

# Marketing in Schools, Commercialization and Sustainability: policy disjunctures surrounding the commercialization of childhood and education for sustainable lifestyles in England

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## Abstract

Capitalist expansion is predicated on consumption and growth driven by citizens following their individual preferences in the marketplace. To promote consumption and influence consumer wants and desire, propaganda is used to persuade citizens to purchase products using a wide and diverse range of techniques. In recent decades, this has involved an increase in the marketing of products and consumerist values to children through the education system and the broader media. This paper argues that successive UK governments' public policy in this area has been characterised by inaction, inertia and contradiction and that the resulting policy disjunctures are at variance with their public rhetoric about the commercialization of childhood and professed objectives regarding the promotion of environmental awareness and sustainable lifestyles in schools.

**Key Words:** sustainability, marketing, school commercialism, commercialization, propaganda, childhood

## Introduction

Children today are being sold the idea that the path to happiness lies through excessive consumption.

David Cameron (quoted in Prince, 2010)

Such is the power of the prevailing free-market economic paradigm in the West that capitalism is often treated as synonymous with democracy and freedom. It surprised many, then, that the leader of the British Conservative Party, quoted above, should add his voice to the public disquiet about modern marketing techniques to children and, further, that his party should promise in their 2010 election manifesto to 'take a series of measures to help reverse the commercialisation of childhood' (Conservative Party, 2010, p.43). Previously, as the newly elected Opposition leader, Cameron had visited arctic Norway in 2006 for what became known as his 'hug-a-husky' photo-shoots and, as prime minister, declared to civil servants at the Department of Energy and Climate Change that he wanted the new coalition administration to be 'the greenest government ever' (Randerson, 2010).

The World Wildlife Foundation (2012) praised him for giving his backing to the UK's 2008 Climate Change Act but now claim that the prime minister has 'gone conspicuously quiet' on green issues. Labour Leader Ed Miliband has mocked the prime minister who, he says, has 'gone from hug a husky to gas a badger' (Hansard, 2013).

This article highlights a series of policy disjunctures in education in England which appear to undermine successive UK governments' twin objectives of promoting sustainable lifestyles and combatting the commercialization of childhood. The central theme advanced throughout the paper is that corporate marketing and brand-building to children in schools and educational contexts, what Molnar (2005) calls 'school commercialism', reinforces the values of consumer culture and is, in essence, a further contributory factor to the commercialization of childhood. Such activities therefore run counter to the central messages of education for sustainability and Cameron's claim to take action to 'reverse the commercialisation of childhood'. The article argues that government policy in this area is characterised by inaction, inertia and contradiction. Not only does it fail to regulate corporate marketing activities in schools but its marketization agenda and exhortations for schools to develop partnerships with business may have the effect of facilitating and further entrenching this aspect of consumer culture in education as the private sector increases its power and influence in public services. The resulting policy confusion produces an environment in which schools, rather than providing commercial-free public spaces, are co-opted into the 'brandscape' (Sherry, 1986), acting as a further conduit for corporate messages and values.

### **Growth, Consumption, Marketing and Brandscapes**

Political success in market democracies appears to be tied to economic expansion. For Hamilton (2004, pp.1-2), politics appears to be in the grip of a 'growth fetish' in which 'economic growth...is the touchstone of policy success' and where 'GNP appears to provide a measure of prosperity that is immune to argument'. Foucault (2008, p.144) has made a similar point writing that for 'today's neoliberals in particular there is only one true and fundamental social policy: economic growth'. In such an economy, consumer society as it is commonly called, consumption drives growth just as growth and technological progress drives consumption. Thus, as Jackson (2011) argues, governments in thrall to growth-driven economic policies find themselves compelled to encourage continual materialistic consumption. We become locked in an 'iron cage' of consumerism' where 'the throwaway society is not so much a consequence of consumer greed as a structural prerequisite for survival' (Jackson, 2011, p.97). President Bush's injunction to the American people 'to go shopping' in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks neatly encapsulates the problem in which consumption is invested with symbolic and, in this instance, overt political value. Growth fetishism, then, appears to promote consumerist values and, as Sandel (2013) has pointed out, this focus on economic productivity ignores other aspects of what it might mean to live a meaningful and satisfying life. It also overlooks what are referred to in economics as 'externalities' such as the costs of pollution and resource depletion which have a bearing on environmental sustainability (Skidelsky and Skidelsky, 2013).

A positive attitude towards consumption is not, of course, confined to governments. Bush's rhetoric chimes harmoniously with the messages of the marketing industry who, since the rise of the brand as commodity, have attempted to persuade us that ownership of a particular product is a 'lifestyle choice', invested with meaning and identity (Klein, 2000). This reflects a shift in corporate priorities to what Deleuze (1992, p. 6) has called 'a capitalism of higher-order production.... no longer a capitalism for production but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed'. The emphasis is on the promotion of brands, rather than products, using images, associations and ideas designed to appeal to the emotional response of consumers. Brands are a way of creating the illusion of common purpose between customers and companies, a way of ensuring that 'firms and

consumers interests align through the magic of the marketing concept' (Marion, 2006, p. 256). This has been extended to the concept of the 'brandscape' (Sherry, 1986), defined by the UK Design Council as 'the total experiential reach and engagement of a brand' or, as Klingman (2007, p. 83) puts it, 'the demarcation of territory by brands'. For Wood and Ball (2013, p. 47) brandscapes 'have an inherent experiential quality and form the basis of the new affective economy' and so 'while they appear in wide range of formats, brandscapes have one common element: the generation and exploitation of affect in the consumer subject.'

The logic and techniques of modern marketing were first systematically outlined in 1928 by Edward Bernays in his book *Propaganda*. For Bernays, propaganda, a synonym for what he called 'public relations' (PR - the term marketing had not entered the vernacular), is defined as 'a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group.' (Bernays, 2005, p. 52). Influenced by the emerging disciplines of sociology and social psychology, PR was the scientific creation of favourable circumstances for products or ideas involving the staging of newsworthy events, the simulation of enthusiasm and the use of imagery to create mood. In creating impressions of products rather than directly dealing with their intrinsic merits, marketing attempts to bypass or override consumers' rationality. Ellul's (1973, p. 15-17) analysis of propaganda techniques emphasizes the importance of the modern media and highlights the role of 'pre-propaganda' concerned with 'creating ambiguities, reducing prejudices, and spreading images, apparently without purpose.....for propaganda is not the touch of a magic wand. It is based on slow, constant repetition'. Thus, the creation and maintenance of modern brandscapes is a long-term multifaceted project of persuasion concerned with the management and creation of desire in order to sell product and build brand affinity and loyalty.

Many children in the West now have their own disposable incomes and, through the use of what is commonly referred to as 'pester power', are able to influence parental spending in addition to being potential customers of the future. Companies have responded by developing products and marketing strategies to develop and grow this previously untapped, or under-exploited, source of potential profit. Schor (2004) has described how modern marketing techniques have shifted from the 'gatekeeper model', which sought to persuade parents of the benefits of goods produced for their children, to the targeting of child audiences directly which has increased children's exposure to branding exercises. Other critics observe how marketing is being directed at ever-younger children (Linn, 2005) whilst many spaces and activities for children's play carry hidden marketing intent (Steeves and Kerr, 2005). Public debate in the media tends to be more specifically focused and usually centres on the nature of products, the content of the advertising, the age at which marketing campaigns target children, the exploitation of children in market research and the ethicality of marketing techniques such as data-mining.

There are a number of cultural, social and legal ambiguities about children's role in relation to the market and their capacity to engage in market transactions in consumer society and so questions arise concerning the ethics and fairness of aggressive and sophisticated affective marketing techniques as business tries to grow its child markets. The philosopher Amartya Sen (1998) has argued that consumerism is based on anxiety as citizens chase status through the acquisition of positional goods as signifiers of identity and difference and marketing plays on these desires for status, distinction and belonging. The psychological harms associated with consumerism have been theorised as a pseudo-disease, 'affluenza', by De Graaf et al (2005) which they define as a 'socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more'. Appealing to children in this way must be ethically questionable to say the least given the importance of peer culture and acceptance by those in their formative years. Whilst free-market logic insists that everybody is free to exchange and enter into contacts that suit them and satisfy

their needs and desires, even Milton Friedman (1962, p.33) recognised in *Capitalism and Freedom* that 'we do not believe in freedom for madmen or children'.

As well as a growing critical literature on 'child consumers' (see, for example, Marshall, 2010; Kenway & Bullen, 2003; Macklin & Carlson, 1999; Gunter & Furnham, 1998) the pressure on children to consume has been recognised in a number of government reports related to the commercialization of childhood. Whilst there is little conclusive evidence of the harms to children caused by corporate marketing, serious concerns have been expressed by government and those charged with investigating the issue. New Labour's *Children's Plan* (DCSF, 2007, p.45), citing evidence of an increase in children's interactions with the commercial world, acknowledged that 'there is a gap in understanding properly the impact that cumulative exposure to shopping, advertising and commercial messaging may have on children's wellbeing, particularly at a young age'. Three reports were commissioned including Tanya Byron's *Safer Children in a Digital World* (DCSF/DCMS, 2008), an enquiry into the *Sexualisation of Young People* (Papadopoulos, 2010) and a full-blown review of *The Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing* (DCSF/ DCMS, 2009) led by David Buckingham.

Byron, a clinical psychologist by profession quoted findings from a European Research into Consumer Affairs report (2001) that 'children are confused by the blurring of advertising and content' and argued that 'the risks associated with the process of commercialization are relevant to a child's development and their wellbeing' (Byron, 2008, p. 89). Papadopoulos argued that children are being 'sold the idea that they have to look 'sexy' and 'hot'' (Papadopoulos, 2010, p. 6). Children are, she writes, 'internalising media and advertising messages' and points to research findings which, collectively, provide a 'large body of research from developmental psychologists that attests to the fact that young children do not have the cognitive skills to cope with persuasive media messages' (ibid.). The overarching message of David Buckingham's review concerns the absence of conclusive evidence about how commercialization affects the well-being of children since the 'evidence, both of risk and harm caused by the commercial world and of its benefits is rarely conclusive' though it does acknowledge that 'commercialization may accentuate inequalities and place further pressure on those who are already disadvantaged' (DCSF/ DCMS, 2009, pp.3-4).

The Coalition, following Cameron's pre-election promise to tackle the commercialization of childhood, commissioned yet another review led by Reg Bailey, the Chief Executive Officer of the Mothers' Union. *Letting Children be Children* (DfE, 2011, p.6) canvassed views from parents, children, organisations and businesses and begins by reporting that 'nearly nine out of 10 parents surveyed for this Review agreed with the statement that 'these days children are under pressure to grow up too quickly''. Of particular concern to Bailey is the pressure that marketing images put on children to 'take part in a sexualised life before they are ready to do so' in addition to 'the commercial pressure to consume' (ibid., p.6). Again, the lack of conclusive evidence of harm to children is acknowledged but, observes Bailey, 'insufficient evidence to prove conclusively there is harm to children does not mean that no harm exists' (ibid., p.7).

One of the unifying features of these government reports is their concern about the absence of evidence about the effects of marketing to children. Indeed, all four call for more evidence-gathering, stressing the 'urgent need for further research in this area' (DCSF/ DCMS, 2009, pp.3-4). There is, however, growing research evidence about potential harms to the wellbeing of those who do buy the message that consumption provides the path to happiness, the subtext of the marketers' work. Kasser's (2002) work, for example, on consumer-driven materialism is instructive. He defines materialistic attitudes as involving a preoccupation with money, appearance and fame. His work shows that people who scored highly on scales designed to measure materialistic values also scored less on tests for safety, security, sustenance, competence, efficacy, self-esteem connectedness, autonomy and authenticity. He writes that adolescent 'individuals who were focussed on financial

success, compared with non-materialistic values, were not adapting to society well and were acting in rather destructive ways. Specifically, they were not functioning well in school, on the job, or in their extra-curricular activities, and were likely to exhibit various symptoms of behaviour disorders, such as vandalizing, skipping school, and carrying weapons' (ibid., p. 8). Schor (2004) argues that the theory and practice of PR undermines self-esteem and the social fabric of schools and families. Her research shows that high 'consumer involvement is a significant cause of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and psychosomatic complaints. Psychologically healthy children will be made worse off if they become more enmeshed in the culture of getting and spending' (ibid., p. 167).

## **School Commercialism: the brandscaping of schools and the school curriculum**

Given the evidence, and the huge public concern, about marketing to children, it is important to consider what the role of the school might be as mediator in preparing children for life in a brandscaped world. Indeed, Byron, Papadopoulos, Buckingham and Bailey all talk about the critical role of schools in this regard. However, fulfilling such a role is highly problematic since the intensification of PR activities in and involving schools has meant that they too have become a key social space through which corporate marketing is channelled. Molnar (2005) uses the term 'schoolhouse commercialism' to describe corporate marketing campaigns in American schools and his annual reports on school commercialism trends have also included contributions from the UK and the Republic of Ireland (see, for example, Molnar et al, 2008, 2009, 2010). They provide a yearly update on seven distinct categories of schoolhouse commercialism ('1) appropriation of space on school property, (2) exclusive agreements, (3) sponsored programs and activities, (4) digital marketing, (5) incentive programs, (6) sponsorship of supplementary educational materials, and (7) fundraising' [Molnar, et al, 2014]). A report for the US Consumers' Union's (1998, pp. 4-5) *Captive Kids* identified four 'forms of in-school commercialism' marketing (In-School Ads, Ads in Classroom Materials and Programs, Corporate-sponsored Educational Materials and Programs, Corporate-sponsored Contests and Incentive Programs). In the UK, a case has been made for the recognition of marketing in and through schools as a distinctive form of the commercialization of education, described as 'consumeristic commercialization' (Wilkinson, 2013) or 'propagandist commercialization' defined as the 'infiltration of educational space with the objective of promoting and pushing product to children and inculcating brand awareness and loyalty' (Wilkinson, 2007a, pp. 384-5).

The use of schools and school curricula to deliver business-friendly messages, sell product and build brand awareness commercialism appears to be almost as old as state schooling. The United States General Accounting Office's (2000, p.5) report that the 'use of corporate-sponsored instructional materials can be traced back to at least 1890, when a paint company developed a hand-out on primary and secondary colours for schools to distribute in their art classes'. Historians of US public education have documented how propaganda for capitalist ideology of business has manifested in schools as well as in the general media. Ripa (1992) has detailed attempts in the early twentieth century by American business to besiege US public schools with ideological propaganda promoting the benefits of the free enterprise as the 1930s depression and Roosevelt's New Deal raised questions in the public mind about the capitalism system. Sukarieh and Tannock's (2009, p.775) history of Junior Achievement Worldwide (JAW) describes similar pro-market messages in the 1950s to counteract those intent on 'attacking on free enterprise in a continuous effort to gain control of the teen-age mind... Junior Achievement is your strongest defence against these attacks'. Today, JAW's website describes the company as 'a partnership between the business community, educators and volunteers' which teaches 'the key concepts of work readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy to young people all over the world' (Junior Achievement, 2014). Supported by banks such as Citigroup and HSBC and global businesses like Microsoft, AT&T and FedEx, JAW's political stance, and

objectives, are quite explicit. Its fundraising arm, the Free Enterprise Society, consists of a group of individuals opposed to the 'plunder of private wealth by slick government debt and taxing schemes' (Free Enterprise Society, 2014). JAW claims that it reaches over ten million children a year and, despite its rather crude objective of pushing the ideology of capitalism, one of its regional websites claims that it has 'served' 19,034 children this year (Junior Achievement of Southern Nevada, 2014).

There are plenty of examples of 'schoolhouse commercialism' in the UK. Examples of big businesses trying to build brand affinity in British schools include major banks, energy providers, food manufacturers and supermarkets operating in the UK. Taxpayer-owned National Westminster Bank Plc (2015) and Royal Bank of Scotland (2015) produce *Money Sense for Schools*, a series of branded resources designed to teach financial literacy. Barclays (2015) competes for school market share with its own *Money Skills* resources, which includes branded resources for children as young as four years of age. Oil companies BP (2015), Shell (2015) and Exxon Mobil (2015) all compete to get their materials into British classrooms. In an attempt to distance themselves from the obvious environmental consequences of their business activities, they promote themselves as champions of the environment. 'ExxonMobil is also committed to investing in education for sustainability' trumpets the company's website adding that 'as a business we need to keep the education pipeline filled with engineers, researchers and scientists' (ibid.) suggesting perhaps that their primary concern is the sustainability of ExxonMobil rather than the planet. Also deploying this classic Bernaysian propaganda technique of positive association, companies best known for their production of foods of minimal nutritional value (FMNV) are keen to be seen promoting the benefits of healthy lifestyles. Nestle's (2015) *Healthy Active Kids*, for example, is 'an online resource encompassing videos, games, free teaching units and activities, all promoting healthy eating and activity for children both at school and at home'. Chocolate company Cadbury's (2015) range of branded educational resources is extensive and includes materials for the delivery of the geography and mathematics curricula amongst other things. Cadbury's have obviously not been deterred by public criticism of one of their previous school-based marketing campaigns. Their 2003 *Get Active* scheme backfired in spectacular style when the voucher collection scheme was roundly condemned by the Food Commission (2003) and most of the media when it was pointed out that children needed to consume 5,440 chocolate bars to earn a set of volleyball posts.

Perhaps the best known UK examples of school commercialism are the slow-burning, protracted brand-building campaigns of the big supermarkets. Business in the Community (BITC) long regarded the Tesco's Computers for Schools voucher scheme as the benchmark for 'cause-related marketing', lauding the company for delivering over £100 million worth of kit into schools, demonstrating that 'the scheme is cemented in customers' hearts' (BITC, 2009). Such schemes trade on the perceived benefits for schools but, as BITC point out 'Cause Related Marketing is not philanthropy or altruism' (BITC, 2004, p.3). Tesco is being challenged by Morrison's (2015) *Let's Grow* campaign, an incentive scheme which provides gardening equipment to schools in return for vouchers collected when shopping at the supermarket. Their PR agency won the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising's latest 'Best Integration sponsored by Campaign'. According to advertising industry analysts, 85% of primary schools registered, 39 million vouchers have been redeemed and Let's Grow has generated payback of £21.57 per every £1 spent (Heyworth et al, 2009). Their branded educational resources centre on food education downloadable from their grandly titled *Academy of Food* (Morrison's, 2015).

The only available data from the UK government suggests 23% of schools participate in business-related competitions and contests (DfEE, 1998) but it is highly improbable that this reflects the current reality. Bennett and Gabriel's (1999) study in Greater London found that 58% of state funded secondary schools had participated in voucher collection schemes while pupils in 62% of schools took part in business related competitions and contests. Raine's (2007) research in the Yorkshire & Humber region found that 85% of schools had participated in at least one voucher collection scheme

and that at least four types of commercial activity had been present in over 50% of the 253 schools surveyed. 84% of schools participated in Tesco's *Computers for Schools*, now renamed as *Tesco's for Schools and Clubs*. Almost half of the schools had collected Nestlé *Box Tops* and more than a third had been involved with Walkers *Free Books for Schools* with 67% of schools involved with one or both of these campaigns. Corporate websites certainly make impressive claims about the reach of their marketing tools. Nat West (2015) claim that 'over 71% of secondary schools in England, Scotland and Wales have been involved' with their *Money Sense for Schools* scheme which has reached 'over 2.5 million students'. BillingtonCartmel (2010), Morrison's marketers, claim that their creation of the Let's Grow 'sub-brand' has resulted in over 5 million children [benefitting] from the campaign equating to half the UK child population!

There are good reasons why companies market in schools. Classrooms provide a ready-made segmented audience so that companies know exactly to whom they are pitching products, brands and messages. In addition, children in schools constitute a captive audience whilst the educational context in which brand-building occurs might be seen to confer legitimacy on corporate promotions. There are also objections to school commercialism which relate specifically to the special context of the school. The US Consumers Union (1998, pp. 39-43) lists nine claiming, inter alia, that marketing in schools compromises the integrity of education, blurring the line between education and propaganda and leads to distorted lessons as well as contributing 'to the din of commercialism targeted at kids'. Marketing in schools, they claim, carries the weight of an endorsement, a concern since sponsored curricula and materials bypass US curricular review processes. It is 'naive', they argue, to pretend that teachers have the detailed subject knowledge to act as gatekeepers against the 'biased messages often found in sponsored materials' (p.41) as is the claim that children are somehow immune to advertising because of its ubiquity in modern consumer economies. This later claim, made by some defenders of school advertising, begs the question as to why companies would bother with the expense if children took no notice of marketing in schools. Although the precise effectiveness of school-based marketing from the corporate perspective is notoriously difficult to quantify, as is the success of marketing more generally, customer reach acts to some extent as a proxy. On this measure, the level of school engagement with some of the best known schemes suggests that they are hugely effective and it is clear that companies believe it is something worth doing. Unfortunately, the impact on children of schoolhouse commercialism, as distinct from the success of the marketing from the corporate perspective, is, like the effects of marketing embedded in the media and other cultural forms, unknown.

In the absence of conclusive evidence about the effects of school commercialism on children, it makes sense to talk about potential threats to their wellbeing. Molnar et al (2014, p. 11) defines such 'threats' as activities that 'introduce the possibility of harm to students' and identifies three overlapping types - health, psychological and educational threats. The threats to health from the promotion of sugary drinks and FMNVs are self-evident and have been well-documented. Raine's research (2012) in the UK, for example, demonstrates how commercial activities in schools undermine the principles of health-promoting schools, a finding many might find analogous to the apparent contradictions between the delivery of education for sustainable lifestyles in a branded environment. The inclusion of inaccurate and misleading information in branded educational materials, a finding common in the detailed research in this area, presents an educational threat too. Whatever one's educational philosophy, it is hard to see how providing children with inaccurate information can be anything other than antithetical to the purposes of education. Moreover, the very nature of affective marketing is designed to subvert the rational and critical faculties and is, by almost any definition, anti-educational. Molnar puts it in stark terms arguing that a 'teacher who hands out "supplemental" instructional materials that market candy, personal care products, sports shoes, or soft drinks is manipulating children for the benefit of a special interest and undermining the integrity of the curriculum. (Molnar, 2005, pp. 9 -10). Finally

there are psychological harms. Whatever small benefits might accrue to schools in terms of 'free' resources, school commercialism exposes children to the world of the brand and the subtext that the consumption of corporate-driven 'solutions' provides the answer to most things, including short-funded public services. If Sen, De Graaf et al and other critics of consumer society are correct that the scramble for status through acquisition carries psychological risks, then further exposure to its messages in schools must make it more likely that children will develop materialistic values and the consequent psychological harms outlined above.

## Policy and School Commercialism

The government-commissioned reports on the commercialization of childhood all make great play of the role of the school in preparing children for participation in the marketplace. Byron called for 'better information and education where the role of government, law enforcement, schools and children's services will be key' to promoting e-safety (DCSF/DCMS, 2008, p.6) whilst Papadopoulos (2010, p.14) recommended that primary schools 'make specific reference to the influence of the media on body image and personal identity'. Buckingham (DCSF/ DCMS, 2009, p, 4) expressed concern that 'schools and public spaces are increasingly being used as marketing venues and being affected by privatisation and commercialization' and noted that 'the implications of these developments for children's wellbeing remain to be identified. Bailey's fourteen recommendations were mainly soft policy options rather than legislative regulation, since, in his view, 'there is enough goodwill for this to happen without legislation' (DfE, 2011, p. 3). While stopping short of calling his work a whitewash, Bailey's own employers, the Mothers' Union (2011), criticised its recommendations as weak and called for more stringent government intervention arguing that '[w]e should not be afraid to challenge industry when the welfare of our children, and their future, is at stake'. *Letting Children Be Children* certainly seems to have a blind spot regarding school commercialism. Its author identified the activities of the marketing industry as the principal cause of the commercialization of children and frequently cited schools as key to promoting the media literacy deemed an essential component for the development of well-informed critical citizens. The work also included data on negative parental attitudes towards school commercialism but nowhere is the topic discussed in his analysis despite the acknowledgment that children are 'influenced by their friends and what is popular at school' (ibid., p.57). The option of banning advertising in schools and/or on children's television as happens in Quebec and Norway is dismissed as unworkable in an age of global media and because regulation 'would further disempower parents from taking the responsibility for their children upon themselves' (ibid., p.3). The issue of product placement on television is ignored completely even though the Coalition government was discussing lifting the prohibition on this most surreptitious of marketing techniques at the time Bailey's work was in progress. Ofcom's revised Broadcasting Code, *Commercial References in Television Programming*, now permits product placement in British television in films, television series, sports and light entertainment programmes (Ofcom, s. 9) all of which are accessible to and watched by millions of children. Changes to the rules on product placement provides one good example of how government policy on corporate marketing contradicts its pronouncements, and promises, about the commercialization of children.

Indeed, central government policy on school commercialism is generally characterised by inertia, inaction and the absence of joined-up thinking. Despite having what amounts to a national curriculum for children, trainee teachers and school leaders, the government chooses to leave decisions 'on whether to allow advertising on school premises and whether to invite children to carry home advertising material received in school... with the governing body and headteacher of individual schools' (DfE, 2007). It is not, however, correct to say that the government has entirely washed its hands of the issue. In fact, it co-authored an advisory document, *Commercial activities in schools: best practice principles* (DfES et al, 2006), on the use of the commercial materials with the

Incorporated Society for British Advertisers. Moreover, it also seems that some state-funded bodies include the production of propaganda material targeted at children. The Meat Marketing Board (2015), for example, promotes the 'benefits of eating red meat' whilst The Potato Council (2015) organises Britain's annual National Chip Week. A further policy disjuncture arises from the obligation placed on schools to provide education for sustainable development. Ofsted (2012, p.3) mandates that this should have 'a broad focus, including health, well-being and sustainable communities' and that it should be delivered as part of 'a holistic educational approach' (ibid., p. 4). Again, marketing in the classroom, and policies which facilitate this, clearly fly in the face of this aspiration. In a growth-driven economy, schools are essentially being asked to deliver a curriculum which in many senses might be regarded as counter-cultural.

Perhaps the greatest threat for those concerned about school commercialism comes from the government's marketization agenda. Both the Thatcher and New Labour governments introduced a series of marketization policies, now intensified by the Coalition, which saw 'a redefinition of the boundary between the government and private interests as a semi-permeable one' (Crouch (2003, p. 17). So far has this agenda advanced that 'the private sector is now part of, and doing the work of the state, in several respects' (Ball, 2009, p.92). We have seen a drift towards the privatization of school governance which has meant that the wealthy can now, in effect, buy control of state schools creating what amounts to a 'pedagogy of the possessed' (Wilkinson, 2007b). It is not alarmist, then, to point out that such policies open up the possibility for more deeply embedded strategies to propagandise children in schools for the benefit of corporate interests in the future. The repeated enjoiners for school to work in partnerships with businesses and, in the case of academies and free schools, to hand over governance to private individuals and interests means that those who may wish to commercialise schools are now able to control them. The Dixons Academy in Bradford provides one obvious example where the very name of the institution serves as a marketing tool for its parent company. Indeed, New Labour's lure to business as it attempted to get its specialist schools scheme off the ground was couched in terms of marketing advantages. 'Supporting a specialist school,' they argued, provides innumerable and ongoing opportunities to raise the profile of a particular sponsor' (Specialist Schools and Academies, 2005, quoted in Wilkinson, 2007b). The Labour government again appealed to corporate marketing advantages as it launched its new Academies programme designed to bring business into state sector schooling. 'Companies today are discovering that partnership with schools can help bring real business benefits. They can acquire better market knowledge, tap into local creativity to develop new products, and gain new and more loyal customers' proclaimed its Education Business Links website (DfES, 2006, quoted in Wilkinson, 2007b). The academies programme, originally an attempt to channel resources into disadvantaged areas, has been extended by the Coalition government. In March 2014, there were 3,689 academies open in England (HM Government, 2014a). It is again notable that the government seems to sell the policy to companies in terms of marketing advantages or, to school governors, in terms of freedom from local democratic controls since they are 'publicly funded independent schools that are not managed by a local authority' (HM Government, 2014b). But, as has been outlined above, the corporate world is already alert to the marketing opportunities provided by schools and has its own techniques to tap into school markets.

It is not difficult to see how governments' sustained failure to act on school commercialism, undermines its rhetoric on the commercialization of childhood and education for sustainability. The reach and scope of corporate marketing and propaganda, operating alongside a prevailing economic orthodoxy which prioritises growth in a society in which identity and meaning is sought in the purchase of material objects, poses a serious obstacle to the promotion of sustainable lifestyles. Neither, it might be thought, is it a state of affairs that is likely to 'reverse the commercialization of childhood' since school commercialism adds to 'the din of commercialism' (Consumers Union, 1998, p. 41) providing the backdrop to children's cultures and children's lives. Buckingham (DCSF/ DCMS, 2009, p.153) neatly describes the horns of this modern cultural dilemma when he writes that as 'a

society, we need children to be well-informed, critical consumers (and indeed citizens); but we also need them to be protected in some ways from the operations of the market'. Research is therefore urgently needed into the impact of marketing to children and the role that schools might play in mitigating any negative effects of consumer culture.

Commenting on the proliferation of corporate propaganda, Chomsky (2002) argues that 'citizens of the democratic societies should undertake a course of intellectual self-defence to protect themselves from manipulation and control'. Modern marketing, pushing persuasive messages about both capitalism itself and the products and services it creates, is now embedded within a huge variety of cultural forms whilst the growing economic power of children has extended the reach of the marketplace. The prevalence of school commercialism, and the government's tacit support for it, make it clear that both the advertising industry and the political class in the UK seem to think that the marketplace now encompasses schools. Consequently, branded schools, rather than providing a 'course of intellectual self-defence', end up becoming part of 'the wallpaper of children's lives' (DfE, 2011, pp.20-39) from which many believe they need protection.

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