The responses of 1,250 teachers suggested that approximately half of U.S. teachers used sponsored materials, and indicated that a wide variety of commercial interests were represented, including banks, utilities, manufacturers, and food processors.

Hucksters in the Classroom included an examination of many sponsored educational materials, a review of state education departments' policies, a survey of teachers, and a review of advertisements for sponsored materials appearing in education-related publications. In addition to discussing the ethical dilemmas inherent in sponsored materials, Harty also described in detail many examples showing bias, racial prejudice and sexism, inaccuracies, and incomplete or outdated information.

Channel One, the 12-minute current events program which carries two minutes of commercials, was launched in 1990, and is widely considered the bellwether of the recent expansion of commercial influences in the schools. As such, it has been the subject of several studies on the extent of its use, its educational efficacy, and the financial value of the service and equipment provided. Critiques of Channel One's content include Fox, [47] Miller, [48] and Rank. [49] "Channel One in the Public Schools: Widening the Gaps" found that schools with high concentrations of poor students are almost twice as likely to use Channel One as schools serving more wealthy students. [50] Greenberg and Brand found that students who watched Channel One were more likely to express materialist values such as "Money is everything," or "A nice car is more important than school." [51]

"Captive Kids: A Report on Commercial Pressures on Kids at School," produced by Consumers Union Education Services in 1995, outlined various commercializing activities in schools. "Captive Kids" provided reviews and ratings of over 100 sponsored materials and contests and included a listing of national education organizations and their positions on school commercialism, and provided a comparison of Channel One and CNN classroom news programs.

The Growth of Schoolhouse Commercialism in the Nineties

For the past two years (1998 and 1999) I have conducted an annual analysis of advertising trends in the schools by tracking the number of citations relating to each of seven areas of schoolhouse commercialism. In doing my analyses I conducted searches of four media databases, the popular press, the business press, the marketing press, through Lexis-Nexis, and the education press, through Education Index. Press citations were used to attempt to understand the scope and the development of marketing activities directed at schools because primary data are largely unavailable. Firms engaged in school-based commercial activities may, at different times, have an interest in making exaggerated claims about the number of children reached (in order to attract clients); remaining silent (to shield market research and product introduction information from competitors); or minimizing the size of their efforts (to lessen the possibility of a negative public reaction). In addition, the varied and particular purposes for which organizations gather data on school-focused commercializing activities results in

information that is fragmentary and often not comparable, and, therefore, not reliable as a basis for identifying overall trends.

The seven areas of schoolhouse commercialism I have identified are:

1) Sponsorship of Programs and Activities. Corporations paying for or subsidizing school events and/or one-time activities in return for the right to associate their name with the events and activities. This may also include school contests. The number of citations related to sponsorship of programs and activities increased 250% between 1990 and 1998-99.

2) Exclusive Agreements. Agreements between schools and corporations that give corporations the exclusive right to sell and promote their goods and/or services in the school or school district. In return the district or school receives a percentage of the profits derived from the arrangement. Exclusive agreements may also entail granting a corporation the right to be the sole supplier of a product or service and thus associate its products with activities such as high school basketball programs. The number of citations related to exclusive agreements increased 1,668% between 1990 and 1998-99.

3) Incentive Programs. Corporate programs that provide money, goods, or services to a school or school district when its students, parents, or staff engage in a specified activity, such as collecting particular product labels or cash register receipts from particular stores. The number of citations related to incentive programs increased 83% between 1990 and 1998-99.

4) Appropriation of Space. The allocation of school space such as scoreboards, rooftops, bulletin boards, walls, and textbooks on which corporations may place corporate logos and/or advertising messages. The number of citations related to appropriation of space increased 270% between 1990 and 1998-99.

5) Sponsored Educational Materials. Materials supplied by corporations and/or trade associations that claim to have an instructional content. The number of citations related to sponsored educational materials increased 963% between 1990 and 1998-99.

6) Electronic Marketing. The provision of electronic programming and/or equipment in return for the right to advertise to students and/or their families and community members in school or when they contact the school or district. The number of citations related to electronic marketing increased 106% between 1990 and 1998-99.

7) Privatization. Management of schools or school programs by private for-profit corporations or other non-public entities. The number of citations related to privatization increased 2,000% between 1990 and 1998-99.

Overall, between 1990 and 1999 the number of press citations related to schoolhouse commercialism increased 303 percent. Between 1997-98 and 1998-99 the increase was 11 percent. Graphs 1 and 2 and Figure 1 illustrate the overall trends in schoolhouse commercialism in the nineties and the relative size of each area of commercialism tracked.

Ethical Conflicts

Stories describing advertising activities in schools on occasion helped to highlight the inherent ethical conflict faced by educators who jump on the school marketing bandwagon as well as the dangers that advertising poses to the children in their charge. Two types of schoolhouse commercialism, exclusive soft drink contracts and sponsored educational materials, help illustrate the ethical problems created as well as the mis-educative character of advertising in schools.

Exclusive Soft Drink Contracts

On September 23, 1998, John Bushey, the executive director of school leadership for Colorado Springs School District 11, sent a memo to district principals. Normally, a memo from a school administrator's office outlining

expectations for the coming year would not merit press attention. John Bushey's memo, however, attracted the attention of the *Denver Post*, [52] *Harper's Magazine*, [53] the *Washington Post*, [54] and the *New York Times*. [55] Mr. Bushey, who oversees Colorado Springs' exclusive contract with Coca-Cola, is the district's self-proclaimed "Coke Dude." In his memo Mr. Bushey pointed out that District 11 students needed to consume 70,000 cases of Coke products if the district was to receive the full financial benefit of its exclusive sales agreement with the company. In order to better promote the consumption of Coke products, Mr. Bushey offered school principals tips such as: "Allow students to purchase and consume vended products throughout the day," and "Locate machines where they are accessible to the students all day." He also offered to provide their schools with additional electrical outlets if necessary and enclosed a list of Coke products and a calendar of promotional events intended to help advertise them.

Mr. Bushey's zeal may in part be explained by his tardy realization that the district's exclusive agreement with Coke counted only vending machine sales toward the system's annual quota; Coca-Cola products sold at cafeteria fountains wouldn't count. In March 1999, Mr. Bushey told the *Washington Post* that the district might not meet its contractual goals. In May he told the *New York Times*, "Quite honestly, they were smarter than us."

One of the most often expressed concerns is the negative health impact of consuming large amounts of soft drinks. The *Washington Post* reports that, according to the Beverage Marketing Corporation, annual consumption per capita of soda has increased from 22.4 gallons in 1970 to 56.1 gallons in 1998. [56] The Center for Science in the Public Interest found that a quarter of the teenage boys who drink soda drink more than two 12-ounce cans per day and five percent drink more than 5 cans. Girls, although they drink about a third less than boys, face potentially more serious health consequences. With soda pushing milk out of their diets, an increasing number of girls may be candidates for osteoporosis. [57] With childhood obesity rates soaring (up 100% in twenty years), William Dietz, director of the division of nutrition at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that, "If the schools must have vending machines, they should concentrate on healthy choices like bottled water." [58] Richard Troiano, a National Cancer Institute senior scientist, says the data on soda consumption suggest that there may be a link between childhood obesity and soda consumption. According to Troiano, overweight kids tended to take in more calories from soda than kids who were not overweight. [59]

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) classifies soft drinks as a "food of minimal nutritional value" and prohibits their sale during lunch periods. In 1995 the USDA issued model regulations aimed at elementary schools that would bar soft drinks (and other non-nutritive foods) from school grounds entirely from the start of classes until the end of the lunch period. Secondary schools, the agency pointed out, have the authority to completely ban the sale of foods of minimal nutritional value. Guidelines similar to those proposed by the USDA have been adopted in Kentucky and Florida. [60]

Not all school districts and administrators share Colorado Springs' devotion to exclusive agreements. Middleton and Swansea, Mass., have, for example, turned down contracts with soft drink bottlers. [61] Pat Ratesic, principal of Penn-Trafford High School in eastern Pennsylvania, told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, "I think we're going to try and hold off on those kinds of things as long as we can, as long as the budget allows." However, he added, "Down the road, who knows? Everything seems to be going commercial nowadays. Money talks, I guess." [62]

Sponsored Educational Materials

Sponsored educational materials have been around much longer than exclusive soft drink contracts. The magazine Marketing Tools has traced corporate

sponsored educational materials as far back as 1890 when a paint company developed a handout on primary and secondary colors intended to be distributed in school art classes. The handout also contained a plug for the company's products. [63] Despite some occasionally harsh criticisms of the practice, over the years sponsored educational materials have become a staple of marketers who want to put a corporate message in the school. In its 1995 publication Captive Kids, Consumers Union evaluated over 100 of the sponsored materials provided by corporations, trade groups, and others and found the vast majority were highly commercial, educationally trivial, or both. [64]

Producers of sponsored materials include Enterprise for Education, Learning Enrichment, Inc., Lifetime Learning Systems, The Mazer Corporation, Modern Education Services (formerly Modern Talking Picture Service), and Scholastic, Inc. Together these firms claim to put their clients' materials in the hands of millions of teachers, kindergarten through college, a year. As an elementary school principal in Washington commented to The New York Times, "We get them every day." According to Dominic Kinsley, president of Lifetime Learning, the number of curriculum projects the firm worked on in 1997 was four times greater than a decade earlier. [65]

It is no hard to find examples of sponsored educational materials. The Life and Health Insurance Foundation has a high school education program; [66] Merrill Lynch offers "Money Matters in the Millennium," a "financial literacy" curriculum, and Young Entrepreneur Kits to teach students how to start their own business; [67] and the Archery Manufacturers and Merchants Organization offers middle schools a kit called "Archery Alley." [68] Lifetime Learning Systems developed the "Quality Comes In Writing" program for the BIC pen company to promote "strong writing skills" in fourth to sixth graders, [69] and MasterCard International wanted to help students learn money management skills. [70]

The efforts by credit card companies to teach "money management skills" illustrate the contradiction of having self-interested corporations take on the role of protecting children from their own advertising campaigns. In 1999 the Consumer Federation of America released a study documenting the severe pressure credit card debt is putting on students and criticizing the marketing efforts of credit card companies aimed at college-age youths. Also in 1999, the American Association of University Women report "Gaining a Foothold" suggested that credit card debt presented an obstacle to pursuing or continuing a college education. It is at least possible, therefore, that the most effective method of promoting good money management skills among young adults would be for credit card companies to stop the seductive advertising campaigns aimed at college-age youths they currently fund.

When and where so-called learning materials turn up is based on a corporate need that usually has nothing to do with curriculum improvement. To get around this problem, companies frequently bill their creations as "supplements" to the teachers' regular lessons. They encourage teachers to fit in some or all of the materials whenever and wherever they can. Some clever marketers try to make this into a virtue by claiming that the material is therefore controlled by the teacher, who can tailor it to fit the school's program. However, even a brief examination of most sponsored materials would prove to most people that it is created to benefit its sponsor, not the teachers or the children.

Corporations try to put materials in schools for a number of reasons. They may simply want to sell something to the kids. Companies that sell snack food, candy, clothing, and personal care products are often in this category. Other companies may want to develop a consumer base for their products down the line. These include computer manufacturers, credit card companies, and even car manufacturers.

Since the marketing firms that create sponsored materials have to keep their corporate customers satisfied, their material is judged, first and foremost, by the extent to

which it meets the objectives of their clients. The emphasis is not on providing the fullest and most accurate presentation of information to students. The fundamental difference between marketers and teachers distorts teaching as surely as a funhouse mirror distorts the image of anyone who looks into it. When teachers use products developed by marketing firms, instead of lessons taught to benefit students, the curriculum promotes the objectives of a third party whose interests may well conflict with those of the children, their families, and the country. Bernays might approve. Dewey would not.

If America's capacity to renew its democracy rests on an educated citizenry making well-informed public policy decisions, every American is poorly served when public schools turn their curricula into an educational flea market open to anyone who has the money to set up a table. Yet that is precisely what the relentless assault on funding for public education and repeated calls for "cooperation" with the business community are pushing schools to do.

What Makes Schools So Attractive to Advertisers?

Schools are attractive venues for marketing activities for several reasons. The United States and much of the rest of the industrial world are saturated with advertisements. By some estimates, the average American views a full hour of commercials a day. [71] In attempting to reach children with advertising messages, advertisers must overcome advertising "clutter" to make their messages stand out. Another major problem for advertisers is that children, particularly teenagers, represent a notoriously fragmented and thus difficult to reach market. For example, television ads may be a good way to reach the over-50 crowd — they watch an average of 5.5 hours of television a day. In contrast, children between the ages of 12-18, according to the "Teen Fact Book" put out by Channel One, watch television only 3.1 hours per day. [72] Advertising in schools can help solve the difficulties presented by clutter and fragmentation. Schools are one of advertising's last frontiers. Apart from places of worship, schools are perhaps the most uncluttered ad environment in our society. And, since children are required to attend, school-based ad campaigns play to a captive audience.

The drive to reach children is fueled by the prospect of an enormous financial payoff. Although estimates of the size of the children's market vary, everyone agrees it is huge. By some estimates, elementary-age children influence almost \$15 billion in annual spending. [73] America's approximately 31 million teens spent \$144 billion in 1998. [74] James U. McNeal, author of *Kids As Consumers: A Handbook of Marketing to Children*, says each year children in the United States spend \$24 billion of their own money and directly or indirectly influence \$488 billion worth of purchases. [75]

According to the Channel One study "A Day in the Life of a Teen's Appetite," cited in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "Teens are veritable eating machines, generating more than 36 billion eating and drinking occasions each year." This represents a rate of consumption that, according to the report, translates into \$90 billion in direct and indirect sales including \$5.2 billion on after-school snacks, \$12.7 billion in fast food restaurants, \$1.8 billion at convenience and food stores and \$1 billion on vending machines. "The whole vending thing is absolutely huge," commented Tim Nichols, Channel One's executive vice president for research. [76] In the words of James Twitchell, author of *ADCULT USA*, for advertisers, when it comes to schools, "It doesn't get any better. These people have not bought cars. They have not chosen the kind of toothpaste they will use. This audience is Valhalla. It's the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow." [77] It is small wonder that commercializing activities in schools are proliferating so rapidly.

If the advertisers are in it for the money, so it seems are many schools. One

ofearliest "Corporate Partnership" programs in the country was launchedby Colorado Springs District 11 in 1993 to raise money for musical instruments,computers, and staff training. In 1996-97, the program, coordinated by DDMarketing of Pueblo, Colo., raised \$140,000 for the district by sellingadvertising space on the side of school buses and in school hallways to 29companies. Asked whether Colorado Springs had gone too far, June Million,director of public information at the National Association of Elementary SchoolPrincipals commented, "I think it's going too far. But it's difficult forme to point a finger at schools and say that it's wrong because they don't havethe budgets." [78] Christine Smith,director of community partnerships and enterprise activity for the DenverPublic Schools was more blunt, "I got tired of begging for money all thetime." [79]

Thejustification schools use for entering into marketing relationships withcorporations is financial need, however, the monetary reward is often verymodest. The *San Antonio Express-News* reports that school districts inthe San Antonio area that had permitted advertising on their school buses didnot realize the revenue they had anticipated. [80] Even \$140,000 in advertising revenue isn't very much. In adistrict the size of Colorado Springs 11 (32,000 students), [81] it represents approximately \$4.35 per student, hardly enough tomake a dent in the \$4.8 million District 11 announced it had to trim from itsbudget in March of 1999. [82]

The Spreadof Schoolhouse Commercialism Outside of the United States

American-styleschoolhouse marketing is spreading to the rest of the world. German schools nowfeature ads from companies such as Coca-Cola, Columbia TriStar, L'Oreal andothers. Spread Blue Media Group, which holds the largest market share in Germanin-school advertising, is going after the \$20 billion in purchasing power thatit estimates German students have. [83]Austria made it easier to advertise in schools two years ago and theNetherlands has allowed schoolhouse advertising for eight years, according tothe *Christian Science Monitor*. [84]

The (*London*)*FinancialTimes* reported that a firm called Imagination for School Media Marketingplanned to pay 300 secondary schools 5,000 pounds a year (approximately \$7,900 US)to put up advertising posters in school hallways, gyms, and dining halls. [85] The Campbell's Labels for Educationprogram, launched in 1973 in the U.S., [86]introduced plans spread to Canada during the 1998-99 school year. To helplaunch the program in Canada, Campbell's sponsored "Campbell's Race to theFinish Line Contest." The Canadian school that submitted the most labelswon a "digital multimedia production suite" or a "schoolyardpalace." Beaverlodge Elementary School of Winnipeg, Manitoba, won thecontest, turning in 27,999 labels — almost 100 labels per student, [87] a lot of soup by anyone's standard. Also inCanada, Youth News Network (YNN), a daily 12 ½-minute current events programwith commercials that was modeled on Channel One, plans to debut in a few dozenschools in the fall of 1999. [88]

Primedia,Channel One's corporate parent, announced a Latin American development programin 1998. [89] One of the most extremeexamples of school commercialism was reported by *The Daily News* ofNew Plymouth, New Zealand. According to its June 18, 1999, story, an Aucklanschool planned to sell naming rights to each of its six classrooms for \$3,000per year. For \$15,000 a sponsor could buy the rights to the school's name, andall sponsors would be guaranteed product exclusivity and advertising rights atschool events and in school publications. [90]

Opposition to SchoolhouseCommercialism

In aSeptember 1997 *Marketing Tools* article, Matthew Klein warnedadvertisers that as far as school-based marketing programs go, "When acomunity feels a company has overstepped its bounds ...no one is immune from thebacklash." He went on to cite

several examples: the backlash Campbell's experienced for sponsoring a phony science lesson designed to demonstrate that Campbell's Prego brand spaghetti sauce was thicker than its competitor's; the ban on sponsored textbook covers in a Staten Island school because of a father's outrage when his daughter came home with a temporary tattoo featuring a Calvin Klein logo; the reexamination of all Seattle school district advertising as a result of efforts by the district administration to solicit paid advertising for its middle and high schools. [91]

Mr. Klein's concerns may be well founded. Although the trend toward increased commercialism in the schools shows no signs of abating, there are indications that concern about commercializing schools is growing. According to Anne Bryant, executive director of the National School Boards Association, "This [commercialism] has become a very important topic of conversation in many schools, and we're concerned about it. The number of kids under 18 years old and their purchasing power is astronomical. Companies are going directly after that target market any way they can." [92]

In 1998, for example, the Berkeley, Calif., school board voted to ban advertisements in schools. [93] Des Plaines, Ill., School District 62 decided against using Channel One and announced plans to implement advertising and sponsorship guidelines modeled after those proposed by the National Parent Teachers Association. [94] Wisconsin State Representative Marlin Schneider proposed a total ban on advertising in schools in 1997. [95] Faced with strong opposition from educators as well as corporations, Schneider then proposed a less expansive bill that would have barred schools from signing exclusive agreements with soft drink bottlers. [96] Although neither version of the 1997 bill was adopted, in 1999 Schneider introduced new legislation that would prohibit school boards from entering into exclusive advertising contracts or contracts for telecommunications goods or services that require students to be exposed to advertising. [97]

In 1999, California State Assemblywoman Kerry Mazzoni introduced two bills on the topic of commercialism in schools. Assembly Bill 116, which was signed into law that September, bans in textbooks any "materials, including illustrations, that provide unnecessary exposure to a commercial brand name, product, or corporate or company logo." Mazzoni's second bill (AB 117) would have prohibited school districts from entering into exclusive contracts with beverage companies or with ad-bearing electronic services such as Channel One. AB 117 encountered a great deal of industry opposition and was ultimately modified so as to require only that the contract be debated and entered into at a noticed public hearing. The bill passed in its revised form in fall 1999. [98]

At the federal level, legislation was introduced in the House and Senate to prohibit companies from using a legal loophole to distribute soft drinks and other non-nutritive snacks during school lunch periods. [99]

Opposition to schoolhouse commercialism is not limited to the U.S. In May, *MarketingWeek* reported that because of the explosion of marketing activity in British schools, Great Britain's Department of Education and the National Consumer Council were meeting to discuss the issue of advertising and corporate sponsorship. [100] Quebec Education Minister Francois Legault has prohibited school boards in the province from signing contracts to broadcast Youth News Network ... a 12 ½-minute current events television program that contains commercials. According to Legault, the program would constitute "without a shadow of doubt commercial solicitation that is contrary to the mission of the school." [101] These actions, and the Norwegian and Swedish bans on all advertising to children under the age of 12, in or out of school, indicate what is possible given the political will. [102]

Whether the legislative initiatives over the last two years in Wisconsin and

California are the start of a trend toward the regulation of commercializing activities in schools remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Commercial activities now shape the structure of the school day, influence the content of the school curriculum, and determine whether children have access to a variety of technologies. Moreover, it appears from a number of citations that there is an emerging trend for marketers to attempt to bundle together advertising and marketing programs in schools across a variety of media and thus gain a dominant position in the schoolhouse market. A leader in this trend is Primedia, which owns *Cover Concepts*, *Seventeen* magazine, and Channel One, among other media properties that have an advertising impact on schools and classrooms. *Seventeen* and *Cover Concepts* have, for example, launched a coordinated product sampling campaign aimed at adolescent girls. [103] And Channel One has signed on as content provider for America OnLine's teen web site. [104]

The effort to more fully integrate the schoolhouse into corporate marketing plans by securing control over as many school-based advertising media as possible may well be the trend to watch over the next decade. If so, we can expect schools to serve as launch pads for marketing campaigns that resemble high profile movie releases complete with multiple tie-ins for a variety of products and services aimed at children and their families.

As a measure of how far short the professional education community is of Dewey's ideals, it is telling that, despite the pervasiveness of schoolhouse commercialism and its rapid growth in the nineties, the education press has had very little to say about the issue. At a time when commercialism in schools and classrooms is increasing dramatically, educators have been largely silent or, worse, cheerleaders for the trend. The failure of the education community to critically describe and attempt to understand and assess the impact of commercial activities on the character and quality of schools and their programs is not worthy of a profession that would lay claim to the legacy of John Dewey.

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