

Producing healthy little consumers in the age of the obesity crisis*

Darren Powell
University of Auckland
d.powell@auckland.ac.nz

* Title borrowed from Michael Gard's (2008) article, 'Producing little decision makers and goal setter in the age of the obesity crisis'

+ Outline

1. A critical ethnography of three primary schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand and 'healthy lifestyles education' programmes
2. 'Healthy lifestyles education' and technologies of consumption
3. Sponsorship
4. Free gifts
5. Product placement
6. Transforming children into marketers
7. Critical corporate resources?
8. Conclusion: A new 'brand' of health and education



+ The research

A critical ethnography of three primary schools:

Dudley School (Year 1-8)

St Saviours' School (Year 1-8)

Reynard Intermediate School (Year 7-8)

A mash-up of methods:

Research conversations (Fitzpatrick, 2013)

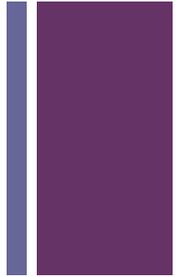
Observations

Documentary evidence

Journaling

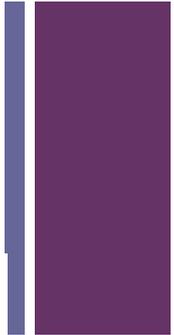


+ Programmes and partners



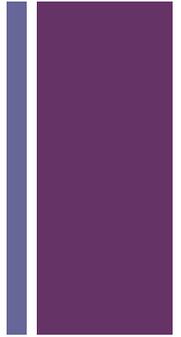
Programme	For-profit organisation	State institution	'Not-for-profit' organisation
<i>5+ A Day</i>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Fresh New Zealand • 5+ A Day Charitable Trust
<i>Fruit in Schools</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5+ A Day Charitable Trust • United Fresh New Zealand
<i>Yummy Apple Sticker Promo</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Yummy Fruit Company • PAK'nSAVE • Turners and Growers • New World • Champs Sports • Wynton Rufer Soccer School of Excellence 		
<i>My Greatest Feat</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McDonald's 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand Olympic Committee

+ Programmes and partners



Programme	• For-profit organisation	State institution	• 'Not-for-profit' organisation
<i>Be Healthy, Be Active</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nestlé New Zealand • Nestlé S.A. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Media Limited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millennium Institute of Sport & Health • NZ Nutrition Foundation
<i>MILO cricket</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nestlé New Zealand 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local cricket club
<i>moveMprove</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport New Zealand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GymSports New Zealand • The Lion Foundation • New Zealand Olympic Committee • Local gymnastics club
<i>Iron Brion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beef + Lamb New Zealand 		
<i>Life Education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just Juice (Frucor) • Macleans (GlaxoSmithKline) • ANZ • The Warehouse • Mainfreight • Konica Minolta • AWG 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life Education Trust • Pub Charity • The Lion Foundation

+ Programmes and partners



Programme	For-profit organisation	State institution	'Not-for-profit' organisation
<i>ActivePost Small Sticks</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ford • Fuji-Xerox 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NZ Post/ ActivePost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hockey New Zealand • New Zealand Community Trust
<i>ASB Football in Schools</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASB • McDonald's • Persil • Volkswagon • Nike 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand Football • Auckland Football Federation
<i>Get Set Go</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HTC Sportsworld 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NZ Post/ ActivePost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletics New Zealand • Physical Education New Zealand • Sport Auckland

+ Technologies of consumption

(Miller & Rose, 1997)

Technologies of consumption are a group of tactics/strategies that have re-fashioned the educational sphere, extending the market place into schools and attempting to re-shape children as 'healthy little consumers'.

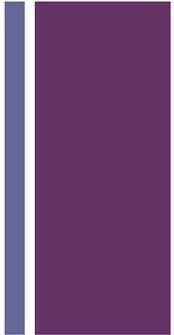
These are technologies that align educational resources and pedagogies with the goals of neoliberalism (i.e. to shift educational decision making to the private sector), corporations (i.e. to profit), and charities (i.e. to survive).

What are these technologies?

How are these technologies deployed by corporations? And why?

How are they used to to develop children who are lifelong consumers of the corporate brand image and their allegedly 'healthy' corporate products.

+ Product placement (or 'brand integration')



+ 'A message from Just Juice': Product placement in educational resources

Product placement was one technology of consumption that endeavoured to connect branded and unbranded objects with children's understanding of health and self.

Corporations and their 'not-for-profit' partners used the healthy lifestyles education programmes to market their corporate brand and corporate products directly to students.



+ Life Education

National Sponsors



A message from Just Juice – did you know...

That one glass (250ml) of fruit juice counts for one of your daily fruit servings for everyone over 5 years.

This information sheet has been produced with the kind support of one of our national sponsors, Just Juice. (Life Education Trust, n.d., p. 1)

+ *Be Healthy, Be Active* resource

(Nestlé New Zealand, 2011)

Healthy Kids Global Programme: “NO product branding”
(Nestlé, 2014).

“The content of the programme is not commercial in nature”
(Nestlé New Zealand, 2011, Foreword)



+ *Be Healthy, Be Active* – Snack time

‘Sensational Smoothies’: banana-chocolate smoothie made with MILO.

‘Muffin Magic’ includes Milk Melts – a Nestlé brand of cooking chocolate.

‘Mighty Muesli Bars’ - made with Nestlé’s Sweetened Condensed Milk.

‘Super Noodles’ are to be made with Maggi ‘2 Minute noodles – chicken flavour’.



<https://www.behealthybeactive.co.nz/food-plate/>

+‘Generic’ products: Beef & lamb

(New Zealand Beef and Lamb Marketing Bureau, n.d.)

Lesson 3: “Identify the main sources of iron in their weekly food plan” (p. 19)

Lesson 4: “Students choose a beef or lamb product to promote to their class members and design a package and label for this product” (p. 21)

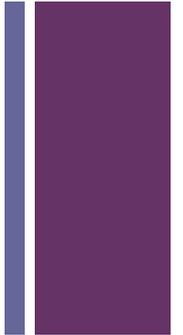
Lesson 5: “Prepare and produce advertising material to develop an awareness of the importance of zinc, iron and protein in our eating plans” (p. 22)

Lesson 7: “Gather a range of recipes that use beef and lamb (see www.recipes.co.nz)” (p. 25)

Lesson 10: “Discuss how beef and lamb is kept at home” (p. 30)



+ The problem with product placement

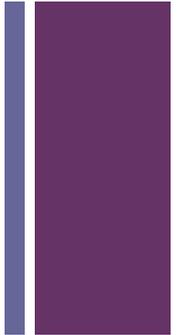


What is meant to be an *educational* endeavour is transformed into one that represents the *commercial* interests of private sector players and partners (and government).

Product placement is used by the private sector (with the assistance of ‘not-for-profits’) to form relationships between *objects* of consumption and the *subjects* of consumption: children (see Rose, 1999).

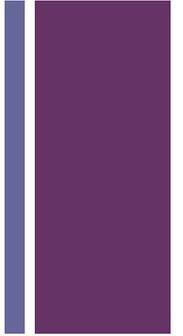
Product placement is a stealthy marketing strategy, one that joins with other technologies of consumption in an attempt to align children’s desires to make healthy ‘choices’ with the desire of for-profit players to shape children to be consumers of their ‘healthy’ products.

+ Transforming children into marketers





Transforming children into marketers



5+ A Day programme - ‘Bright ideas: marketing and advertising fresh fruit and vegetables’ (see *5+ A Day Charitable Trust, 2011*), aimed to raise “awareness, critical thinking and action” about food marketing by providing opportunities for children “to create their own advertising and marketing campaigns to promote fresh fruit and vegetables to their friends and families” (p. 4).

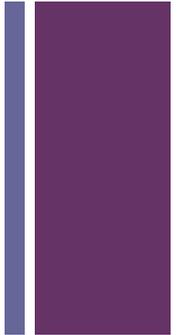
+ *‘Bright ideas: marketing and advertising fresh fruit and vegetables’* (5+ A Day Charitable Trust, 2011)

“plan for and implement advertising strategies to encourage a greater consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables” (p. 2)

“Tell children that they have a very important job to do. They have to help 5+ A Day promote fresh fruit and vegetables to other children and their family” (p. 6).

One of the activities instructs children to:

“draw a picture and write a message that promotes the eating of fruit and vegetables. (Designs could be laminated and posted around the school, or copied and placed into the school newsletter, or used as a school fundraiser, source and print aprons and tea towels and sell to school community)” (p. 6)



+ Transforming children as marketers: Technologies of consumption

1. They reinforce the idea that in order to be healthy, children need to *increase their consumption* of fruit and vegetables to *at least* five servings a day.
2. They reinforce the 5+ A Day logo/slogan/brand/message as a public health imperative, a 'truth' about health that has been shaped by private sector interests.
3. Even though this resource states that it encourages children to **think critically** about marketing, health and consumption, by turning children into marketers, the food industry attempts to 'teach' children to be **uncritical** of marketing strategies that saturate public and private spaces.

+ Sponsorship: ‘Promoting your products to consumers’

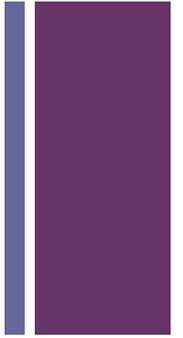
Sponsorship also used to connect notions of education and health with corporate products:

“Members can link with the 5+ A Day Charitable Trust’s high-impact promotional activity to *raise the consumption of their products* and fresh fruit and vegetables in New Zealand.

The [5+ A Day] Trust is a respected provider of practical and fun classroom concepts that encourage children to learn about and eat, fresh fruit and vegetables every day. *Promoting your products to consumers through education, social media, public relations, television, advertising, marketing and sponsorship*” (United Fresh, 2014a, p. 3).



Sponsorship as a cause of tension



Darren: Why do you think McDonald's would be wanting people to measure their steps?

Eton: To try and encourage people that McDonald's is helping people get fit.

Brian: (Laughs)

James: But it's not really – look at me! (James points to his own stomach)

Brian: [People] have McDonald's, keep fit and then exercise a day later.

Eton: They try to encourage them to go to McDonald's.

Darren: What do you think the ultimate goal for McDonald's is in doing these programmes in schools?

Eton: Profit?

James: To see who has the most shops.

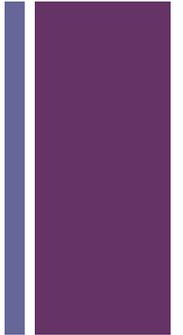
Darren: So you think it's like a competitive thing, so against-

James: They're fighting against like Wendy's, Burger King, Subway.



Sponsorship speech

(Helen, Year Seven, Dudley School)



I would just like to say mcdonalds shouldn't sponsor events as

- It gives kids the wrong source of energy to play sports on.
- It will give us kids health problems in the future that can effect our life badly.
- And it will effect our every day life by being 1 of the millions of people being obese
- So now why don't we all say no to mcdonalds sponcering our sports evetns because we like to live a healthy life!!

+ The point of sponsorship?

Mary, a Year Six at St Saviour's School, believed that the involvement of 'pokies trusts' in school activities was "to raise money" for the gaming industry.

I asked Leroy and Sam, Year Seven students at Reynard Intermediate School, for a reason why McDonald's sponsored *My Greatest Feat* to which they succinctly replied:

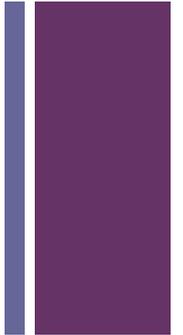
Leroy: Money.

Sam: Money – fast money.

When I asked Helen and Nicole, Year Six girls at Dudley School, why McDonald's and their *My Greatest Feat* programme wanted children to be more active, they replied:

Helen: Make them [children] eat more.

Nicole: For McD's [McDonald's] to be more popular.



+ Sponsorship: Profit and PR

Year Six boys from St Saviour's - DJ, Mark, Hone, Carlos and Afakasi:
'Why would a company like Beef + Lamb New Zealand want to create a character like Iron Brion and bring him to your school?':

DJ: So that we know what food to put where in the food chart [pyramid] to eat and also **keep us healthy** at the same time.

Darren: Why do you think that a company would want you to be healthy or keep healthy?

DJ: To be strong.

Mark: To stay fit and **stay healthy**.

Hone: **Because they care about us**.

Carlos: So we can **live a longer life and** buy more of their products.

Darren: So you think part of it is-

Afakasi: -to get **more money**.

DJ: Yeah, to get **more money!**

Darren: How do you think they get more money from doing these sort of programmes?

Afakasi: They put a **vivid image in children's heads** so they can go home and **tell their parents about the company**.

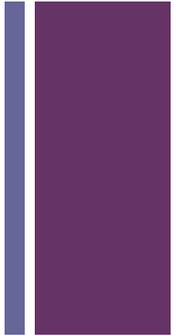
+

‘I want the free hamburgers!’: The ‘gift’ of food and other ‘healthy’ products



+ 'I want the free hamburgers!':

The 'gift' of food and other 'healthy' products



During a number of lessons and 'edutainment' events, students received free (often branded) gifts that were provided by the corporate sponsors.charity partners:

Life Education

Iron Brion

MILO cricket

My Greatest Feat

Yummy Apple

Life Education

Year Seven at Reynard Intermediate School: [Just Juice](#)

St Saviour's School: [Hamburgers](#)

Year Seven/Eight at Dudley School: [MILO](#)

Dudley School: [McDonald's branded hats, hackey-sacks, balls + pedometers](#)

[Sports equipment](#)

Year One/Two at Dudley School: [Macleans gift bag](#)

+ *Life Education* and the Macleans gift bag

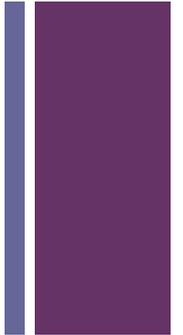


Life Education teacher Marion: “I’m not promoting the bag and what’s in the bag itself” - was focused on teaching the children about advertiser’s ‘tricks’”.

“I’m doing a unit [on] making choices at the moment, using advertising. So we get to create an ad so that we can look at the tricks and trades of advertising and what they do. And we have Macleans toothpaste and we have the other products, so it’s a good opportunity to get the sponsor’s product in without actually having to go out of my way to promote it.”

Giving free branded gifts to children was rationalised as “part of the promotion – that’s what pays us. And I’m happy to do it if we can work it in and it’s not too much of a stretch.”

+ Incentive schemes and consumer-oriented philanthropy:



Yummy Apples School Sticker Promo

“The more [stickers] you collect, the more sports gear you get so get going and start collecting” (The Yummy Fruit Company, n.d., para. 1).

Wynton Rufer: *“I couldn't think of a better way to be encouraging our kids to be actively healthier Kiwis. Eating Yummy apples and getting free sports gear in return is an awesome campaign to be proactively supporting”* (The Yummy Fruit Company, n.d.).

+ Free hamburgers ... for educational purposes?

I asked DJ, Mark, Hone, Carlos and Afakasi “would you want Iron Brion to come back?” to St Saviour’s School, all five students responded with a resounding “Yes!”. However, when I asked “Why?”, they responded:

Afakasi: I want the free hamburgers!

Darren: And would you want [Iron Brion] to do the same sort of talk in the hall?

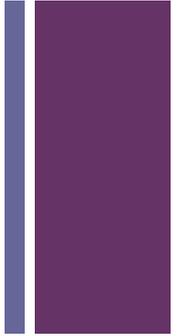
Mark: Just the free burgers.

Hone: We already know what he’s going to say.





‘Critical’ corporate resources?

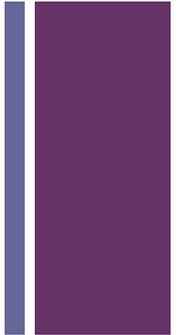


5+ A Day resource ‘Bright ideas: Marketing and advertising fresh fruit and vegetables’ (5+ A Day Charitable Trust, 2011, p. 4) promotes “awareness, critical thinking and action” about food marketing by providing “opportunities for children to critically analyse advertisements”.

“Examine how food advertisements affect our attitudes toward and choices of different foods” (p. 2), suggests a number of activities for students to learn how advertisers used logos, mascots and cartoon characters to increase consumption.



'Critical' corporate resources?

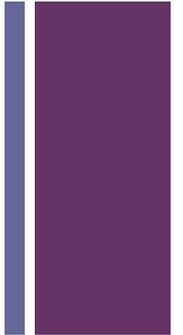


Life Education's 'Warrant of Fitness' workbook (Life Education Trust, n.d.-a, p. 13)

'Advertising is everywhere' activity: teach children the differences between two food pyramids: one that represents "diet as recommended by doctors and dieticians" (a 'healthy' food pyramid); and the other which demonstrates "diet as shown by amount of advertising".

Students are instructed as follows: "Think about the types of food we see advertised, are they the sorts of food that would make up a recommended diet? Not really but advertising must work, after all the companies wouldn't pay the big money that they do if it wasn't going to help to sell more of their product now would they? And where do we see this advertising ... not only TV [but also] sponsorship ... So we need to think carefully about what we are seeing and believing" (Life Education Trust, n.d.-a, p. 13).

+ Pedagogies of silence

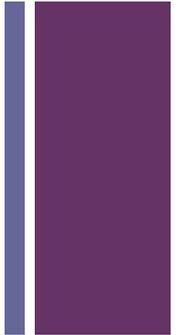


Life Education teacher Marion explained to me that the point of the lesson was to “look at how people get tricked into buying junk food, what the advertisers want us to see, want us to buy, why they want, and that it’s just money”.

Neither Marion or the classroom teachers asked the students why Frucor, was wanting to teach New Zealand children about healthy choices.

Marion, classroom teachers, the resource writers, the advisor (Frucor nutritionist Jenny Yee) did not encourage students to discuss how Frucor profits from sponsoring *Life Education*, or critique how placing Just Juice and H2Go products in students’ workbooks and newsletters was a form of corporate ‘trickery’.

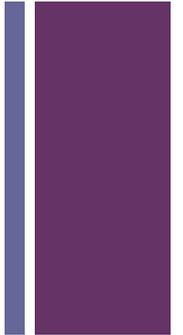
+ ‘Critical HPE’ or ‘pedagogies for consumption’?



5+ A Day claims that its resource will teach children how to be critical of the influence of marketing on their “attitudes toward and choices of different foods” (5+ A Day Charitable Trust, 2011, p. 2).

At the same time, however, the *5+ A Day* programme employs a number of pedagogical strategies “to help children develop health enhancing attitudes to fruit/vegetables ... to promote fresh fruit and vegetables to their friends and families ... and help make 5+ A Day a way of life for children and their families” (p. 3-4).

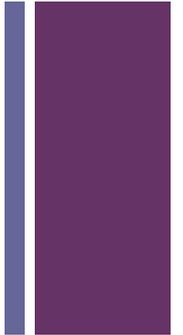
+ Producing (un)critical, (un)healthy little consumers?



By using technologies of consumption – free gifts, product placement, children as marketers, sponsorship - the private sector **attempted** to mobilise children to consume corporate products and their brand image, and at the same time normalise the commercialisation of education.



Teachers as uncritical consumers?



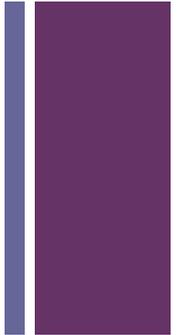
Mrs Donna dismissed the intent of sponsorship, believing that “they’re not using it as advertising to the kids”.

Mr Woodward stated that profit was not the “prime purpose” of the programmes he allowed into his school and believed to be of value to his students, such as McDonald’s *My Greatest Feat*, *Life Education*, and the *Yummy Apples Sticker Promotion*.

Mr Spurlock admitted he had “not noticed” the Just Juice and H2Go marketing in the ‘Warrant of Fitness’ workbook he asked his students to complete.

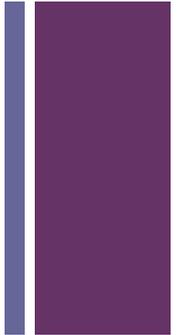
A success of the corporate marketing strategies was that it was not seen as marketing at all.

- Darren:** What sort of water was it?
- Brian:** Yeah, it was H2Go-
- Eton:** -but in our books, instead of like, putting just there a bottle of water ... in the food pyramid ... it would be like, all the healthy stuff, and **at the bottom would be like, bottles of H2Go.**
- Darren:** Was that a food pyramid in your workbook or in the van?
- Eton:** In our workbook-
- Brian:** -**and on the van**, like inside.
- Darren:** Why do you think they chose Just Juice, not just orange juice?
- Eton:** Because Just Juice sponsored them and like, **they deserve [it]**. Just Juice would be like, 'if we sponsor you, you have to put us in your books', so **it's like**, advertising at the same time to all the kids that they go to.
- Darren:** And what do you think about being advertised to in school **books and things like that?**
- Eton:** **I think it's kind of dumb, because we're there to do our school work.**
- Darren:** What was the point of talking about advertising and making up your own ads?
- Eton:** I'm not sure, I reckon it was just another fun game.
- Brian:** I think **there might've been a point behind it**, but I don't think she got round to telling us.



+ Conclusions

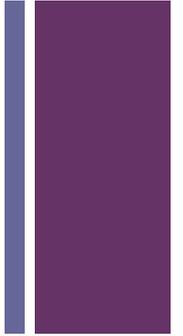
- The use of technologies of consumption in educational resources/programmes is not benign, unproblematic or a 'win-win' for all.
- Corporations use schools to reproduce the idea that for children to be healthy they need to choose certain products from “generous”, “caring”, ‘healthy’ corporations.
- Corporations ‘taught’ children about the ‘tricks’ of advertisers, yet at the same time exposed the children to a range of stealthy marketing tactics, such as product placement, sponsorship, and free gifts.



+ Conclusions

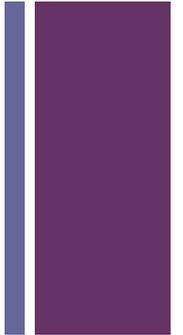
The organisations who developed and implemented these programmes in primary schools, in particular those with profit-seeking motives, have a vested interest in shaping children into becoming and being a certain type of 'healthy' consumer.

Healthy lifestyles education programmes have become not only an important 'part of the solution' to childhood obesity, but a critical element of the overall strategy to ensure that the endeavours of corporations, charities, governments and schools to produce healthy, self-responsible, compliant and uncritical 'little consumers' are successful.



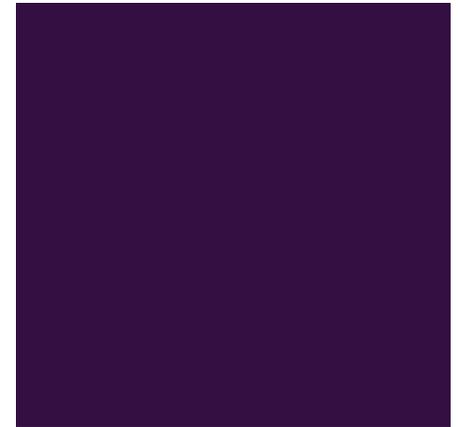


Conclusions



Corporations and industry groups (as well as their charitable partners) are unlikely to encourage children to critically examine or take critical, collective action against business strategies that attempt to shape children's choices, lifestyles, education or lives.

But what is our role as teachers/educators/researchers?



Producing healthy little consumers in the age of the obesity crisis*

Darren Powell
University of Auckland
d.powell@auckland.ac.nz

* Title borrowed from Michael Gard's (2008) article, 'Producing little decision makers and goal setter in the age of the obesity crisis'