

"No More Teachers, No More Books" is Heather-jane Robertson's examination of Canadian public education. Regarding which, she says, "we may talk of who has power, but not of who profits; what is illegal, but not what is unjust; and of education to train workers but not of education for itself." She criticizes deals between a fast-food giant and schools of preteens, and between a ministry and a brewery for curriculum on safe drinking. She laments that educational debate is limited to what brand of technology to purchase, not the role of technology in education.

Governments are being advised to replace schools with virtual classrooms. Robertson cites studies showing that virtual classrooms and virtual teachers don't improve a child's learning, but they do retard social skills. Technology manufacturers, not children, benefit from virtual classrooms.

Public education is being attacked by deregulation pundits. The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) says public goods and services, such as education, are governmental monopolies interfering with business freedom. The MAI says governments must let business compete in providing education or compensate for the lost opportunity to profit.

This may not be disturbing if businesses provide an identical service, but corporate values differ from public values. A corporate advocate states, "the emphasis of education for itself or on education for the good of the members of a community without a large emphasis on preparations for the future of work is no longer appropriate." Another point for public debate.

Robertson describes a recent Canadian conference promoting Creative Kid-Targeted Marketing Strategies. There are strategies to tap into the market generated by 4.4 million Canadian kids, to block schools from censoring advertising, and to use school-based programs for corporate promotion. The keynote speaker wrote a book called "Kids as Consumers." He reported that children directly control the spending of huge sums. They indirectly influence their parents spending on everything from breakfast cereal to cars. American children can recognize brand names at twenty-four months and they nag at their parents to buy them something an average of fifteen times per shopping trip.

The classroom is an attractive place to advertise. When kids are in school, they're a captive audience. Corporations distribute free lesson plans. For example, the Dole Food Company supplies lessons on nutrition which improve sales of Dole fruits and vegetables. Snickers provides lessons plans on food and fitness and the National Potato Board and Snack Food Association has a math lesson called "Count Your Chips." Whether you find this offensive or beneficial, Robertson's point is that there has been no debate on whether corporate curriculum is appropriate in the classroom.

Robertson debunks the idea that schools are inadequately preparing graduates for the new economy. She shatters misconceptions and concludes with a historical vignette. In 1910, Canada established a Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education. There had been pressure by industry to reform schools, to simplify the curriculum and to prepare graduates for assembly line work. In 1913, the Commission reported on deteriorating social and economic conditions, factors beyond the control of schools, that were preventing students from benefiting from their education. They said it would be pointless and cruel to use the appetites of industry as an excuse to limit education to training students to command skills that only a few would use. They argued that schools must cultivate character and citizenship and that education encourage critical thought and creativity.

Robertson feels that education for the sake of education and for the good of the community are the only reasons for public education. Kids are exposed to enough advertising already; classrooms must be commercial free.