

## “No Strings Attached”?: Corporate Involvement in Curriculum

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In this article, I provide a critical feminist analysis of my experience in a public-private partnership of university, government, and industry in New Brunswick. The project served the economic interests of the partners, supported neo-liberal discourses framing the restructuring of public services in the province, and shaped and were shaped by dominant social relations of gender, race, and class. Although the intent of the partnership was to benefit students in the public school system, my analysis points to benefits for the project partners and larger economic, social, and political interests.

Keywords: corporate partnerships, health education, alcohol education, gender

Dans cet article, je propose une analyse critique féministe de mon expérience au sein d'un partenariat public-privé réunissant le monde universitaire, le gouvernement et des gens d'affaires au Nouveau-Brunswick. Le projet servait les intérêts économiques des partenaires, souscrivait aux discours néolibéraux à l'origine de la restructuration des services publics dans la province et façonnait les relations sociales dominantes de genre, d'ethnicité et de classe sociale tout en étant façonnées par elles. Même si le partenariat visait à aider les élèves du système d'enseignement public, mon analyse met en évidence les avantages du projet pour les partenaires ainsi que les intérêts économiques, sociaux et politiques en jeu.

Mots clés : éducation en matière de santé, éducation sur l'alcool, partenariats du gouvernement en matière d'éducation, genre

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In the last decade, scholars working from a range of critical perspectives have contributed to international conversations about the marketization of public education (Harrison & Kachur, 1999; Kenway, 1995; Marginson, 1997; Robertson, 1998a; Whitty, 1997). Feminist scholars (David, 1996; Dehli, 1996; Hey, 1996; Kenway & Epstein, 1996) have argued that much of the work on marketization lacks a gender analysis. Dehli (1996) said “feminist inquiry into marketisation requires both global vision and attention to geo-politically and historically specific events, relations and individuals” (p. 364). Hey (1996) argued that a gender, race, and class analysis broadens understanding of market forces in education,

strengthens the critique, and adds credibility to this work.

In this article I draw on my experience as a feminist academic in a faculty of education in New Brunswick working with a particular form of marketisation — a public/private partnership in health education involving government, university, and industry. My intent is to make visible how processes of commodification, corporatism, and globalization worked through the partnership and their gendered, classed, and racialized effects. I argue that the partnership served the economic interests of the project partners and supported neo-liberal ideas that are moving the province toward the privatization of public services. Although the intent of the partnership was to benefit young people, it served larger economic, social, and political purposes.

In analyzing how the partnership worked to support neo-liberal ideologies across market and state, I have not singled out public service administrators. Although government representatives are “not simply neutral conduits for policy pressures” (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997, p. 31), they are expected to implement decisions made in the premier’s office. University administrators, too, implement decisions that presidents and boards of governors make with corporate bodies. Although I eventually withdrew from this partnership, I do not separate myself from corporatist values: my own desire for research funding drew me to the project.

My work, situated in “feminist case study research” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 164), draws on traditional case study methods (Ragin & Becker, 1992), while insisting on attention to the experiences of women typically lacking in male-dominant research. As Reinharz (1992) stated, a feminist approach to case study research furthers knowledge by helping “social researchers see the relation between gender and power in all social settings” (p. 169). Feminist research also typically challenges methodological assumptions of detached objectivity and “frequently takes the form of ‘starting research with one’s own experience,’ particularly when the study concerns a disturbing experience” (p. 259). I was deeply involved in this case; it is my account of what happened to me, for me, a disturbing experience.

To present the case study I distinguish what took place from what happened.<sup>1</sup> To distinguish between a set of events and what happened as a result of these events is to bear in mind, as Mead (1997) said, that “not all the past is recoverable; not all the reasons behind events can be excavated” (p. 41). In the spirit of feminist research, I first present my account of what took place.

## WHAT TOOK PLACE

In 1997, at the request of the New Brunswick Department of Education, I participated in the development of an educational resource on alcohol for the province's schools. The Brewers Association of Canada (BAC; industry) provided the funding<sup>2</sup> and the resource was to be developed in partnership with the department and two provincial universities (anglophone and francophone). The provincial department of health, the provincial telephone corporation, and a local multimedia company were also represented. The industry hired a private consultant to administer the project. The then-dean of my faculty was project manager. I was asked to write the anglophone resource. Apart from the project administrator, I was the only woman member of the team — a point to which I will return.

The resource was to be web-based, designed for 13- to 14-year-old students, pilot tested in local schools, and subjected to a formal evaluation before release. The industry claimed that it would take a "no-strings attached" position: content decisions would be made by the team. But, consistent with its other public relations programs,<sup>3</sup> the industry determined that the resource would take a responsible drinking approach. In keeping with this approach, the industry argued that young people do drink and providing technical information about alcohol (e.g., the physical effects of alcohol) should help them make responsible decisions about alcohol use. The industry also stipulated the harms to be addressed (e.g., drinking and driving), but excluded others, namely alcoholism, fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol use in combination with other drugs, and issues for specific groups. It also excluded information about how alcohol works socially, economically, politically, and globally.

In team meetings and in the detailed reports I submitted monthly to the industry, I expressed my concern about the industry's responsible drinking approach. I argued that alcohol use is not simply a matter of drinking responsibly because individuals are not equally positioned in terms of choice. I offered what I considered to be a more pedagogically appropriate model: to have students engage in critical thought about alcohol use (Forbes, 1994; Fox, 1994). I stressed that the resource should illuminate the social, economic, cultural, and political issues that impact decisions about drinking. I also stated that responsible drinking approaches fail to capture the harm caused by alcohol use, and teaching 13- to 14-year-olds about responsible drinking could implicate them in underage drinking (Boyd, 1991; Massing, 1998). The project administrator said all this was mere "wordsmithing." I also spoke about the importance of

accompanying professional development for teachers. The president and chief executive officer (CEO) said that this was something the industry did not believe in. Other members of the team contributed little to the discussions, lending legitimacy to the industry's position.

At a team meeting held four months into the partnership, citing a shortage of funds, the project administrator announced that I would no longer be a writer for the project. This move effectively excluded me from further direct involvement in framing the resource. Following this announcement, I resigned from the project. It went ahead. The industry hired two male private consultants to write the text. According to the industry (BAC, 2002a) the completed resource, entitled *Your Life: Your Choice!*, has been "successfully introduced as a teaching tool in New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Alberta . . . hosted by SchoolNet, a federally funded initiative linking schools to the Internet" (p. 3).<sup>4</sup> Although *Your Life: Your Choice!* does not use the language of responsible drinking (perhaps as a result of my critique), its content reflects a similar framework. Indeed, the industry (BAC, 1998b) promoted the resource as a "responsible drinking . . . project" (p. 1), and as "another building block in the extensive responsible drinking programs sponsored by the brewing industry" (BAC, 2000b, p. 1).

At the same time, when speaking about its partnership programmes, the industry (BAC, 1998a) claims a "no strings attached" (p. 1) position: "[The partners] call the shots . . . you cannot impose some kind of agenda on dedicated professionals, nor would you want to" (p. 1). In describing the New Brunswick project, the industry (BAC, 2000c) said, "it had no involvement in developing the website's content" (p. 2) and the industry's director of public affairs reportedly said that the industry took a "completely hands-off approach . . . we did not interfere in the content in any way" (White, 2000, p. A3). Although I do not presume to know what happened once I left the team, my experience at the time suggests otherwise.

#### WHAT HAPPENED

In analyzing what happened, I refuse to accept the view that the partnership was solely about the development of an educational resource, or as an isolated event that happened to a group of people in New Brunswick. I view the partnership as symbolic of a larger shift toward a market-led system in public services in the province, with economic, cultural, social, and political implications, and with connections to broader forces of

globalization. The literature on commodification, corporatism, and globalization is especially helpful in analysing how the partnership furthered a neo-liberal economic agenda. Understanding what happened also means attending to the gendered, classed, and racialized effects of these processes and how this, in turn, contributes to the shaping of provincial economic and social reforms. To show how the events of the project supported these forces, I first need to say more about the context.

### *Re-forming New Brunswick*

In the last decade, New Brunswick has moved ahead with a neo-liberal economic agenda for health, social services, and education. In public education the province has eliminated school boards, downsized its curriculum development branch, downloaded management responsibilities onto individual schools and increased its emphasis on standardized testing. Because health education has not historically been given priority, the government's current interest in this area has created a space for private groups that want access to youth and schools. Furthermore, the province has attempted to deregulate the teaching profession through cutbacks and contract hiring, and charter schools are gaining a foothold in the province (New Brunswick Teachers' Association, 1998). In higher education, cuts in transfer payments to the provinces have forced universities to seek corporate sponsorship for programs, facilities, and research endeavours (Tudiver, 1999; Turk, 2000). New Brunswick is especially disadvantaged because of its smaller resource base and the inequitable distribution of federal research funds across the country (McLaughlin, 2002).

### *The Industry*

The industry is in a contradictory position: it wants to increase sales and to be seen to be doing something about the harmful effects of alcohol use. It works to achieve both, simultaneously, by various strategies. For example, in its annual reports, newsletters, promotional materials, and website<sup>5</sup> the industry constructs alcohol consumption as a part of everyday life. It uses the language of responsible drinking, responsible consumption, and drinking in moderation, and depicts beer drinkers as people who have fun, cook with beer, participate in sports, support Canada's economy, and care about the environment. In contrast, it demonizes "hard core

drinking drivers," that "small but dangerous group" who "drink excessively" and "access our roads" (BAC, 2001, p. 4). The social drinker is thus positioned against the problem drinker, as if one has nothing to do with the other.

Further contradictions abound. The industry deliberately aims its lifestyle advertising at youth (Boyd, 1991, p. 170), while demonizing young people who drink too much. It funds alcohol research and announces correlations between alcohol consumption and the prevention of cardiovascular disease, cancer, and osteoporosis while ignoring liver disease and addiction (e.g., BAC, 2002b, 2003). Although the industry expresses concern about drinking and driving and fetal alcohol syndrome, it endorses new product lines, such as beer that "packs a 16-proof punch" (BAC, 1998c, p. 4), and slim bottles designed to make beer "more appealing to women" (BAC, 1999, p. 4). Also evident is the industry's concern about tax rates on beer and restrictive trade agreements — a goal often hidden from public view but, according to Boyd (1991), very much a part of corporate government negotiations.

The industry's efforts to promote itself as a corporation that cares about the societal effects of alcohol deserve closer scrutiny than space here allows. A brief glimpse at an industry publication *Quiet Victories: Community Partnerships and Responsible Drinking Initiatives* (BAC, 2001) may suffice. Here the industry invites the reader to "settle back in a comfortable arm chair and pour yourself a tall, cool glass of Canadian-made beer" while reading about its efforts to promote "responsible drinking" (cover page). (There are obviously huge assumptions made here about the reader.) The industry's activities include an alcohol and substance abuse help-line for pregnant and nursing women (pictures of supposedly pregnant women with their smiling male partners and children prevail), presented as if the industry is not implicated in promoting alcohol sales to women who are or who may be pregnant. The publication extols the virtue of *Caring Together*, a board game for students developed in conjunction with the Native Physicians Association of Canada. The historical role of the alcohol industry in the destruction of Aboriginal communities is diminished to a game for the industry's purposes. The industry lauds itself for its "Fresh Heads" program for university students; what it doesn't mention is the industry's steadfast promotion of alcohol in university communities (Blaney, 2001). *Quiet Victories* ends with "Until next time — cheers! And please . . . drink responsibly" (p. 12). Such double entendres are typical of the industry's many deeply contradictory practices.<sup>6</sup> As Massing (1998) said, "The alcohol lobby is among the richest, savviest and best connected. And it has learned an important lesson from the tobacco wars" (p. 36).

*Commodification*

Commodification, as defined by Fairclough (cited in Sosteric, Gismondi & Ratkovic, 1998), is a process whereby "social domains and institutions . . . [come] . . . to be organized and conceptualized in terms of commodity production, distribution and consumption" (p. 6). In the New Brunswick project, the industry made decisions about what counted as knowledge in the resource by determining the content, pedagogical approach, and method of delivery. The industry, in effect, turned knowledge into profit through the normalization of drinking — what Klein (2000) named as "branding" (p. 16) a particular lifestyle.

Whether or not the educational resource is pedagogically sound is immaterial. Experts have legitimated a responsible drinking approach that implies that once a person masters the skill of drinking (e.g., under the legal limit; without getting drunk) all other problems associated with alcohol use will be eradicated. In a critique of the dominance of such technical rationality in educational documentaries, Ellsworth (1993) wrote, "Because the problem is 'solved' there is no need or room for consideration of social, ideological, historical, and economic 'causes', which would require social changes that go beyond simply educating people out of their misunderstandings or ignorance" (p. 208). Despite the industry's stated preventive intent, an unproblematic picture of regular consumption aimed at young people prevails (Massing, 1998).

The discourses and ideologies evident in the partnership fit well with the market discourses and neo-liberal ideologies shaping the restructuring of public services in New Brunswick. The industry's responsible drinker/problem drinker binary supports other neo-liberal discourses, such as those that demonize single mothers, families living in poverty conditions, and people unemployed. A responsible drinking approach also supports blame-the-victim discourses that are needed to sustain a privatized health and social services agenda (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1998). Demonizing discourses about young people (Males, 1996) fit well with education discourses about meritocracy and school choice. Furthermore, since corporate sponsorship appears to be important to the survival of higher education, it is not surprising that the university supported the industry in gaining access to researchers to legitimate its practice.

*Corporatism*

The partnership embraced the following aspects of corporatism identified by Harrison and Kachur (1999): relations of dominance and subordination,

authoritarianism, and anti-democratic values, where “the state becomes the facilitator of policies, and ‘stakeholder’ consultations displace the legislative process” (p. 74). Indeed, there was increased surveillance and control of my work through numerous work-plan checks, conference calls, and face-to-face meetings with the industry. The CEO almost always attended the meetings and the project administrator deferred to him. When the CEO was absent, or out of the room, the administrator frequently reminded us to “please” him and “not to make him angry.” The industry controlled knowledge by making decisions a priori, suppressing intellectual debate, and by dismissing me (literally) when I spoke out. Moreover, discussions between the industry, university, government, and business were held behind closed doors. Newson (2000) argued that such secrecy is typical when conditions are attached to corporate donations. I was merely a commodity producer; students were positioned as consumers.

Corporatism also includes the redirection of academic research and teaching to suit a corporate agenda (Axelrod, 2000). In this project, the industry did not support my proposal to interview teachers about their pedagogical experiences with alcohol education, or even to find out their resource needs. Nor was it interested in community-based approaches to alcohol education already in place in the province. Moreover, they appeared unconcerned about how teachers would deal with the pedagogical and legal issues that would no doubt arise in their classrooms and with parents. Department officials also appeared uninterested in pursuing these questions. Again, the other team members were either compliant in their silence, or as a team member once said to the CEO, “Just tell us what you want and we will do it,” leaving me to argue my case alone.

It was no doubt strategic for the department to distance itself from the project. If the resource were not implemented in schools because of parental concerns, the department could wipe its hands of the resource and the industry would still have its product: a resource that is now legitimated by academics and health professionals. It is no coincidence that the industry did not make any promises about professional development for teachers. What teachers actually do with the resource is inconsequential. Furthermore, the exclusion of teachers, other than the seven teachers involved in the field test (Hughes, 2000), contributed to what Robertson (1994) described as a discourse that constructs a “crisis of confidence in teachers” (p. 119), which fits with teacher blaming discourses so prevalent in the province and attempts to undermine the power of the unions — a prerequisite for the province’s education, health, and social services agenda.

*Globalization*

The project supported competitive individualism, rampant consumerism, and a shifting of state powers to multinational and transnational corporations — all of which fit with the forces associated with globalization (Harrison & Kachur, 1999). Although the industry initially said the resource was intended for New Brunswick youth, it wanted to implement the resource globally on the Internet. Indeed, the industry said that its interest in New Brunswick had something to do with former premier Frank McKenna's promise of access to advanced communications technology. A global approach is certainly consistent with the industry's concern about declining beer sales in the West and the launch of new products in the East and South. As Kenway, Bigum, and Fitzclarence (1995) stated, "New technologies interact with economic matters to help facilitate transnational enterprises" (p. 43).

The global marketing of the idea of responsible drinking and the ideologies it sustains no doubt has unlimited marketing potential. These ideas start at home: nationalist images and discourses in the brewing industry abound. The partnership was no exception. I expect that most team members remember our first "nutrition break," when the industry wheeled in a parade-style float of beer with a "12-pack" for each of us to take home and a banner that read "Celebrate Canada Day on Our Patio." This incident was a symbolic beginning to the partnership; it should have been a wake-up call.

The industry's decision to design a web-based resource was no doubt strategic. Klein (2000) wrote about the power of the web "to blur the line between editorial and advertising much more aggressively than . . . in the non-virtual world" (p. 42). She gave numerous examples of "the branding-content integration taking place on the Net" (p. 42), including the activities of the breweries. Although Klein did not mention the breweries' educational programs as a source of global branding, as I am arguing here, she did say that "corporations are experimenting with the much-coveted role of being 'content providers'" (p. 43). Decisions about freer trade and the deregulation of the global marketplace, of course, further enable the global marketing of the idea of responsible drinking.

The global branding of beer drinking as a lifestyle also requires a global teen market — "the creation of a new generation of consumers" (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 97) that is difficult to reach because of Internet controls, restrictions on television advertising, and laws that restrict the sale of certain products to teens. But first the idea itself has to be marketed.

Klein (2000) wrote,

What most global ad campaigns are still selling is the *idea* of the global teen market — a kaleidoscope of multiethnic faces blending into one another . . . . Nationality, language, ethnicity, religion and politics are all reduced to their most colorful, exotic accessories, converging to assure us . . . there is never an ‘us and them,’ but simply one giant ‘we’. (p. 120)

Certainly, the multiethnic appearance of the completed resource fits this critique.

In the New Brunswick project the discursive practices of government, university, and industry came together in mutually sustaining ways. The province’s economic policies in education, health, and social services depend on ideologies of individualism becoming part of taken-for-granted, common sense knowledge. The partnership worked as a vehicle for these values, which in turn supported the industry’s discourses about alcohol use as a matter of individual choice. The university facilitated the process, and team members, including me, complied.

#### *Gendered, Classed, and Racialized Effects*

In the New Brunswick project, the language of partnership masked systemic practices of sexism, racism, and class violence. Gender issues around alcohol and issues for specific individuals and groups (Adrian, Lundy, & Eliany, 1996; Connell, 1995; Hacker, Collins, & Jacobson, 1987) are well documented, but the industry’s pedagogical approach denied students access to this knowledge. Furthermore, feminist researchers have long critiqued gender-blind pedagogical approaches as detrimental to women. Such an approach to alcohol education assimilates everyone to male experience, reinforcing male dominance, and drawing attention away from larger social forces that support young women’s use of substances. As Walkerdine (1990) said, denial of gender is “punitive and harmful. . . . [It] means that the girl must bear the anxiety [of alcohol use] herself. It is simply not spoken” (p. 46). Epstein and Johnson (1998) stated that “processes of remembering and recognizing are important because they affect the powers of different groups to define themselves and become active, collectively” (p. 19). These processes shape individual identity and connect to the social politics of the state and to the material conditions of daily life.

Reay’s (1998) work on middle-class consumerism is also helpful in teasing out problems with individualistic approaches to alcohol education. Reay said, “Market discourses that assert freedom of choice for all . . . act

in the interests of the privileged in society by denying their social advantage" (p. 261). She said by masking class interests market discourses privilege middle-class students who "are always the groups most inclined to engage with the market and the best skilled and resourced to exploit it to their advantage" (p. 262). I would make a similar argument regarding all youth who experience discrimination and exploitation daily, such as students with disabilities, Black students, and Aboriginal students.

Moreover, as Yvonne Brown, scholar of African diaspora and racial discrimination, reminded me, "Alcohol has always been used as a colonizing practice" (personal conversation, June, 1998). For example, the industry's separation of Aboriginal students with a resource of their own (e.g., the board game) — that appropriates the Medicine Wheel and "traditional native symbols and teaching techniques" (BAC, 2001, p. 3) — contributes to what Young (cited in Rizvi, 1997) called "cultural imperialism" (p. 92), where a group is made "invisible at the same time that it is marked out and stereotyped" (Rizvi, 1997, p. 92). As Bannerji (1997) argued, "The socio-economic and cultural disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples has been both genocidal and patriarchal" (p. 27), and continues in modern times perpetrated by hegemonic discourses and legitimated by the state.

The partnership's exclusion of teachers may have something to do with the gendered relations of their work (Acker, 1995). As Ozga (2000) said, "markets demonize teachers" (p. 17), most of whom are women. Curiously, the evaluator's report (Hughes, 2000) stated that pilot teachers expressed concerns only about technical difficulties with the resource. It is possible that the present social conditions of teachers' work, including fear of job loss or reassignments for those who speak out,<sup>7</sup> might lead teachers to accept resources approved by the department uncritically. In education markets, teachers are easily expendable.

In the New Brunswick project my invisible presence created a problem for the industry. Not being introduced to newcomers on the team, being excluded from the morning handshake ritual, side comments just loud enough for me to hear, continuing sidebars while I was speaking, and secret meetings about me during breaks were some of the ongoing practices to intimidate me and undermine my status as a writer for the project. The other team members, all men, read themselves into the script. They knew not to come near me. They knew not to publicly show interest in my concerns; they knew not to engage in discussions about research ethics or about the politics of texts. In this masculinized environment I behaved badly. The industry wanted to buy my labour, my body, not my ideas, surely the most degrading form of commodification.

This case study illustrates how market strategies contribute to, legitimate, naturalise, or disguise hegemonic relations of power. The reproduction of social inequalities, of course, is not a new development in schooling. An enormous amount of feminist work has revealed how schools and curricula have historically actively produced and reproduced systems of oppression. Certainly, I have long questioned the ideologies of individualism and technical rationality so evident in school health-education curricula (Eyre, 1997). Corporate advertising in schools is not a new phenomenon. Kenway and Bullen (2001) pointed out, however, that instances of corporate appropriation of curriculum increased dramatically in the 1990s and marketing ploys are becoming more sophisticated and seductive. The turn to education markets adds a further dimension. When profit is the bottom line, economic discourses displace discourses about equity and social justice (Kachur, 1994).

How does this happen? This new market-led system in public education is a result of policies and combined forces that work across sectors. Robertson (1998b) argued:

The vast majority of partnerships are born out of a shortage of resources available to schools to do the work demanded of them . . . a need created, in no small measure, by the corporate sector itself. . . . [Corporations] have lobbied for fiscal and monetary policies that benefit investors and speculators . . . and have successfully lobbied for the lowest corporate tax rate of any OECD nation. (p. 12)

In New Brunswick, discussions about healthcare funding dominate the political scene. High levels of teacher stress, debates over French immersion programs, and concerns about literacy levels and testing have consumed the energy of school administrators, teachers, and parent groups, enabling the industry to gain access to a captive audience of young consumers (Robertson, 1995). The industry had the obvious benefits of huge financial resources, access to governments with a stake in revenues from alcohol sales,<sup>8</sup> and a CEO with previous cabinet connections (Boyd, 1991). The greed of the university (Currie, Harris, & Thiele, 2000) and faculty, myself included, facilitated this process.

#### IN WHOSE INTEREST

In this article, I have attempted to illustrate how government, university, and industry collaborated in an educational partnership that, rather than benefiting students, served the interests of the project partners. The industry was in a perceived conflict of interest position: it attempted to enhance its image, possibly protect itself from future legal suits, and,

indirectly, increase profits by controlling the content, pedagogical approach, and method of delivery of an educational resource aimed at 13- to 14-year-olds. Both government and industry benefited from the individualistic ideologies that permeated the resource — ideologies that, in effect, blame youth for decisions they make about alcohol and absolve government and industry of their responsibility for youth health. The events of the partnership perpetuated hegemonic gendered, raced, and classed relations, thereby perpetuating oppressive practices of government, university, and industry. The position taken by the partnership reinforced and was reinforced by liberal economic discourses of the state, benefiting each of the project partners, although not necessarily in the same way.

This case study extends Kenway and Bullen's (2001) analysis of "promiscuous corporations . . . desiring schoolchildren" (p. 90), where companies, especially those engaged in risky health practices, seduce schools by developing "expensively produced learning materials bearing their corporate logo to be provided free to schools . . . usually overlaid by some apparent educational purpose" (p. 98). To gain access to schools, "corporations construct themselves as both good corporate citizens and guardians of traditional values in order to mask their principal goal of accessing a consumer market" (p. 102). They ensure that their resources are endorsed by a recognized educational body, developed in partnership with schools, piloted locally, and subjected to evaluation. All this happened in this case study. However, as I have shown, in the New Brunswick project, university, government, and industry each supported corporate values and engaged in corporate practices.

Readers may argue that an ethical conflict should have been obvious at the outset. Although I was certainly hesitant at first, promises of "no strings attached" appeared genuine; department officials expressed enthusiasm for the project. Corporate dollars are very seductive. As this case demonstrates, the language of partnerships and proclamations such as no strings attached have little meaning when the boundaries between university, government, and industry are blurred.

#### HOW TO PROCEED

Some scholars argue that faculty should refuse to participate in corporatist processes and practices that are inherently harmful (Polster, 2000). But, as Marginson (1997) said, "It has become difficult to imagine a university, or any other system of relationships, in which markets might be absent" (p. 277). And, is refusal to participate a viable option for everyone? If academics do not confront, who will be left, unchallenged, to do the work?

What will public education come to mean if students are viewed first and foremost as consumers, if education is about universities and government accommodating powerful corporate elites with global agendas?

What alternatives are there? Some scholars call for a system of rules to guide action: a system that would be fair and just for everyone. But should the corporate sector benefit at all? Should it even be at the table in the first place? Or, if the industry were not present, would this ensure that there would be no conflict of interest? In market-led systems that embrace corporate management practices, how does one participate in a process that, as Kachur (1994) said, “excludes moral and political evaluation as a legitimate form of discourse? . . . As an individual or a community, one either plays the game or is selectively excluded” (p. 14). And, as I have shown, there is always a danger of individuals who represent minority groups being tokenized and co-opted by dominant interests. As Ferguson (cited in Nichols, 1999) said, critique of marketization has to do with the “very premises that underlie operating procedures” and the “moral and political legitimacy of [corporatist] practices” (p. 10).

In this case study, I suggest that students should be the focus of the work and any partnership in public education should act in the students’ best interests. Who defines best interest is of course not a neutral endeavour. For me, this would mean providing students with access to knowledge so that they might learn to read all texts from a critical perspective. It means respecting their ability to make decisions that work in their own best interests, and in the interests of the communities in which they live, while recognizing that all subject positions are not equally available to all students. As Young (1997) said:

Respecting individuals as full citizens means granting and fostering in them liberties and capacities to be autonomous — to choose their own ends and develop their own opinions. It also means protecting them from the tyranny of those who might try to determine those choices and opinions because they control the resources on which citizens depend for a living. (p. 126)

If Klein’s (2000) thesis is correct — that youth opposition to corporate control of space, choice, and jobs will spur the next political movement— young people may not need protection. Some students in my B.Ed. courses have been able to bring a critical analysis to the resource, but other students take it at face value and may one day use it, uncritically, in their classrooms. This situation suggests to me that academics in faculties of education have a responsibility to ask critical questions about whose interests partnerships

in public education represent. It is essential that academics scrutinize partnerships carefully, are clear about their purposes, and refuse to participate if and when principles of equity and social justice are threatened.<sup>9</sup> Academics must be especially attentive to discourses that demonize young people, their parents, and their teachers, and the discursive and material practices that serve market interests and work against the democratization of public education. They must put their own corporatist desires aside for the public good. I will be better prepared next time.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank Elizabeth Blaney, Ph.D. candidate, for our continuing conversations about the project. I thank, too, the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

#### NOTES

- 1 Mead's (1997) work alerted me to the effectiveness of this strategy.
- 2 The industry stated that it provided a "\$1 million grant" to fund the project (BAC, 2000a, p. 1).
- 3 The Brewers Association of Canada (BAC, 1998a) stated that it has "spent over \$100 million in the past ten years on programs to promote responsible drinking" (p. 10).
- 4 *Your Life: Your Choice!* is available at [www.schoolnet.ca/alcohol](http://www.schoolnet.ca/alcohol).
- 5 See <http://www.brewers.ca>.
- 6 One of the most despicable that I have so far collected is a photograph of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) receiving a cheque from a beer-outlet fund-raising drive (BAC, 1998d): the caption accompanying the photograph reads "Beer consumers in Ontario tied one on" (p. 3).
- 7 Scraba (2002) criticized the New Brunswick Department of Education for informing teachers that they cannot speak out against the government.
- 8 According to the industry (BAC, 1998a) "governments in Canada . . . received almost \$4.6 billion generated by beer in taxes and other revenues" (p. 3).
- 9 I do not suggest that such action would be easy and without repercussions; university researchers have been vilified for speaking out against a range of dominant practices (e.g., Olivierie, 2000).

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