

Corporate Influence on Children
by Anup Shah

Corporate Influence in Education

The education system in the USA has turned into a hugely profitable business estimated to be worth around \$650 billion. From commercial-filled Channel One which many students must watch, to sponsored and selective educational material, the school system is bombarded by commercialism.

Children as Consumers

"The Journal of the American Medical Association has said that children between the ages of two and seventeen watch an annual average of 15,000 to 18,000 hours of television, compared with 12,000 hours spent per year in school. Children are also major targets for TV advertising, whose impact is greater than usual because there is an apparent lessening of influence by parents and others in the older generation. ... According to the [Committee on Communications of the American Academy of Pediatrics], children under the age of two should not watch television at all because at that age, brain development depends heavily on real human interactions. Nevertheless, \$1 billion a year is spent on ads and commercials directed at children."

— Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, Sixth Edition, (Beacon Press, 2000), p. xxxvi

As well as children being targeted via the education system in the USA, as mentioned above, there is increasing concern at ad campaigns that are increasingly targeting children to be consumers and overly conscious about materialistic things, perhaps even at the expense of human qualities. One of the main reasons for such a fascination in children in this way is because of the potential purchasing power that children have.

"In my practice I see kids becoming incredibly consumerist," said Kanner, who is based at the Wright Institute, a graduate psychology school in Berkeley, Calif. "The most stark example is when I ask them what they want to do when they grow up. They all say they want to make money. When they talk about their friends, they talk about the clothes they wear, the designer labels they wear, not the person's human qualities."

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"In the 1960s, children aged 2 to 14 directly influenced about \$5 billion in parental purchases," McNeal [professor of marketing at Texas A&M University] wrote [in an April 1998 article in *American Demographics*]. "In the mid-1970s, the figure was \$20 billion, and it rose to \$50 billion by 1984. By 1990, kids' direct influence had reached \$132 billion, and in 1997, it may have peaked at around \$188 billion. Estimates show that children's aggregate spending roughly doubled during each decade of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and has tripled so far in the 1990s." — Miriam H. Zoll, *Psychologists Challenge Ethics Of Marketing To Children*, MediaChannel.org