

SCHOOL INC.:
A PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY
OF THE EFFECTS OF CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP
ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Over the past five years, a number of incidents in British Columbia, and throughout North America, have demonstrated the extent to which the corporate sponsorship of public education is influencing the curriculum-as-lived by students. With these examples in mind, I commenced researching the following question: what is the potential for ongoing and highly lucrative corporate sponsorship to have a detrimental impact on public schools and does this phenomenon compromise the integrity of public education?

The methodology that I employed was performance ethnography. Performance provides a more effective means of exploring multiple truths in a way that promotes informed public dialogue concerning the various perspectives and attitudes that exist toward an issue.

School Inc. uses a multi-media drama to tell the story of Jim Freeman, a high school English teacher, who opposes his school's decision to enter a corporate sponsorship arrangement with *Cash-Cola*. Over the course of three acts, the play explores how a school's entering into a corporate sponsorship arrangement can impact members of the school community both professionally and personally. *School Inc.* also explores how the trend toward increased corporate sponsorship of schools is connected to the global trend of rising corporate influence.

While researching and writing *School Inc.*, I began investigating the disabling of water fountains at the Faculty of Education, in the Scarfe Building, on the campus of the University of British Columbia. My investigation revealed a significant correlation between UBC signing a lucrative contract with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company in 1995

and the removing or disabling of forty-four percent (44%) of the fountains on the UBC campus during the following three years.

From both the writing of *School Inc.* and my inquiry into the water fountains on the UBC campus, I concluded that corporate sponsorship in education has a significant impact on the foundational values with which we understand the role of our educational institutions. Simply put, when schools and universities enter into corporate sponsorship agreements, the evidence suggests that they begin to adopt the values of the corporations that are sponsoring them. This poses a significant threat to the foundational values of public education and, by corollary, the democracies that depend on them.

A first step toward halting this development is to formally recognize, both within educational institutions and the community-at-large, that our schools are fast approaching a critical juncture. If we continue on our current path, the seemingly small, well-intentioned compromises made for the sake of increased funding will dramatically alter the values that shape our understanding of the role our schools play. This reshaping presently favours an emerging corporate order that threatens the very foundations of our democratic values. It is this recognition that I strive to hasten with the writing (and future production) of the play *School Inc.*.

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PREFACE

The Medium is the Thing

Performance ethnography¹ represents a departure from the thesis as the medium for communicating the fruits of scholarly endeavour. Performance allows the scholar to augment the emotional intensity and social impact of the research. It represents an important trend toward employing different media to enter their voices more successfully into public discourse. The advent of the printing press offers an historical example of how the introduction of new media can have a profound impact on the world of ideas.

In the mid-fifteenth century Johann Gutenberg converted a wine press into a printing machine with moveable type. Forty years following his invention, there were similar printing presses in 110 cities, spread out over six different countries. Fifty years later, eight million books were available, filled with information, much of which had been previously unavailable to the average person (Postman, 1993, pp. 61-67).

As is well known, printed pamphlets and more available Bibles, printed in the vernacular, played an essential role in Martin Luther's reshaping the spiritual landscape of Europe. During the following centuries new methods of distributing print, such as newspapers and books, developed. This wide spread availability of information, particularly that which pertained to political thought, played a significant role in the foundation of democracy. In short, the medium of typography greatly contributed to the evolution of democracy: the printed word contributed to *changing the culture* (Postman, 1985 & 1993).

¹ The general purpose of ethnography is to capture the human meanings of the social life lived, experienced, and understood by a particular community. Although the concept of performance ethnography will be explored later in the introduction to this thesis, for this preface it can be understood as "a theatrical performance", or more simply, "a play."

Western civilization continues to be shaped by the media that carry information. Today, the most influential information is digital and is transmitted throughout the world via film, the internet, musical recording, television, and video. While corporations employ various media, generally other than print, to propel the global rise of their influence, scholars for the most part remain committed to one mode of communication: the printed scholarly essay.

School Inc. departs from the standard thesis in order to benefit from drama's capacity to maximize emotional impact and to foster public discourse. It is important to remember, however, that the reading of the text is, on its own, insufficient for understanding the full impact of the play's performance.

Reading the play *School Inc.* provides the reader with the opportunity to follow sufficiently complex, and therefore realistic, characters as they weave their way through plot arcs toward a cathartic climax and, one hopes, a redemptive resolution. It also provides insight into the impact, and the potential for impact, of corporate sponsorships on public education.

The text of *School Inc.* offers examples of the detrimental impact of viewing students as consumers. It suggests that if we do not make an effort to reverse this trend, we are on course to return to the historical norm of high quality education being available only to those who are capable of paying. Reading the script of *School Inc.* may provide one with ideas regarding these themes and others, but one would still have an incomplete understanding of what *the play* is about. The impact of attending a publicly performed spectacle is significantly different from that of reading the text.

The public performance of a text conveys a degree of emotional engagement that does not exist in the reading of it. The spectator's emotional reaction to theatre depends not only on the *meaning* and *sound* of the words spoken but on the visual impact of the actors and the set, an awareness of the actors vulnerability to public scrutiny, and, perhaps most importantly, the impact of sharing this emotional and intellectual experience with the actors and other spectators. The intensity caused by this combination is, one imagines, the reason we are much more likely to cry and/or laugh out loud at a theatrical presentation than while reading silently. It is presumably for this reason that live performance is often the centre of a romantic or celebratory event. It is for this reason that Hamlet rightfully expects live theatre to evoke an emotional reaction that will reveal his uncle's guilt.

Theatre is at once an intensely emotional, social, and therefore political experience. It is precisely this level of significance that I have attempted to attach to the ideas contained in *School Inc.*

Some modes of expression simply have a greater capacity to make a lasting impact and/or to compel a response. This calls to mind an adage that I heard recently: *the Stone Age did not end because they ran out of stone*. There was nothing wrong with stone; metal simply worked better in certain situations. If an important objective of scholarly reporting, particularly that concerning education itself, is to admit the product of research into a community's collective awareness, some modes of communication simply may work better.

This notion was not lost on corporate interests who, throughout their "dramatic rise to dominance" (Bakan, 2004, p. 7) in the twentieth century, relied to a great extent on

information conveyed through media other than print. As Ben Bagdikian points out, the “capacity to propagate ideas is at the root of political power, and political power is essential to modern corporate ambitions” (Bagdikian, 1992 p. 31). Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola, now exercising great influence in schools and universities, have acquired extraordinary international influence through advertising campaigns that unite visual images, music, and words in order to condition consumers i.e. brand them (Klein, 2000), to associate positive experiences with what is mostly sugared water. It is more than a little ironic that the use of such communication techniques has allowed both beverage providers to acquire sufficient global influence to now “rescue” educational institutions from democratic governments’ apparent incapacity, or unwillingness, to fund education.

Born in 1970, I grew up at a time when this corporate branding was well underway. So effective was the corporate use of multi-media to advance their message of self-interest and material gain, that I had little interest in the history of public values until my late twenties when I had become a public school teacher. The ideas and stories associated with the historical struggle to create laws and institutions in defense of the public good are, in terms narrative power, far richer than that of corporate ascendancy (Zinn, 1995). The stories of the people’s successes are, after all, the stories of the triumphant underdog. The appeal of the corporate message must be due, to some degree at least, to its use of media other than print to more effectively communicate its message.

Writing a thesis for performance is a significant step toward augmenting the scholar’s capacity to inform and stimulate dialogue. In the case of *School Inc.*, this dialogue concerns the fact that educational institutions throughout North America are under siege, not by those challenging the “the scholarly article as the preferred form of

presentation” (Denzin 2003, p. 13), but by those who stand to benefit from the advancement of corporate interests at the expense of public interests. Given the potential for rising corporate influence to cause harm, this value shift is among the most pressing issues of our time (Bakan, 2004).

At its core, this issue concerns timeless questions regarding the nature of just societies, how power is most justly distributed, and how best to educate young people in order to maintain a just society. The persistent human need to grapple with these questions is documented in our most ancient texts and, of course, is with us today. Dialogue concerning these questions existed long before the ascendancy of *the university* and *the scholarly essay*, and it will exist long after both of these are forgotten.

The same can be said for using narrative to convey complex ideas.

This corporate intrusion represents a profound threat to our ability to pass on to students, via public education, the public values - for example, that we care about those outside of our immediate social circles, that equality of opportunity is important, that one’s capacity to pay does not determine one’s access to education or health care...etc. - that are at the core of Canadian democracy. In his groundbreaking book, *The Corporation*, produced in tandem with the award-winning and widely viewed movie of the same title, critically acclaimed legal scholar Joel Bakan describes the extent to which these shifting values pose a threat to the future of democracy (Bakan, 2004, p. 138)

Viewed in this light the ongoing drive of corporations, and those ideologically aligned with them, to maximize corporate influence in educational institutions is best understood as an enormously effective means of advancing the agenda of those poised to most benefit from this “emerging order.”

The steady advancement of corporate influence in almost all spheres of human life, the steady decrease in people's capacity, manifest in their representative democracies, to counter this influence, and the rising tide of opposition to this trend are the basis for what will no doubt be the defining *stories* of our time. These are the most recent manifestations of the timeless story of one social group's drive to usurp power from another. If present trends toward greater corporate dominance persist, historians will have little choice but to label this significant change for what it is: "a radical and pervasive change in society and the social structure" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 1966, p.1227). That is to say, a revolution.

Our collective capacity to understand the threat that corporate values pose to the democratic values and our capacity, and willingness, to take action to diminish that threat, depend on our new stories being told; and being told well.

This is what I have attempted to accomplish with *School Inc.*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I will argue later in this thesis, it is our concern for others that is at the heart of the desire to protect and promote public education. The central element of this concern is empathy: that we are able to imagine the plight of others in circumstances different than our own.

I am very fortunate to come from a family with more than its share of empathy and imagination. For this, I would like to acknowledge my brother, Rob, and my mother, Sherry, for their ceaseless support through the five tumultuous years that have culminated with the play *School Inc.*. My father's legacy of heroism and courage has also given me the confidence to endure the many challenges that such an undertaking inevitably presents.

Marie Cook, my paternal grandmother, has been loving and supportive throughout this last phase of my post-secondary education. Her steadfastness has been a source of security throughout my life. My recently departed maternal grandmother, Mae Pettit, taught me the value of compassion, humour, and optimism, each of which played an important role in the writing of *School Inc.*.

I have been very fortunate to work with a most supportive and knowledgeable research committee consisting of my thesis advisor, Dr. Stephen Petrina, and Dr. Lynn Fels. Their commitment to the ideas and methodology at the core of this thesis provided much encouragement. Dr. Theresa Dobson and Stephen Heatley, both examining members of the committee, offered many valuable contributions to the final thesis.

The Haas family, with my step-father Bill at its helm, provided me with the love and commitment that helps to smooth out life's many bumps.

My good friend Roger Holden played a vital role in the development of many of the themes found in *School Inc.*. His undying commitment to the examined life and his inexhaustible faith in the power of the well-turned phrase has been the source of much inspiration.

Philip Ireland has been a mentor since our paths first crossed thirteen years ago. Above all, he has taught me that it is indeed compassion that makes us strongest. A well-pressed shirt can help as well.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my five-year-old daughter, Avrel Mae-Marie Cook, to whom the play *School Inc.* and all the hours spent imagining and writing it are dedicated. That from the ineffable heartache of learning to live without her, I would muster the determination to undertake the creation of *School Inc.*, will doubtless constitute one of my life's greatest ironies.

Increasingly, we are told, commercial potential is the measure of all value, corporations should be free to exploit anything and anyone for profit, and human beings are creatures of pure self-interest and materialistic desire. These are the elements of an emerging order that may prove to be as dangerous as any fundamentalism that history has produced. For in a world where anything or anyone can be owned, manipulated, and exploited for profit, everything and everyone will eventually be. (Bakan, 2004, p. 138)

I have heard that guilty creatures, sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions.

.....The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King. (Hamlet, II. ii. 616-617)

CHAPTER ONE

Part I: Background

Over the last four years, there have been a number of incidents in British Columbia that underscore the problematic nature of corporate involvement in public schools. In the spring of 2000, I witnessed a principal at Como Lake Middle School in Coquitlam, British Columbia using the school's public address system to hold a contest persuading middle school students to buy more Coca-Cola beverages. The winning student would receive free tickets to an N.B.A. basketball game. In April of that same year, Sandra Banks, vice-president of public affairs for the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, told two Grade Nine classes at Como Lake Middle School that the caffeine found in Coke is "probably one of the safest substances that is studied by government. It is naturally occurring in the coca bean.....caffeine is a completely safe ingredient... [it] is a healthy substance." After confirming that a Coke per day is healthy, she assured students that Coca-Cola would not promote a harmful product because they would not want to "harm the [Coke] logo." During the 1999-2000 school year, at Princess Margaret Secondary School in Abbotsford, British Columbia, representatives of Pepsi-Cola held a "chug-a-lug contest"; whoever could gulp down the sponsor's beverage the quickest received a free pager (Wright-Howard, 2000). In November of 2000, the *Vancouver Sun* reported that school administration had told an Abbotsford teacher, Dawn Dyck, that her students' Marketing Twelve project to sell Jones Soda was unacceptable because of the school's exclusive contract with Coca-Cola. Ms. Dyck told reporters that she "did get [her] hand slapped by the administration. They weren't impressed with [her] because they were getting their hand slapped by the board office" (Stansby, 2000, p. B2).

In spring of 2000, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF, 2000) conducted a survey in which staff representatives from approximately half, (848 of 1,793, or 48%) of British Columbia's public schools submitted information regarding corporate involvement in their schools (BCTF, 2000). The BCTF considers this high rate of return to be evidence of teachers' concern regarding commercialism in schools. Given that this was the first such survey, its purpose was not only to report on the current data but also to "establish a baseline for future comparisons." (BCTF, 2000)

Further justifying the concerns expressed in the above-cited personal observations and newspaper and television reports, the BCTF reports that ninety-three percent (93%) of secondary schools and thirty-four percent (34%) of elementary schools have at least one vending machine. At the time of the survey, twenty-eight percent (28%) of all schools "were known to be tied in to an exclusive beverage contract," while "more than two thirds of high schools are" (BCTF, 2000). The BCTF reported empirical evidence of what they labeled "nutritional mixed messages" (BCTF, 2000). While mandated school curriculum calls for teaching healthy eating habits, the sale of junk food within schools sends students a contrary message.

The school curriculum is also influenced by the advertising to which students are subjected. Under the section entitled "Logos 'R' Us", the BCTF survey reports the following:

- Kids are exposed to in-school advertising: 8% of schools have ads on scoreboards and 8 % (by coincidence) of school buildings have ads.
- Kids at 61% of elementary schools collect labels, box tops, etc. as part of a corporate incentive program. (BCTF, 2000)

Beyond demonstrating that corporate sponsorship is an increasingly prevalent aspect of public education, this anecdotal and empirical evidence, a small portion of the growing body of evidence, confirms that corporate involvement is affecting that which we are teaching students in the public schools of British Columbia. The companies that provide additional revenue for schools are indeed influencing the curriculum-as-lived by the students. That corporations are paying to have the promotion of their products included in the curriculum of public education represents a profound shift in the foundational values of public education. This shift concerns “fundamental issues of public policy, curriculum content, the proper relationship of educators to the students entrusted to them, and the values that the schools embody” (Molnar, 2003, p. 10).

The purpose of this performance ethnography is to promote informed public dialogue concerning the various perspectives and attitudes that exist around the issue of commercialization of schools, with specific emphasis on corporate sponsorship of schools, and the profound value shift that this phenomenon represents. I will employ drama to present my findings in a way that privileges evocation over cognitive contemplation (Ellis, 2000, p. 273) and “provides a forum for the search for moral truths about the self and the other” (Denzin, 2003, p. 117). This performance will be in the form of a three-act play entitled *School Inc.*, the text of which constitutes the second chapter of this thesis.

School Inc. will use drama to explore some of the professional, political, and personal challenges that educators and other members of the public school community face while negotiating the introduction of a corporate sponsorship contract into a public school.

School Inc. will forgo reporting a detailed analysis of the relevant data in order to represent the *full* experience i.e. the intellectual, emotional and social experience of this community as they undergo the value shift necessary for permitting corporate sponsorship. To this end, I will construct fictional characters who, in a dramatic fashion, embody various perspectives and attitudes toward the sponsorship of public schools. I will forgo the safer territory of reporting the findings that are “warranted by evidence and [have] the ability to withstand skeptical scrutiny and criticism” (Philips, 1995, p. 75) in order to explore the larger narrative.

In turn, this will compel spectators to explore and question the complex web of conflicting values that corporate sponsorships bring to public education. The purpose of such a performance is to promote scrutiny and criticism rather than withstand it.

Personal Background:

My own experience with public education began in 1975 when I entered into kindergarten in a working class neighbourhood of London, Ontario. As a consequence of my father's death in 1977, I had a somewhat irregular education, attending nine public schools throughout Southwestern Ontario.

I spent the last three years of secondary school (1986-1989) at Ridley College, a co-educational boarding school in St. Catharines, Ontario. After graduation, I obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Honours French Language and Literature from the University of Western Ontario. This degree was earned over five years, two years of which were spent studying in France. While in France, I observed the degree to which French citizens feel a sense of political entitlement and how their theatrical tradition plays an important role in shaping their convictions.

When this degree was completed, I planted trees and worked as a labourer/carpenter's apprentice for one year before entering the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Education. One week after graduating with of Bachelor of Education in August of 1996, I returned to public education, this time as a Math and Science teacher at Como Lake Middle School in Coquitlam, BC. I held this position for three years then accepted a post at Centennial School, also in Coquitlam, BC, as an English teacher, where I have taught high school English and Creative Writing for four years.

These experiences contributed to a political orientation that I would describe as socially democratic with a high regard for the private sector's ability to create value, provide incentive, and reward innovation. Public institutions such as education, health care, and social services are necessary for limiting the punishing consequences of the unfettered free market. These social institutions, hard won over centuries of activism, provide tangible evidence of humankind's potential for forming more compassionate societies.

Corporations, bound by law to undertake only those actions that lead to an increase in revenue (Bakan, 2003), have very different objectives than schools that endeavour to advance the interests of students and their communities. As Bierlein points out, "[b]usiness and education do not share identical concerns or see the same world, speak the same language, and even more importantly, share similar values" (Bierlein, 1993, p. 13).

My concerns regarding corporate sponsorship of public education, or what is more broadly understood as the commercialization of public education, are not those of

one who has no regard for the benefits that private enterprise, “guided by the marketplace, stimulated by competition, and regulated by government” (2003, Bok, p. 21), affords Canadians. My criticism of corporate and commercial influence in schools stems from an understanding of the importance of providing autonomous public institutions to offset the destabilizing inequity resulting from unregulated market forces.

I began investigating this issue in the fall of 1999 after attending a meeting at Como Lake Middle School at which an administrator was presenting a proposal for a new district policy regarding corporate sponsorship in School District #43 (Coquitlam). After the meeting, I began the process of researching various foundational questions: What is the nature of corporate sponsorships in schools? Why have corporate sponsorships *now* become a legitimate source of revenue? What are the negative consequences of Canadian public schools accepting funding from large multi-national corporations and how are these consequences connected to the larger issues of expanding corporate influence in general? These questions provide the broad context for initiating my exploration of corporate sponsorship in public education.

These questions were then narrowed down to a central concern: what is the potential for ongoing and highly lucrative corporate sponsorships to have a detrimental impact on the curriculum-as-lived by students in public schools and how does this phenomenon compromise the integrity of public education?

Part II: Commercialism in Schools

Corporate sponsors giving money or goods to a school in exchange for the right to conduct an element of their business in the school e.g. exclusive provision of

beverages, is just one example of the increasingly common and contentious phenomenon of commercialism in schools.

Commercialism has been defined in a number of ways. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “the principles and practice of commerce; excessive adherence to financial return as a measure of worth”(Brown, 1993, p. 451). In *Lead Us Not Into Temptation*, James Twitchell describes commercialism as two processes:

“*commodification*, or stripping an object of all other values except its value for sale to someone else, and *marketing*, the insertion of the object into a network of exchanges only some of which involve money” (Twitchell, 1999, p. 30).

In the context of broader school issues, *Class Warfare: The Assault on Canada's Schools* (Barlow & Robertson, 1994) provides a starting point for understanding commercialism in schools. Barlow and Robertson articulate the negative trends in public education: “Canadians are engaged in a struggle over their institutions that is taking on the characteristics of class warfare” (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. vi). The authors place our current educational challenges within a social and economic context:

On one side stand those who have embraced the free market as the means and purpose of participation in public life. On the other are those who must live with the effects of a system dedicated, by definition, to the acquisition of privilege and profit. This is an ideological conflict. (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. vi)

Having established this underlying clash between corporate and public interests, the authors describe what they consider to be the myths surrounding public education in an increasingly corporate world: schools are failing children in a variety of ways, graduates have no job ready skills, and corporations are creating jobs that graduates cannot fill (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, pp. 23-61). After debunking these myths, they define what businesses want from the schools they sponsor: to secure the ideological allegiance of

young people, to gain access to the market that students in schools represent, and to transform schools into training centres for transnational corporations (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, pp. 77-93).

One criticism of Barlow and Robertson is that their overtly anti-business stance diminishes their objectivity and thereby decreases the text's credibility. This explains why political opponents dismiss the book as "having no basis in fact" and driven by an "ideological agenda which figures so prominently in their work" (Bloom, 1996, p. 123). In promoting the merits of publicly funded schools, Barlow and Robertson are indeed taking a left-wing political stance. Barlow and Robertson's criticism of those who want more business involvement in schools, however, does not necessarily suggest a lack of balance. The effect is the opposite: writing with an overt moral position suggests transparency and intellectual honesty. Balance requires that we characterize opposing positions as both reasonable and moral from the perspective of those who hold them.

Barlow and Robertson assign very reasonable motivations to those who seek to commercialize public education. Given that the essential principal of the corporation is to maximize revenue, corporate leaders are acting reasonably:

Some corporate leaders may have a personal sense of philanthropy to the community or the less privileged, but the business of business is to make money. It is not in a business leader's interest to challenge a system under which so few can earn so much and give back so little. (Barlow & Robertson, 1994. p. 78)

This type of straight-forward analysis provides a strong foundation on which the authors build their case against the commercialization of public education.

A simple measure of a text's thoroughness is to question whether it allows for an understanding of both sides of the issue. Despite its left leaning politics, this text would prepare one for participating meaningfully on either side of the debate, whether to protect

public education or profit from it. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the ideas put forth by Michael Bloom, a prominent defender of corporate involvement in schools.

As a Senior Research Associate for the National Business and Education Center and the Conference Board of Canada, Michael Bloom is an advocate of corporate involvement in public education. In his essay "Corporate Involvement in Curriculum: Partnership Not Coercion", he defends corporate involvement in schools: "Business people want to work with educators to enhance the quality of the already superior education system being delivered at every level" (Bloom, 1996, p. 119).

A lack of thoroughness mars Bloom's argument. Whereas Barlow and Robertson provide a reasonable explanation for business's desire to participate in public education, Bloom offers no explanation for the concerns that reasonable people have about corporations in schools. For him, the view "that business people wish for...the privatization of public education – has no basis in fact" (Bloom, 1996, p. 121). This article provides little insight into the case against businesses partnering with schools. The result is a problematic lack of balance. Rather than acknowledge the conflicting values at the heart of the debate, Bloom shrugs off his critics by suggesting their concerns are not based in fact but are, one is left to conclude, imaginary.

The absence of an accurate depiction of the case *for* corporate involvement in schools further reduces the credibility of Bloom's argument. He states that despite "the fears of some commentators and educators that there is a secret agenda for education that is being pushed by a faceless group of backroom corporate conspiracists, the reality is much different" (Bloom, 1996, p. 119). We are led to believe that businesses want nothing more than to improve the quality of Canadian public education. Bloom does not

acknowledge that business involvement in schools is necessarily related to their primary objective of maximizing revenue, either in the short or long run. This oversight significantly undermines his credibility.

For conclusive evidence that a “faceless group of backroom corporate conspiracists,” in this case blue chip investors, are indeed working for the privatization of public education, one need only read the business literature itself. In 1999, Merrill Lynch published its *In-depth Report, The Book of Knowledge: Investing in the Growing Education and Training Industry* (Moe, Bailey, Lau, 1999). The document, written to promote investment in education, advances the case for privatizing K-12 public education. It is a most significant piece of literature in that the strategy for privatizing public education is clearly articulated, not by those who oppose it, but by Merrill-Lynch, one of the largest, most respected and best known American financial institutions. The following citations prove that there is significant investment interest already working toward the conversion of American public education into a for profit enterprise:

The \$360 billion [USD] K-12 segment is the largest in the education industry, but is the most difficult to invest in. Impediments to change include the entrenched status quo that argues for more time and more money to improve the current dismal situation....

It is our prediction that 10% of the publicly-funded K-12 school market will be privately managed ten years from now, implying a market of over \$30 billion in today's dollars....

The compelling dynamics of the education industry have not been lost on investors. This sector has attracted significant interest from leading financiers, venture capitalists and visionary business leaders. Since 1994, 38 IPOs [initial public stock offerings] have been completed, raising \$3.4 billion of equity. Education is nearly 10% of the GDP, yet just 0.2% of U.S. capital markets....In our view, this will result in sustainable high P/E [price to earning] ratios in the sector and significant opportunity for investors. (Moe, Bailey, & Lau, 1999, p. 2)

These quotations, coming from Merrill Lynch, confirm that public education, given its immense value, is an appealing target for revenue-seeking corporations. The \$3.4 billion (USD) that had already been raised through stock offerings by April of 1999, for the purpose of entering into the public education market, leaves little doubt as to the goals of big business.

The fact that this document is an American publication does not make it less relevant to the study of corporate sponsorship in Canadian communities. Given the multi-national nature of corporations and the nature of our North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Canadian public education is equally vulnerable to the investment objectives confirmed in the Merrill Lynch document.

One of the most outspoken critics of commercialism in schools is Alex Molnar, Professor and Director of the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) at Arizona State University. CERU has monitored media references to commercialism in schools since 1990. CERU defines and tracks media references to eight categories of commercial activity in schools through searches on news archival services (Molnar, 2003a, p. 2). The eight categories are sponsorship of programs and activities, exclusive arrangements, incentive programs, appropriation of space, sponsored educational materials, electronic marketing, fundraising and the private management of public schools.

Molnar's research provides useful quantitative data regarding the increasing prevalence of commercial activity in schools. In the July 2002 – June 2003 study period, for example, six of the eight categories saw a considerable rise in references compared to the 2001-2002 study (Molnar, 2003b, p. 1). His well-informed criticism of commercial

trends in education, combined with his passionate defense of public education, make him a valuable contributor to the debate concerning corporate influence in schools.

Molnar understands that this debate hinges on “fundamental issues of public policy, curriculum content, the proper relationship of educators to the students entrusted to them, and the values that the schools embody” (Molnar, 2003a, p. 10). Unlike Bloom’s attempt to dismiss his opponents by declaring their arguments to have no basis in fact, Molnar understands the complexity and contentiousness of the issue. It is in this context that administrators, coping with diminishing school funding, must make difficult decisions to accept or refuse money from corporate partners.

To help principals navigate these challenging waters, The National Association of Secondary School Principals published Andrea Bell’s legal memorandum entitled *Supersizing Education: A Principal’s Guide to Commercialism in Schools* (Bell, 2002). Bell’s objective is to help school principals balance the financial benefit of corporate sponsorship with the potential for such partnerships to “cause great controversy among those who believe that schools are not the appropriate place to advertise to children” (Bell, 2002, p. 2).

At first glance, the memorandum appears to be a politically neutral analysis. Further scrutiny, however, reveals a latent pro-business bias. Bell defines the various types of commercialism in schools using only four categories: product sales, direct ads, indirect ads, and market research (Bell, 2002, p. 2). Under the heading of “The Politics of Principalship”, Bell cites the following general arguments from those who are “vehemently and legitimately” opposed to the idea of commercialism in schools: a school’s focus should be squarely on educating students; a school may unintentionally

endorse products; students are captive audiences; and, if corporations subsidize education, governments will reduce their spending (Bell, 2002, p. 3).

This list does not, however, include the more troublesome corporate objectives of influencing the school curriculum and, as the Merrill Lynch report makes clear, introducing for profit management in public schools. The consequence of this omission is a bias in favour of utilizing the additional corporate revenue while avoiding the potential controversy. She fails to consider the option of a public school system that depends solely on public funding.

Bell concludes with the following advice:

Schools are often under funded and, with a quid pro quo, corporations are willing to help. The question is (sic): How can school leaders maximize the revenue stream for the school without compromising the school's integrity or selling out the students?

Schools and businesses have many opportunities to come together and many of the opportunities really do benefit the students and the schools. Some opportunities, however, yield little benefit to the school and only work to build business for the corporation. (Bell, 2002, p. 5)

Bell's memorandum is important in that it recognizes both the positive and negative elements of corporate involvement in public schools. She advises principals to give careful consideration to the possible consequences of corporate partnerships before entering into them.

There is, however, an ethical question that arises from Bell's otherwise reasonable counsel. Given the reality of human fallibility, it is logical to assume that if the decision to accept a corporate partnership is left to individual principals, eventually the school's integrity will be compromised and, to use Bell's words, the students will be "sold out."

One wonders whether parents and concerned community members would be satisfied with funding scenarios that inevitably lead to such outcomes.

Furthermore, Bell's advice is founded on the assumption that under-funded public education is a constant when, in fact, it is a variable depending on political will. It is conceivable that governments adequately fund schools so that corporate sponsorships would not be required. This provides us with another example of her pro-corporate bias.

Given the potential for the assumptions and value judgements of the researcher to skew results, researchers have begun to utilize new methodologies, such as performance ethnography, that offer a means of exploring the complexities of their observations in a way that acknowledges multiple truths. This point is elaborated Part III.

Part III: The Use of Performance Ethnography

There is a growing body of scholarship that articulates the philosophical underpinnings of writing for performance (in the case of *School Inc*, a three-act play) as scholarly research. The most fitting description of my research methodology is performance ethnography.

Elliot Eisner offers a compelling defense of arts-based research in education. In his essay, "What Artistically Crafted Research Can Help Us to Understand about Schools" (Eisner, 1995), Eisner states that "the primary tactical aim of research is to advance understanding" (Eisner, 1995, p. 3). We must, therefore, consider literary works as a form of research:

[They] help us to understand because their creators have understood and had the skills and imagination to transform their understanding into forms that help us to notice what we have learned not to see. They provide an image fresh to behold, and in so doing provide a complement to the colorless abstraction of theory with renderings that are palpable. (Eisner, 1995, p. 3)

With this in mind, Eisner suggests, for example, that such works as *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, *Oliver Twist*, *Dead Poet's Society* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, given the extent to which they advance our understanding of education, should be given some credit as research documents. These works, unlike more traditional forms of research, evoke empathy and a "wide-awakeness" (Eisner, 1995, p. 2), both of which permit the reader (or spectator) to more fully understand the research.

Eisner's views are not without opposition. D.C. Philips, in his article entitled "Art as Research, Research as Art" (Philips, 1995), criticizes arts-based research for not having a clear, manageable central question, and therefore not providing us with a clear answer. Philips contends that arts-based research is not quite research:

[The traditional *researcher*] is concerned to discover propositions in the context of some problem that has been formulated in a clear and manageable way, that are warranted by evidence and the ability to withstand skeptical scrutiny and criticism; a competent researcher will try to use designs that guard against alternative hypotheses or explanations, will use data-gathering methods and designs that insulate as far as possible against threats to validity. (Philips, 1995, p. 75)

For Philips, the benefit of traditional research methodology is its ability to provide concrete and verifiable conclusions on which we can securely construct future research and, consequently, future knowledge.

This type of classic methodology is especially powerful for advancing research in the physical sciences. In the social sciences, however, the effort to provide verifiable and impartial research can be problematic. To present an issue as heated and contentious as the rising corporate influence in the public sphere using a rationalized methodology is to misrepresent the extent to which emotion, perspective, and values shape the debate. More importantly, to not convey the vehemence with which defenders of public

education make their case is an omission that favours the advancement of commercialization. The insistence of some social scientists on applying rigid research methodology in pursuit of clear, definable results creates the tendency to avoid those value-based issues which stir the most heated disagreement.

This calls to mind John Ralston Saul's view that the social sciences' imitation of "scientific analysis through the accumulation of circumstantial evidence" (Saul, 1995, pp. 49-50) can be decidedly counterproductive. Given this concern, we see the advantage of a research methodology, such as performance ethnography, that advances knowledge of a contentious issue's multiple truths without eschewing its emotional and political significance.

Norman Denzin, in his book *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*, eloquently captures the role that performance ethnography has in providing this type of research:

More deeply, the ethnographic tale is a utopian tale of self and social redemption, a tale that brings a moral compass back into the reader's (and the writer's) life. The ethnographer discovers the multiple truths that operate in the social world – the stories people tell one another about the things that matter to them. These stories move people to action, and they rest on a distinction between fact and truth. Truth and facts are socially constructed, and people build stories around the meaning of facts. (Denzin, 1997, p. 118)

For Denzin, the value of interpretive ethnography stems from the understanding that even *facts* and *truth* are socially constructed. As noted above, Bell's basing her legal advice on the assumption that governments cannot provide adequate funding for public education is an example of how even well-researched and balanced *truth* is *constructed* from subjective assumptions. Denzin's notion of employing performance ethnography for the sake of "discovering multiple truths", of bringing "a moral compass back into the

reader's (and writer's) life", and of moving "people to action", provides an important argument for understanding the value of this type of research.

In *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*.

(Denzin, 2003), Denzin advances performance ethnography's challenge to the scholarly article:

Performances deconstruct, or at least challenge, the scholarly article as the preferred form of presentation (and representation). A performance authorizes itself not through its citation of scholarly texts, but through its ability to evoke and invoke shared emotional experience and understanding between performer and audience. (Denzin, 2003, p. 13)

Performance ethnography provides an alternative to the limitations of the traditional methods of researching and reporting, specifically the scholarly article's inability to evoke a shared emotional experience. Without shared emotion, one cannot feel empathy, the essential element in any endeavor that strives to uphold the notion of the public good.

The literature that I have reviewed suggests that traditional scholarly writing is not the most effective means of researching and understanding emotionally charged issues born of conflicting values. Furthermore, performance is perhaps the best way to evoke empathy and therefore promote the advancement of social justice.

Participant Ethics:

The play *School Inc.* does not reflect actual people and/or experiences. Over the course of five years of research, I have collected a vast amount of data that represents various perspectives on this issue. To attempt to construct a dramatic, engaging and informative plot by representing the actual participants would be profoundly limiting. Instead, I *constructed* the *fictional* characters who are best suited for conveying the

various perspectives that exist on the issue of commercialism in schools. Importantly, these dramatic characters are *fictional*, constructed to best serve the thematic and dramatic needs of the play.

Given the contentious nature of the issue of commercialism in schools, I intentionally avoided creating characters that reflect any specific individual. To borrow the well-worn phrase of the writer, *any similarity between a constructed character of the play and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental*. To avoid the ethical complexities of (re)presenting real occurrences this performance is “a factually and fictionally correct” depiction of “what could have happened” (Denzin, 2003, p. 117) given the various forces at work.

Chapter Three of this thesis, entitled “Changing Tastes: ‘Let Them Drink Coke’”, presents evidence that the University of British Columbia’s cold-beverage contract with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company had a significant correlation with the university’s removing or disabling of forty-four percent (44%) of the drinking fountains on its campus. This chapter provides insight into the impact of corporate sponsorships, and corporate values in general, on educational institutions.

Some of the evidence used to make this case was gathered informally, through email correspondence on the Faculty of Education mailing list, before I had decided to formally report my discoveries in this thesis. With this in mind, the decision to identify a source was based on the citation meeting one of the following criteria: it had been previously published, consent had been given for its publication, or the professional responsibilities of those being cited included public accountability for that on which they provided information.

Design and Analysis:

The design of my research serves two functions: first, it must distill this vast amount of data into representative characters and dialogue that reflects my understanding of the issue of corporations in schools; and, secondly, it must provide the necessary elements or successful drama.

Richardson's five criteria for performance ethnography offer a useful design for analyzing and presenting my data. These criteria require that the culminating performance makes a *substantive contribution*, possesses *aesthetic merit*, shows a measure of *reflexivity*, has a lasting effect through making a strong *impact* and, finally, *expresses a reality* (Richardson, 2000, p. 254).

For a performance to make a substantive contribution requires that the research possess a thorough and current understanding of the various opinions, interests, historic trends and economic ideologies that shape the debate around corporations in schools. To make my voice credible to the broader community, my research includes elements of the perspectives of teachers, students, administrators, marketers, corporations, concerned citizens and the Supreme Court of Canada. This research provided the sufficiently extensive understanding of the impact of corporations in schools required to make a substantive contribution.

To create *aesthetic merit*, I relied heavily on my research into narrative and playwriting. This was conducted over the last four years as preparation for instructing Writing 12 and the regular high school English curriculum. Recognizing that aesthetic merit in a play is both relative and perhaps the most elusive of qualities (as it is the one on which success ultimately rests), I can only hope that my previous knowledge of drama and my skill as a writer will render *School Inc.* aesthetically pleasing.

When considering the degree of reflexivity in performance ethnography, a balance must be struck. On one hand, the performance must present sufficient reflexivity: that is to say, the author's awareness of his or her inherent bias in interpreting the data. Conversely, too much self-awareness in the final performance diminishes the spectator's capacity to suspend disbelief, a necessary condition for entering into the constructed world of the performance. As part of my data collection, I applied my knowledge of playwriting for ensuring adequate reflexivity, without jarring the audience from what Lamott calls the vivid and continuous dream-like quality of effective story telling (Lamott, 1994, p. 57).

Thus far, my design has recognized the value of presenting an aesthetically meritorious performance that makes a substantive contribution to the participants' i.e. the audience's and the performer's understanding of the contentious issue of corporations in British Columbian public schools, and its relationship to the global issue of corporate intrusion into the public sphere. In order for such a performance to meet Richardson's fourth criterion, it must also have a *strong impact*. For Richardson, such a performance would affect the spectator emotionally, intellectually, and as a scholar.

Finally, the performance *must express a reality*. According to Richardson, such a text would "embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of a lived experience...[and convey] a credible account of a cultural, social, individual or communal sense of the 'real'..."(Richardson, 200b, p. 937). These last two criteria depend on the extent to which I have created engaging characters, who employ engaging and sensitive dialogue, and follow the course of a sufficiently dramatic plot. Meeting these five criteria provides a suitable design for the presentation of performance ethnography that "discovers the

multiple 'truths' that operate in the social world" (Denzin, 1997, p. xiv) of public schools receiving corporate sponsorships.

Report of Outcomes, Recipients of Outcomes, and Utilization of Knowledge:

Given the public nature of performance, performance ethnography has the potential to reach wide audiences, consisting of a diverse cross-section of the community, including scholars and laypeople. Hopefully, *School Inc.* will promote informed public dialogue on the issue of corporate involvement in schools and contribute to the growing body of scholarship that upholds the value of arts-based research. With performed narrative as the vehicle, it is possible that the ideas contained in this thesis will continue to be performed publicly and, in this way, travel beyond academia and reach the public-at-large.

Part IV: Larger Economic Trends Influencing Both Commercialism in Schools and the Call for Arts-Based Research

The qualifications that Dr. David C. Korten brings to his analysis of global corporate power structures are most impressive. After obtaining an M.B.A. in international business and a Ph.D. in organizational theory from Stanford Business School, he served in Vietnam as a captain of the U.S. Air Force. He then spent five and a half years instructing at the Harvard University Graduate School of Business, followed by two decades working in the international development community. From this vantage point, Korten observed the extent to which government institutions that serve the public good have lost power to corporations serving private interests. In his book, *When Corporations Rule the World*, he describes this shift:

It is a crisis of governance born of a convergence of ideological, political, and technological forces behind a process of economic globalization that is

shifting power away from governments responsible for the public good and toward a handful of corporations and financial institutions driven by a single imperative – the quest for short term financial gain. (Korten, 1995, p. 112)

Within this context of economic globalization and the ascent of corporate power, Korten offers insight into how this shift affects schools:

In modern societies, television has arguably become our most important institution of cultural reproduction. Our schools are probably the second most important. Television has already been wholly colonized by corporate interests, which are now laying claim to our schools. The goal is not simply to sell products and strengthen the consumer culture. It is also to create a political culture that equates the corporate interest with the human interest in the public mind. (Korten, 1995, p. 149)

Korten establishes the link between the rising global corporate power and the fact that “corporations are now moving aggressively to colonize the second major institution of cultural reproduction, the schools” (Korten, 1995, p. 154). That this broad and rather startling analysis comes from a critic with such impeccable credentials underscores the need for a closer and more public examination of commercialism in schools.

Korten also recognizes that traditional methods of research, emphasizing the human capacity to reason while ignoring other faculties, may well play a role in bringing about the challenges that public institutions are now facing:

The Western scientific vision of a mechanical universe has created a philosophical or conceptual alienation from our own inherent spiritual nature. The more dominant money has become...the less place there has been for any sense of the spiritual bond that is the foundation of community and a balanced relationship with nature. (Korten, 1995, p. 6)

One of the more striking elements of this critique stems from the fact that Korten has himself risen within the conservative world of business administration. That Korten, a professor of business administration, would cite the tendency for the pursuit of material

wealth to diminish our capacity to promote community is an obvious break from the traditionally pro-business development stance one expects from business scholars.

Korten's analysis also suggests how the need for research to provide verifiable results may diminish the success with which social scientists can engage in meaningful discussion of highly abstract, emotionally charged, value-based issues. In an academic culture that favours verifiable research results, scholars are less inclined to engage in research that strives to establish a "moral compass" (Denzin, 2003a, p.118) and evoke political action. Instead, research takes refuge in what one might mistakenly consider the safe footing of numerical data and verifiable results. This creates the appearance of having removed the moral and/or emotional elements from the research. Of course, the assertion that any research, especially in the social sciences, is void of the researcher's moral or emotional influence is untenable.

To not react with moral indignation, when corporate interests target public education for colonization is both a reflection of one's moral compass and one's emotional state. In other words, to accept increased commercialization unemotionally, without making a moral judgement, is, paradoxically, both an emotional expression (acceptance, satisfaction...etc) and a moral judgement (that it is acceptable to commercialize public education).

In *The Unconscious Civilization*, the 1995 publication of the *CBC Massey Lecture Series*, John Ralston Saul explores our current crises of thinking, not in terms of the material versus the spiritual, but rather ideological certainty versus humanist doubt. He examines the rise of corporate power within the context of twenty-four hundred years of Western European history and philosophy. He argues that, in the final decades of the

twentieth century, Western civilization was locked in the grip of an ideology – corporatism. The result is that our identities and sense of legitimacy are largely a product of the organizational structures within which we work rather than our individual sense of citizenship. Consequently, there is a trend toward increasing self-interest:

[Corporatism is an] ideology that denies and undermines the legitimacy of the individual as the citizen in a democracy. The particular imbalance of this ideology leads to worship of self-interest and a denial of the public good. (Saul, 1995, p. 117)

Saul sees a centuries old struggle between two groups: corporatists, who derive their power and advancement from a commitment to certainty and organizational structures versus the enlightenment/romantic view of humanism that, in an effort to keep power with the citizen, promotes skepticism and caution.

Because of increasing corporatism, and the subsequent “denial of the public good,” there has been a shift in the values underlying public education. It is worth noting that, in an interview published in the UBC online journal *Educational Insights*, UBC Professor of Education and former BC Deputy-Minister of Education, Charles Ungerleider, makes the same point:

For most of the history of Canadian public schooling, we’ve had a good balance between education as a benefit to the individual and education as a benefit to the society. I see that balance shifting to where people are seeing education primarily as an individual benefit. (Cook, 2004)

When the commitment to self-interest increases, the willingness to speak out against perceived injustice, an essential element of those concerned with the public good, diminishes.

Fear of negative professional repercussions is one source of the unwillingness for those working within corporatist organizations i.e. within universities and public schools,

to publicly criticize their employers. Given this context, performance ethnography, with its emphasis on exploring the multiple truths expressed by fictionalized characters, provides a forum where scholars may feel less threatened when initiate dialogue about politically contentious issues.

From Saul's argument, we can infer further support for performance ethnography. His premise is that our susceptibility to the false certainties promised by the corporatist ideology, or any ideology, leads to worship of self-interest and denial of the public good. What opposes this trend and promotes true social advancement is the humanist's capacity to be skeptical and stir doubt among the citizenship. By exploring conflicting values, performance ethnography provides a counter balance to the claim of certainty, a claim that, in the context of social sciences, can accentuate the worst effects of ideology.

Saul's analysis provides insight into the positions held by Eisner and Philips. Philips is critical of Eisner's view of art as research in that it has no clear, manageable central question, and therefore cannot provide us with a clear answer. This approach contends that if research cannot produce clear, definable, and verifiable results - that is to say *certainty*- then it should not be considered research. Philips is supporting what Saul might consider the quest for certainty that characterizes ideology.

Conversely, one might consider Eisner to be more of the humanist ilk. He contends that good art, such as literature, despite the absence of definable results, promotes greater understanding of issues pertaining to education. Such research is also valuable because it informs while fostering the humanistic virtue of doubt.

The advantages of performance research can also be inferred from Saul's case that our experts, both among the managerial and academic elite, are caught in professional

structures that prevent them from engaging in political issues that are meaningful and relevant:

The highly educated, technocratic, specialized elites who make up more than a third of our population are caught in structures which require of them courtier like behaviour. (Saul, 1995, p. 27)

Like the courtiers who protect their professional reputations by not offending the monarch, so too do our elite avoid speaking out against dominant political ideologies. Saul argues that our academic elite have, for the most part, lost sight of their role in upholding the humanist tradition of questioning and casting doubt on dominant values.

According to Saul, a great deal of scholarship is now bound up in narrow fields of specialized endeavour characterized by "the growth of an obscure, closed language that seeks to prevent communication" (Saul, 1995, p. 57). He describes how "expert" language serves to promote the expert rather than public debate:

Economists, political scientists and sociologists in particular have attempted to imitate scientific analysis through the accumulation of circumstantial evidence, but, above all, through their parodies of the worst of scientific dialects. As in business and governmental corporations, the purpose of such obscure language could be reduced to the following formula: obscurity suggests complexity which suggests importance. The dialects are thus more or less conscious weapons of self-protection and unconscious tools of self-deception. (Saul, 1995, pp. 49-50)

Furthermore, the managerial and academic elite are "indeed castrated as citizens because their professions, their employment contracts...make it impossible for them to participate in the public place" (Saul, 1995, p. 91).

For Saul, these developments help explain why our academic elite no longer provide "the No [sic] of the warner, the Erasmian hesitation, reflection and Socratic caution" (Craig, 1991, p. 222). Instead, they offer their tacit approval to the rising level of corporate influence:

The universities have become to a great extent the handmaidens of the corporatist system. This is not simply because of the academic specializations and their impenetrable academic dialects, which have become in turn the veils of governmental and industrial action.

A far worse criticism would be that of the betrayal by much of higher education in their wider mission. If the universities cannot teach the humanist tradition as a central part of their narrowest specializations, then they have indeed sunk back into the worst of medieval scholasticism. (Saul, 1995, p. 70)

As well as decrying the influence that corporatist ideology has had on education, Saul is endorsing a vision of scholarship that promotes rational skepticism through the use of clear and accessible language. For him "philosophy is a matter of public debate or it is nothing. Philosophy as just another specialist corporation is a flagrant return to medieval scholasticism" (Saul, 1995, p. 58).

Performance ethnography, with its capacity to present contentious issues in a public forum, becomes, in the context of Saul's ideas, an important means of researching issues and promoting the participation of the skeptical citizen in a way that "is central to a citizen-based society; that is democracy" (Saul, 1995, p. 43). Saul's analysis of the influence of corporatist ideology provides insight into the ongoing commercialization of education and acknowledges the limitations of dialect-laden and intensely specialized scholarship. Such an analysis validates the use of performance ethnography, a methodology that explores the complexities of value-based issues in clear and accessible language.

This link between the increasing commercialization of education and the academic community's apparent inability to participate meaningfully in the debate is taken up by Naomi Klein in her groundbreaking work, *No Logo* (Klein, 2000). Described as "[e]qual parts cultural analysis, journalistic exposé and mall-rat memoir, from one of the most insightful and respected young commentators in North America today," *No*

Logo explains “the bad moon rising against the brands” (Klein, 2000, in-leaf). She begins her analysis where Korten leaves off. Rather than write “another account of the power of the select group of corporate Goliaths that have gathered to form our de facto global government,” she attempts to “analyze and document the forces opposing corporate rule, and to lay out the particular set of cultural and economic conditions that made the emergence of that opposition inevitable” (Klein, 2000, p. xxi).

In this context she describes how corporate sponsorship in public schools has managed “over the course of one decade...[to] all but eliminate the barrier between ads and education” (Klein, 2000, p. 88). Like Korten, she acknowledges the larger goal of corporations sponsoring public education:

As with all branding projects, it is never enough to tag the schools with a few logos. Having gained a foothold, the brand managers are now doing what they have done in music, sports, and journalism outside the schools: trying to overwhelm their host, to grab the spotlight. They are fighting for their brands to become not the add-on but the subject of education, not an elective, but the core curriculum. (Klein, 2000, p. 89)

To make her case, Klein provides examples of how the presence of corporate sponsorship both in public schools and universities has limited free speech and influenced scholarship (Klein, 2000, pp. 87-105). She then poses some vital questions regarding the university’s capacity to defend free speech:

Why have university professors remained silent, passively allowing their corporate “partners” to trample the principles of freedom of inquiry and discourse that have been the avowed centerpieces of academic life? More to the point, aren’t our campuses supposed to be overflowing with troublemaking tenured radicals? Isn’t the institution of tenure, with its lifelong promise of job security, designed to make it safe for academics to take controversial positions without fear of repercussion? Aren’t these people, to borrow a term more readily understood in the halls of academe, *counter hegemonic*? (Klein, 2000, p. 183)

Klein suggests three possible explanations for this complacency. First, she partly blames simple self-interest. Until the mid-nineties, much of the corporate sponsorship took place in the engineering departments, the management schools and science labs and these faculties have long been considered “hopelessly compromised right-wing bastions by campus radicals” (Klein, 2000, pg. 184). Secondly, she suggests that the predominance of post-modern thought at university faculties had left professors “preoccupied with their own post-modernist realization that truth itself is a construct” (Klein, 2000, p. 184). which, in turn, made it untenable for academics to advance a strong opinion regarding the commercialization of learning. Her final suggestion is that those campus radicals who were predisposed to engaging in political disputes were caught up in the “all consuming gender and race debates of the so called political correctness wars.” (Klein, 2000, p. 184).

On this subject, Klein employs some of her strongest language:

In this new globalized context, the victories of identity politics have amounted to *rearranging the furniture while the house burned down*.

Yes, there are more multi-ethnic sitcoms and even more black executives – but whatever cultural enlightenment has followed has not prevented the population in the underclass from exploding or homelessness from reaching crises levels in many North American urban centres. (Klein, 2000, p. 123)
[italics mine]

Like Saul, Klein argues that while schools and other public institutions undergo a profound value shift away from serving the public good and toward serving private interests, our university elites have not meaningfully entered their voices in the debate. Consequently, there is, according to Saul, “a sense in the citizenry that they have been abandoned by their thinkers; a sense of being betrayed by an intelligentsia that does not

take the humanist experience seriously, particularly not the drama of the citizen-based democracy" (Saul, 1995, p. 179).

From this one can draw two important conclusions: first, corporate influence is penetrating education at an alarming rate and this represents a value-shift that is already manifesting itself in negative ways. Secondly, the current academic culture, with its traditional research methodologies, has not yet produced public dialogue and/or debate that is commensurate with the significance of this issue.

I therefore offer the following play, *School Inc.*, in an effort to explore these truths, and, if successful, bring public attention to the vitally important debate regarding the impact of corporate sponsorships on public education.

CHAPTER TWO

School Inc.

for Avrel

School Inc.

Cast of Characters:

Jim Freeman	English teacher at Clearview Secondary
Pam Freeman	Jim's wife
Ella Freeman	Jim's nine-year-old daughter
Michael Lerner	lawyer
Janet Larsen	principal's secretary
Karl Buchner	principal of Clearview Secondary
Frank Johnson	superintendent of the Fairview School District
Suzanne Perkins	vice-principal of Clearview Secondary
David Baker	P.E. teacher
Molly Lind	students
Justine Balor	
Antonio Brunetti	
Kelly, Mark	
Gwen Brunetti	parent
News broadcaster	(female voice in pre-recorded news clip)

The school district motto projects on a large screen (approx. 8'x8'), centre-upstage: "**Fairview School District: Investing in Children, Investing in the Future.**" House lights fade. Lights rise down stage right on three waiting room chairs, a large plant and a coffee table with brochures. Since this is the lobby of a public high school office, the furniture is plain, not lavish. Jim Freeman enters, paces, then sits. He is haggard looking from having slept very little over the three previous nights. The principal's secretary, Miss Janet Larsen, an older, motherly woman, enters stage left.

Act One

Act One

Scene One

Janet: Has your lawyer arrived yet, Jim?

Jim: No, not yet.

Janet: What should I tell them?

Jim: I don't know. Tell them that he must be caught in traffic.

Janet: Jim, whatever happens, me and Susan, everybody in the office really, we've always thought that you were a wonderful teacher.

Jim: "Were", Janet?

Janet: I meant "are". They haven't said anything like that, Jim. They've just reviewed the case with their lawyer. I meant to say "you are".

Jim: I know you did. I was just teasing.

Janet: I don't know what Karl and Frank are thinking. The ladies in the office are all certain that this has been blown terribly out of proportion.

Jim: Thank you for saying that, Janet. Thank you.

Michael: (*Michael enters stage right. He is wearing a tired sports jacket and carrying a briefcase*) Hello, my name is Michael Lerner. Would you please direct me to a Mr. Jim Freeman?

Jim: Here, present, president.

Michael: Hello, Jim. I'm Michael Lerner, in-house counsel with the Federation of Teachers. We spoke this morning on the phone. My apologies for being late but traffic was ungodly.

Janet: Can I tell the meeting that we'll begin soon?

Michael: No you cannot. May I ask who you are and the nature of your relationship to Mr. Freeman?

Jim: This is Janet, the principal's secretary and a friend: Janet, Michael; Michael, Janet.

Michael: Hello, Janet. I must make certain for my client's sake that...

Janet: What shall I tell the meeting, Michael?

Michael: If they want to have the meeting today, we will need at least an hour, likely longer to review the particulars of the case, and to brief Mr. Freeman as to the relevant jurisprudence.

Janet: I'll tell them. (*Janet exits stage left*)

Michael: I'd have preferred more time but they've got me doing the work of six lawyers.

Jim: That inspires confidence.

Michael: (*Sets his briefcase on the table, then removes a file, legal paper, and a pen.*) Pardon the hyperbole. This morning's meeting was much more challenging than expected. A teacher accused of inappropriate conduct has chained himself to the flag post until the charges are dropped. As the entire city will learn on tonight's news, that's not the best strategy. As for your case, I've read their letter and, based on what you told me this morning, you've got yourself into quite a fix.

Jim: Piercing insight, counsel. That must be why they pay you the big bucks.

Michael: Right, I appreciate the irony on both counts. I'll need the details from the very beginning.

Janet: (*Janet enters stage left.*) They are willing to wait, but they request that the meeting begin in one hour and no later.

Michael: We'll aim for an hour, but we'll make no guarantees. (*He waits for Janet to leave*) Alright, Jim, tell me what happened and include what took place in your personal life. Given the stressful nature of the school environment, judges pay close attention to whether an incident suggests a momentary lapse in judgement or an ongoing character deficiency. A judge may cite personal circumstances as grounds for lenience, if not a complete rejection of the charges.

Jim: I have a question.

Michael: Yes?

Jim: Can they fire me for speaking the truth?

Michael: The truth has always been subversive, for that history offers no counter-argument. But I'll fight tooth and nail to prevent your losing your job over it. That's why they pay me the big bucks.

Jim: Touché.

Michael: We'd better get started.

(Lights fade. Screen fades to static.)

Scene Two

"Morning Sequence" begins on screen: footage of the sun rising quickly over traffic. Static cut to the "The Happy Freeman Family": Jim, Ella, and Pam holding the bab sit with beaming smiles on the front porch of a quaint suburban home. Cut to static.

On the table at center stage sit two empty wine bottles, some books and a remote control. Ella enters stage right in her brightly coloured pajamas and slippers, carrying a bowl of cereal. She sets the cereal down on the table then sits in one of the three chairs. She takes a mouthful of cereal before aiming the remote control at the screen. A stylized cartoon loop begins. Interspersed in the loop is the Cash-Cola sign i.e. the cartoon's sponsor. (see Act II. scene 4 for description of sign). The sound, at a low volume, is an indecipherable mix of cartoon voices, canned laughter and music. Pam enters stage right wearing her house coat, carrying a plastic food container and a cup of coffee. She sets both on the table.

Ella: Good morning, Mommie.

Pam: Good morning, honey. *(Picks up the bottles then places them on the floor.)* How did you sleep?

Ella: Fine, but I had a really crazy dream about riding ponies on ice skates.

Pam: You must be excited about skating tomorrow. Jim? Jim? *(Picks up the food container)* Don't forget your lunch, it's next to your coat. *(Places his lunch next to the wine bottles.)* Do you hear me? Say something if you hear me. We can't afford you buying your lunch every day.

Jim: *(Jim enters stage right, tucking in his shirt. Throughout this scene he will be preparing to leave for work.)* Yes, I'm right here, no need to yell. Is there coffee made?

Pam: I poured you a cup. *(Motions toward the table)*

Jim: Thank you. Is my princess ready to go back to school?

Ella: Yes. I'm looking forward to seeing my friends and hearing what they got for Christmas.

Jim: And I'm sure they're looking forward to seeing you. Do we have any Tylenol, Pam. All I can find is kid's stuff.

Pam: Don't use those. Buy a bottle on your way to work.

Jim: Is there any Aspirin, Advil? I need something

Pam: You need to not stay up half the night drinking. I set your bottles by your coat. Put them in the garage on you way out.

Jim: I wasn't "*drinking half the night*". I was marking essays and planning a lesson.

Pam: Somebody drank two bottles of wine.

Jim: I'm starting a new unit on advertising...

Pam: Your drinking sets a bad example.

Jim: Oh, Jesus, Pam, not first thing on a Monday morning. A little wine keeps the creativity flowing. You should be proud of how hard I work.

Pam: Proud? You think I should be proud?

Jim: Sure. Some wives put up with husbands who hardly work at all.

Pam: Why should I be proud of you staying up half the night drinking, to do twice the work for a job that gives you half the pay? Do you want more cereal, Ella?

Ella: No, thank you.

Pam: (*Falls into a kitchen chair at the table*) I'm just really, really tired.

Jim: Why don't you rest today?

Pam: I have to be at the bank at ten to do something about the credit cards. Then go grocery shopping, there's nothing to eat in this house, the beds all need changing, the bathrooms need cleaning...

Jim: This is just a rough spot, Pam, we'll pull through. And for you sweetie, (*Ruffles Ella's hair*) how's my princess?

Ella: I'm fine, daddy. How are you?

Jim: Very good, my dear, very good. I'm all ready to go teach those big crazy kids about this big crazy world of ours.

Ella: I don't think the world's crazy, Daddy,

Pam: It's not, honey. That's just your father being funny.

Jim: Oh, I dunno, some parts seem a little out of whack. It is now time to go wage war on ignorance and apathy. And Ella baby, the love of my life, the apple of my eye, what, if I may steal a minute of your most precious time, is *ignorance* and *apathy*?

Ella: I don't know and I don't care.

Jim: That's my girl.

Pam: Jim, don't forget that Ella's class is going skating tomorrow afternoon. I've signed us up to drive kids back to school, you'll need to leave immediately after work. Don't make other plans.

Jim: Consider it done. Ella, honey, I'd rather you didn't watch that first thing in the morning.

Ella: Gawd, dad.

Jim: Please don't say "Gawd, dad." It sounds crass.

Ella: I have to get ready anyway. *(She aims the remote control at the screen. The screen cuts to blank.)*
What does "crass" mean?

Jim: Hard, harsh, crude. *(Walking toward stage left.)* And Pam, I won't work late tonight. This semester will be different, I promise.

Pam: Let's try, Jim. Promise me that we'll try.

Jim: I already did, but I'll promise again: I promise. Have a wonderful day, ladies. I'll see you both tonight. *(He gives his daughter a kiss on the head.)*

Pam: Enjoy your first day back.

Ella: By daddy, I love you!

Jim: Love you too; love you two, too; I love you two in your two tutus, too. *(He picks up the bottles and exits stage left.)*

Pam: Jim! You forgot your lunch. *(Pam sits down at the kitchen table and bows her head. Ella walks past and puts her hand on her mother's shoulder. A baby's cry is heard from the wings. Pam raises her head.)* Let's go check on that brother of yours. He must be scaling his crib walls by now. *(They exit stage right. Screen shows a more rapid version of "The Happy Freeman Family", then cuts to static, before fading to blank.)*

Scene Three

As the stage is being set, a thirty second commercial starring the cast from the play begins. The commercial is intended to "sell" the play, not to preview the actual plot. The students are presented as fun loving and sexy. The good-looking, cool ones (Antonio, Kelly and Mark) tease Justine, who is clearly the outcast. She shows her superficial disapproval. Because she understands her place in the social hierarchy, she good-naturedly accepts the teasing. In the class room, Molly, wearing a provocative school girl dress, bends over to place an apple on Jim's desk. He is visibly uncomfortable with her beauty, and drops his papers. She sees him fumbling, and pinches his cheek. Apart from the basketball coach, Mr. Baker, the teachers and the administrators are presented as awkward and fumbling. The final shot is of all the participants posing as if for a school photo. They are all smiling. The slogan at the commercial's conclusion reads "School Inc.: Politics. Profit. Passion". Fade to white.

A small desk sits center-stage under the screen. An overhead projector is next to the desk. On each side of the desk are three desks, opening in a "V" shape toward the audience. We hear the sound of students and lockers coming from the wings. Jim enters stage left, sets a box on his desk, and begins taking out papers. His shirt is not tucked in at the back and his tie is crooked. A moment later, Karl Buchner, the Principal, enters stage left.

Karl: Good afternoon, Jim, I was hoping to catch you before your last class. I trust you had a relaxing holiday.

Jim: Hello, Karl. My holiday was good, I guess.

Karl: "Good, I guess?" That's not the most enthusiastic response I've heard today.

Jim: Between in-laws and the kids, I hardly had a moment to myself. I did manage to organize a new unit.

Karl: Outstanding! Keep those new ideas coming. Listen, we have another student for your English Twelve class. I think that you might be able to do something with this kid. Her name is Balor, Justine Balor.

Jim: Where's she coming from?

Karl: I've promised old Smitty over at Cedarview that we'd take her off his hands. She's had a rough go, five schools in three years.

Jim: Why so many schools?

Karl: From what I've heard, she's very confrontational and has a hell of a temper.

Jim: And you think that my class is the right place for her?

Karl: Maybe you can challenge her a little, spark an interest that'll keep her in school and out of jail. Her tests show that she's extremely intelligent.

Jim: I'll see what I can do.

Karl: We're not gonna give up on the kid yet, not on my watch. Enjoy your last class, Jimmy. I'll see you at the staff meeting.

Jim: I'd completely forgotten.

Karl: Yes, sir, first Monday of the month. I expect to see all the teachers there at 3:15 sharp. And Jim, the coat tail look went out in the twenties. *(Exit stage right)*

Jim: Oh, I hadn't noticed. *(He tucks in his shirt. Molly Lind enters stage left and pauses near the wings, holding her school books in one arm. She has dark hair pulled back from her pretty face. Her eyes reveal both sensitivity and intelligence. Her turtleneck sweater and knee length skirt give a mature nobility to her statuesque figure. She watches Jim leaning over his desk, organizing his papers. Finally, she looks down to the books in her left arm and takes out a cd.)*

Molly: Hello.

Jim: *(Surprised)* Hey there, Molly. How are you?

Molly: I'm fine thank you. How are you?

Jim: A little tired the first day back, to be honest. Did you have a good break?

Molly: Yes, I did.

Jim: Did you stay here in town?

Molly: No, I went to Montreal with my family. My father's considering a transfer.

Jim: Wonderful! Did you speak some French?

Molly: Sort of, but it's hard. I couldn't get a sentence out. It was like I hadn't learned anything in four years of French class.

Jim: Don't worry about that. You'll just have to spend more time where they speak that language. *(Mark and Kelly enter stage right. Mark sits down at a near desk. Kelly places her books down on a desk across from him, then walks over to Mark's desk. Their action is subtle, and does not upstage Jim and Molly's dialogue. Kelly's body language suggests her romantic interest in Mark.)*

Molly: Before I forget, I burned you a cd over the holidays.

Jim: Thank-you very much.

Molly: I think you'll really like track ten, it's from one of my favourite movies. Let me know what you think of it.

Jim: I'll give it a listen. Alright, if I could get everybody to quickly take their seats, we'll get started. *(Jim walks to the overhead projector and clicks it on. His writing appears on the screen.)*

English 12

1. Return Essays

2. Review Colloquialisms

3. Begin New Unit!

(Enter Antonio)

Antonio: What's up Mr. Freeman?

Jim: Hello, Antonio. How are you?

Antonio: All is well, dude, all is well.

Jim: Please don't call me "dude", Antonio. While were waiting for Antonio to get seated, let's get reacquainted? How were your holidays, Mark?

Mark: Alright

Jim: And what made them *alright*?

Mark: *(Slouched in his chair.)* You know, the usual: hung out, partied, smoked a lot of...oh I guess I can't say that, dude... I mean Mr. Freeman... like you know what I mean.

Jim: Yes, Mark, I do know what you mean.

Jim: Antonio, now that you're seated, tell me about your holidays?

Antonio: What do you want to know?

Jim: What did you do? Where did you go?

Antonio: Went snowboardin' with the folks.

Jim: And how was that?

Antonio: The boardin' was great but hangin' out with the parentals kinda sucked.

Jim: "Sucked" isn't the best word for class. Where did you go skiing?

Antonio: Aspen, Colorado.

Jim: Sounds rather luxurious. And Kelly, how were your holidays?

Kelly: They were like really good.

Jim: And why were they "like really good."

Kelly: Well, I did like a tonne o' work on the fashion show.

Jim: Did you do anything else?

Antonio: Yeah... Mark.

Kelly: Oh- my- god! You're such an asshole. I can't believe you said that.

Jim: Antonio, save the adolescent humour for the locker room. And Kelly, watch your language please.

Kelly: *(To Mark)* I can't believe that you told him.

Mark: *(To Antonio)* Like thanks a lot, dude.

Jim: Alright, alright, let's move on. Molly, why don't you tell us about your trip to Quebec?

Molly: It was lovely. I went with my family to art galleries, and restaurants. I also enjoyed just sitting in cafés and reading.

Antonio: Sounds like a blast, Molly. *(Mark snickers.)*

Jim: As strange as it may sound, Antonio, some of us do read for pleasure.

Antonio: I was serious, it sounds like *a lovely time.* *(More snickers)*

Jim: One's humour, Mr. Brunetti, reveals a good deal about one's character.

Antonio: *(Facetiously)* You don't say...

Jim: I do say. Your humour suggests that you find intelligence laughable.

Antonio: Are you saying I'm stupid?

Jim: No, but your humour suggests that you don't *value* intelligence. *(Justine enters stage right and stops near wings. She is in the "full regalia" of rebellious youth. This can be modified to fit the current culture, but big boots, black clothes, chains, dark eye-liner and radically coloured hair are the general idea.)*

Jim: Yes, ma'am! How may we help you?

Justine: I think I'm in your class. The schedule says "English 12: Freeman."

Jim: Yes, you've come to the right place. You must be Justine.

Justine: Yeah.

Jim: Come in, Justine. Ladies and gentlemen, this is Justine Balor. Justine meet the class. Ms. Perkins, the vice-principal is having a desk sent down. But in the meantime you can grab one of those chairs (*Points off stage left*) and plug yourself in at the end of the row. (*Justine exits stage left and returns with a chair. Sits next to Molly.*) And why don't you come and see me after class, I've a favour to ask.

Justine: No problemo.

Antonio: (*With sexual insinuation*) After school favours, I like it.

Jim: You know, Antonio, I've had just about enough of your inappropriate remarks.

Antonio: What d'ya mean?

Jim: You know exactly what I mean. That's twice you've made remarks that've made people feel uncomfortable. (*Motions toward the door*) So take a five-minute break and give it some thought.

Antonio: What for?

Jim: I told you my reasons. Now you've got five minutes to think about it.

Antonio: Whatever, dude. (*Antonio exits.*)

Jim: Okay, let's get this class started. First, I'd like to discuss the poetry analysis I marked over the holidays(*He begins handing back the essays. Kelly's hand goes up*) Yes, Kelly?

Kelly: I have to leave class at like two-thirty for the fashion show.

Jim: Do you have a note from the supervising teacher?

Kelly: Don't you like believe me?

Jim: Yes, but I still need a note. Bring it tomorrow. Yes, Mark?

Mark: Is it true that you've only been teaching for two years?

Jim: Yes.

Mark: You're pretty old, dude. Whadya do before?.

Jim: Mark, it's not appropriate to call me "dude."

Mark: Whatever. Whadya do before?

Jim: I was in public relations.

Mark: Did you make lots of money?

Jim: I did alright, but let's have this conversation at another time. Now, the essays we're quite good. (*Picks up a stack of essays and begins returning them to the students.*) Molly, yours was very well done, a beautiful use of language and a most sensitive interpretation. There are, however, too many people using slang and colloquialisms in their formal writing. (*Mark opens a can of pop in class.*) Please don't bring pop to class.

Mark: Sorry, dude. It's my lunch.

Jim: That's an awful lunch. Calling a teacher dude is an excellent example of language that is too familiar or casual for a formal setting. Far too many of you used informal words and phrases, also known as colloquialisms, in your essays. Now, I'm not a language prude. In the right context I also use slang and colloquial language....

Mark: *(Very facetiously)* Like gosh golly Mr. Freeman, you must be a real hip cat, when you use that jive talk.

Jim: Very funny, Mark. *(Puts one hand near his crotch, and moves the other back and forth in front of him, hunches his shoulders, and imitates the language and movement of urban rap culture. This line is open to interpretation; it should strive to capture the current language of disaffected, disrespectful, cool youth.)* But like, yo, yo, yo, g. Why you like totally dissin' me, bro? Dawg, I can talk shit, you know whad I'm sayin', you know whad I'm sayin. Don't make me bus a cap in yo' ass, dawg.

Mark: Nice, dude, nice!

Jim: Thank you, Mark. But you'll never catch me speaking like that in class, except of course for effect and certainly never to Mr. Buchner, the principal, or to a parent, because I've learned how and when to speak formal English. Last night I put together a worksheet that will help us improve these skills. *(Begins handing out papers.)* I'm giving you twelve sentences, each one contains a colloquialism. In the space provided, I want you to rewrite the sentence, replacing the colloquialisms with more suitable language.... *(Lights fade to dim. Screen fades. In the dim light, Jim returns to his desk and starts working. The students continue to work on the assignment.)*

Scene Four

(Screen shows proud strong men in blue suits. Lights rise on a large desk down-stage left. Karl Buchner and Frank Johnson enter stage left. Karl takes the seat behind the desk. Frank sits down in front of the desk.)

Frank: I'm happy to hear that the boys are doing so well, Karl. And how's Julie?

Karl: She's managing to keep her spirits up. We're all trying to stay as positive as possible.

Frank: Attitude is very important.

Karl: This has certainly forced us to take stock of our priorities.

Frank: Serious illness does have that effect. Rest assured that our prayers are with your entire family.

Karl: Thank you, Frank. *(Pause)* What's the budget news?

Frank: Not very good, the cuts are severe. This government wants all the fat out of the system, and they want it done fast. The secretarial and custodial staff will be hardest hit, then the teachers, and of course our sports and clubs will need to be trimmed back as well.

Karl: Christ.

Johnson: We'll get through it, we always do. This political business is mostly out of our hands but I've a plan for bringing more money in.

Karl: Let's hear it.

Frank: Last spring I attended the superintendents' conference in Phoenix. Nice spot, Phoenix, the golfing was superb. In any case, how to bring money back into public education was one of the central issues. Different solutions were put forward, but corporate sponsorship was quite obviously the belle of the ball. You wouldn't believe the businesses lining up to put some serious dollars into schools. (*Examples of logos appear on the screen, changing at a steady pace.*)

Karl: Yes, I've heard of this.

Johnson: The major players are the beverage companies, but others have shown interest as well: shoe and clothing manufacturers, food providers, computer companies, even a watch maker. The writing's on the wall, these corporate sponsorships are the way of the future.

Karl: Well good then, if they soften the impact of these cuts.

Frank: I'll have some literature sent over in the morning. Listen, there's one more thing.

Karl: What's up?

Frank: Since this is a new source of revenue, district policy requires a teacher and a parent at each school to approve the change. So I'll need a signature from the head of the your parent committee and a teacher.

Karl: When do you want it?

Frank: The sooner the better.

Karl: Well, we're in luck: there's a School Planning Meeting this afternoon. If you send over the new policy, I'll get those signatures back to you first thing in the morning.

Frank: That'd be great. (*Frank stands, then Karl. Logos fade to static, then screen goes blank.*) I almost forgot, there's an assistant superintendent's position opening up in the Lakefield School District. Miller over there has asked me for some names. If you're interested, have your girl send over a copy of your resume. He and I are on the golf course later this afternoon. I'll put in a good word.

Karl: Thank you very much. I appreciate the favour. (*Karl exits stage left. Frank sits. Spotlight fades.*)

Scene Five

Class agenda, as described above, fades back into screen. Lights rise on class.

Jim: Alright, let's move on. Please put that away. Whatever's not finished is homework. (*Antonio enters and takes his seat.*) Today we're starting a new unit on a different type of story telling. Our focus - Mark put it away please - I want your full attention, thank you - our focus is going to be what I like to call the *little stories*; the *raison d'être* of newspapers, magazines, and television. Can you guess what I'm talking about? (*Pause*) Give it a little thought? (*Pause*) Come on. They cost the most money to produce...and regardless of your personal taste, you'll no doubt be watching, seeing, or reading these.

Justine: Commercials, the advertisements.

J: I think the new kid's on to me. Yes, today we are beginning our study of advertising. (*Kelly raises her hand*) Yes, Kelly?

Kelly: Like, what does this have to do with English?

Jim: A very good question, Kelly. What is the subject of English literature, but the study of story telling? These days, rather than reading books, most of us satisfy our need for stories by watching TV. And what pays the bill for all those television stories? The advertisements, of course. One can't fully understand television or newspaper or magazine stories without understanding their driving force. It is the advertisements that make them all possible. I'm sure you'll find this unit quite stimulating.

Antonio: I like *stimulating*.

Jim: Antonio, please. Alright, take out a piece of paper and a pen. *(He walks to the overhead, scrolls up the agenda.)* To get your brains thinking about advertising, I'm giving you a list of five products and I want you to list as many ads as you can for each. We'll start with an easy one: cars. *(He writes "1. cars" on the overhead.)* Jot down a few words describing the commercials that you remember for cars, see how many you can get. Number two: razor blades. *(Writes...)* Three: potato chips. Four: soap. And number five: carbonated beverages, in other words, pop. You'll be surprised at how many ads you have swimming around your brains. And each one of those ads is telling you that you're not quite complete and that you could be happier if you'd just spend your money in a certain way. What effect does that have on a society? *(Bell sounds.)* Okay, that's all folks. I'll collect your lists tomorrow. Have a good night. *(Students begin to leave. Molly, the last student remaining in class, passes Freeman's desk on her way out.)* Molly, thank you for the CD, I'm looking forward to listening to it.

Molly: Oh, you're welcome. I'm looking forward to hearing what you think. Bye.

Jim: Bye-bye.

Molly exits stage left. Jim takes a breath, returns to his desk, sits down and places the cd in the stereo. As he starts writing in his day book, Ennio Morricone's "Titoli di Coda", from Tornatore's film "Malena" begins. Twenty seconds into the song, Molly enters stage left and stops where Jim cannot see her. Jim stops his writing and raises his head; he is captivated by the music. Molly observes him listening for a moment. She fixes her hair, and flattens her skirt. Jim, sensing her presence, turns to see her. He lowers the volume of the music.

Jim: Hi there, Molly, I didn't see you come in.

Molly: Do you like the music? *(She walks over to the desk and stands half a step closer than expected. Alone in his company, she is relaxed and confident.)*

Jim: It's beautiful. There's something heartbreaking about it. *(Antonio enters stage right. Neither Jim nor Molly sees him. He listens to their conversation.)*

Molly: I thought you'd like it. It's from the soundtrack of the movie "Malena". It's Italian, have you seen it?

Jim: I haven't.

Molly: It's one of my favourites. It's about how most people can't really tolerate anything exceptional.

Jim: Sounds interesting. What was the title again?

Molly: "Malena", directed by Giuseppe Tornatore. The soundtrack's by Ennio Morricone.

Jim: Of course, he composed the wonderful music from The Mission, it's...

Molly: Do you have the CD?

Jim: Yes, I do.

Molly: I've been searching for it everywhere.

Jim: You can borrow it, if you'd like.

Molly: Sure, that would be great. *(Pause)* There's something that I'd like to discuss with you, Mr. Freeman.

Jim: What is it, Ms. Lind?

Molly: I was asked to be in the school fashion show. And, well last night, I decided to do it.

Jim: Congratulations, though it doesn't surprise me that they'd ask you.

Molly: You don't consider it shallow and degrading to women?

Jim: No. There has always been a tension between what is ennobling and what is degrading when appreciating the female body. Nevertheless, feminine beauty has been the subject of some very significant art. The Venus de Milo, for example, is undeniably an object of desire; or the Mona Lisa for that matter. *(Notes fade to static, fade in the Venus de Milo.)* I think it's very natural for a young woman to celebrate her beauty.

Molly: I have a book of Degas prints at home. *(A series of Degas prints fades in on screen.)* The subject is usually nude woman. *(Somewhat hesitantly)* But they're beautiful paintings and I don't think that the women are degraded at all.

Jim: Nor do I.

Molly: Maybe the fashion show is about making art of living people.

Jim: To some extent, but the fashion industry also profits by promoting our sense of inadequacy. The trick, I guess, is to be comfortable with the tension.

Molly: *(She smiles warmly)* I agree. *(She coyly waves a finger)* You think just like me. *(She punches his shoulder)*

Jim: You're a beautiful young woman so I'm quite sure you'll make the clothes look great. Just don't allow your dignity to be compromised.

Molly: I won't.

Justine enters stage right, walking past Antonio. Molly takes half a step back. Degas prints cut to static, then fade to the agenda.

Jim: Hello Justine, thank you for coming as I asked. *(Standing, he turns off the music.)* And hello, Antonio. How can I help you?

Antonio: Coach Baker, asked me to meet'm here.

Jim: Well, you're free to wait, but I have a staff meeting in ten minutes. *(Antonio sits.)* Molly, is there anything else?

Molly: *(She is less comfortable now that they are not alone.)* I just wanted to talk to you about the fashion show. I'll see you tomorrow. *(Molly exits stage left.)*

Jim: Okay, bye-bye. Justine, so you've transferred here from Cedarview.

Justine: Yup.

Jim: I won't take too much of your time. *(Organizing the papers on his desk)* To help me get to know you, I want you to write me a letter about yourself. Can you handle that?

Justine: Sure.

Jim: I want you to tell me about three things: what you value, why you do the things you do, and what you expect from English class. Can you do that for me?

Justine: No problemo. *(She writes it down on her hand)*

Jim: *What you value, why you do what you do, and what you expect from English class.* And thank you for contributing in class today. I can see that you've got some good critical thinking skills. Don't be afraid to liven things up a little.

Justine: Sure.

Jim: Great. Do you have any questions about the class?

(Enter David Baker stage left.)

Justine: Not really.

Jim: I'll see you tomorrow, then.

Justine: Okay, later. *(Exit Justine stage right.)*

David: Hello, Jimmy. How's ol' Brunetti here makin' out this semester?

Jim: Hard to say, we've only had one class.

David: I thought we'd get on him early. You know, get the kid on track right from the get go, before he has time to screw up. I hear you failed him last report card.

Jim: *(Begins organizing his desk.)* Antonio failed himself, David. He didn't submit any assignments.

David: You know what I mean, Jim. Here's our problem: his mom's threatening to yank him out of basketball if he doesn't pass English.

Jim: I won't pass him if he doesn't work.

David: Why stop the kid from doing something positive like basketball? What will that accomplish?

Jim: It might help him keep his priorities straight.

David: Are you saying that athletics aren't a priority?

Jim: I'm saying that his academics come before basketball.

(Suzanne Perkins enters stage left.)

Suzanne: Hello there, gentleman. Are you two handsome devils on your way down to the staff meeting?

David: Yes, ma'am, we are. We'll have to talk more about this, Jimbo. Ms. Perkins, if I may have the honour? *(Offers Suzanne his arm.)*

Suzanne: Thank you, I could use a manly escort. *(Takes David's arm)* Jim, did the custodian bring down that desk yet?

Jim: I told him first thing tomorrow morning would be fine.

Suzanne: No, that's not quite fine. *(Making a note in her agenda.)* I asked him specifically to bring it down before he left. I'll have a word with him. *(All three exit stage right. Lights and screen fade.)*

Scene Six

Spots rise down centre stage. Justine enters stage right. Molly enters stage left.

Molly: Hey, you're the new student in Mr. Freeman's class?

Justine: Yeah.

Molly: You're still here?

Justine: I'm waiting for my dad. He called to say he'd be an hour late.

Molly: Can't you take the bus?

Justine: He lives on the other side of town. I crash at his place once a month.

Molly: That's too bad. I know Mr. Freeman said it, but I totally forgot your name.

Justine: Justine.

Molly: That's right, I'm Molly.

Justine: I remembered.

Molly: So what do you think of Mr. Freeman's English class?

Justine: He seems cool. I like the shit about advertising.

Molly: I had him last year as well. I think he's great, I love his passion for teaching.

Justine: He does seem to have some of that.

(Antonio and Kelly enter stage left.)

Antonio: So the brown nose and the new kid are friends now.

Molly: Why does it fascinate you that I care about school?

Antonio: What's with the geek thing? You're way too much of a hottie to spend your time reading books and makin' cd's for freak teachers.

Molly: That's funny, *you* calling him a freak.

Antonio: You're defending him? I think there's a little something goin' on here...

Molly: Whatever.

Antonio: So Molly likes her men older. That's kinda kinky. *(Puts his hand on her shoulder.)*

Molly: Don't touch me please.

Antonio: Not used to being touched by guys your own age? *(Puts his hand on her shoulder.)*

Molly: Keep your hands off me.

Kelly: Sorry to break up your flirting guys, but we have to go. The rehearsal starts in like ten minutes.

Antonio: See you in the gym, Molly. *(Antonio and Kelly exit stage right.)*

Molly: I guess I should get going too. It's been nice meeting you.

Justine: What's that all about?

Molly: Nothing. He's just a jerk. Hey, do you want to come to the fashion show?

Justine: I'm not into fashion shows.

Molly: I didn't think I would be either, but I'm trying to see it as the art of clothes. Come an' watch. You can tell me what you think.

Justine: I'm *really* not into fashion shows.

Molly: That's why I want you to come. I want your opinion.

Justine: I don't know.

Molly: You've gotta kill an hour anyway.

Justine: But a fashion show, that just seems so like soul crushing.

Molly: Well, that's why I want your opinion of this one. C'mon.

Justine: Fine, but I'm only gonna stay for a few minutes.

Molly: Suit yourself.

(Exit Justine and Molly. Spot fades.)

Scene Seven

Janet pushes podium to centre-stage. Spot rises on podium. House lights rise on audience. The effect suggests the high school theatre where the teachers will hold their staff meeting. Speakers will address the audience of the play as though they were the teachers assembled in the school theatre for their monthly staff meeting. Principal Buchner enters stage left. He walks to the podium, opens a folder, briefly reviews his notes, removes his glasses then begins speaking.

Karl: I'll do my best to keep this meeting as short as possible. I'm sure you're all looking forward to getting home, so I've decided to place a printed version of agenda items two, three, six, and seven in your mailboxes. That leaves us with only three orders of business. First in line is David, then Suzanne, then I'll

make some final comments. David, the floor is yours. (*Karl exits stage right as David enters. Their paths cross.*)

David: Thank you, Karl. I thought I'd bring everyone up to date on what's been happening in the Athletics department. (*Stylized footage of students playing basketball.*) The good news is that there are some outstanding teams this season so I expect to see you all out at the games. The bad news is that we're starting to feel the effects of last year's budget cuts. So we'll definitely be running more fundraisers this year. As you know, the fashion show is happening this week, which we're real excited about, and that money will go directly to new uniforms. If anybody's interested in helping out on Wednesday, please see me. You'll really be helpin' out the kids. Okay, that's about it. (*Steps away from podium. Screen fades to static, then goes blank. He steps back.*) Oh, yeah, my players might need to miss a few classes for these fundraisers and away games. I'll be circulating lists of students involved. Okay, thanks again for your understanding. (*David exits stage right. Karl enters.*)

Karl: Thank you, David. I'm looking forward to seeing those teams in action. Next is our very own Ms. Suzanne Perkins. Suzanne, the podium is yours. (*Karl exits stage right as Perkins enters.*)

Perkins: (*Suzanne Perkins is an ambitious, middle-aged woman. She is professional, though somewhat punctillious. Her speech includes quirky habits of repetition, and the over-emphasis of certain words i.e. "data". Her attire should suggest an attempt to maintain a youthful appeal.*) Thank you very much, Karl. Last year many of you voiced your concerns about the noise and inappropriate behaviours in the halls. I've made dealing with these concerns my top priority, top priority. The strategy that I've followed is a three-fold. (*The three points appear on screen.*) First, we collected the *data*; secondly, we interpreted the *data*, and, thirdly we will devise an action plan. Now, each time a student was brought down to the office for inappropriate behaviour, I gathered *data* on the location, time, and the nature of each incident. With this data, I put together a number of graphs. (*Graph appears on the screen.*) I'll explain: the most common of the inappropriate behaviours is loud talking, with thirteen reported incidents per week, down to the least common, fighting, at an average rate of 2.2 incidents per week. I won't go into too much interpretation today, but I am very pleased, very pleased, to report that significant *data* collection and statistical *analysis* clearly communicate the nature and frequency of the inappropriate behaviours. The next step is forming a committee to devise an action plan based on our findings. Now, I expect those who voiced their concerns will volunteer and play an active role in this committee. Until then, please do not hesitate to supervise the halls outside your classrooms. Seeing no questions, I'll pass the podium back to Karl. (*Suzanne exits stage right. Buchner enters stage right. They awkwardly struggle to cross paths*)

Karl: Thank-you very much for all your hard work, Suzanne. Just before she takes her seat...(*Suzanne stops on stage.*) I should add that while we were away on holiday our vice-principal, Ms. Suzanne Perkins, completed her Master's degree in school administration. (*He applauds. She stops on stage, and displays mock humility.*) Congratulations, Suzanne. I'm sure this is just one step in a most promising career. Unfortunately, not all of my news is as good. (*Finds the correct sheet of paper in his file.*) This afternoon, the superintendent and I received the budget numbers for next year. It saddens me to report that school funding has been cut by ten percent this year, then three percent for each of the following two years. (*Pause*) This memo (*holds up paper*) contains the details of the budget cuts and some possible strategies for coping with less money. Give it a read. I know these are hard times, so if you have any suggestions or if you'd like to discuss this further, my door will be open. Alright, if there's no more business arising, we can head for...(*Sees Jim in the wings.*) Yes, Jim, come on up. (*Buchner exits stage right. Jim enters stage left.*)

Jim: (*Uncomfortable on stage, carrying some folders of assignments*) Just a brief request: I'm doing a unit with my Grade 12's on advertising and I need ads, magazine ads. If you've any old magazines lying around, anything at all, *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan*, please drop them off in the English office. Okay that's...(*Buchner enters stage right, takes two steps toward centre-stage. Jim stops talking and looks at Bucher*)

Karl: Pardon me, Jim. I thought you'd finished.

Jim: No that's fine.

Karl: Ladies and gentleman we're considering a district policy change at the School Planning Committee meeting this afternoon and I need a teacher to attend. Is there anyone who's available? Again, my apologies for the short notice. *(Pause. Jim tries to look inconspicuous)* The meeting will only take fifteen minutes at the most. *(Pause. A pencil falls off the podium where Jim is standing. Buchner turns to him.)*

David: *(From the wings)* Come on, Jimmy, you're the man.

Jim: I don't know. I've got a couple of hours of work yet tonight and my wife...

Karl: You'd really be doing me a favour, Jim.

Jim: Karl, if there's anybody else.

Karl: It's just fifteen minutes of your time. We're going to be looking at corporate sponsorships and you've always something worthwhile to contribute.

Jim: Alright. *(Jim exits stage left.)*

Karl: Excellent, we'll start in the library in ten minutes. There'll be sandwiches if you're hungry, and thanks again. Ladies and gentlemen, if there's nothing further...*(surveys the audience)*...seeing nothing, we'll adjourn the meeting. Thank you, drive safely, and I'll see you in the morning.

(Karl exits stage left. Janet pushes off the podium.)

Scene Eight

Justine enters stage left. She awkwardly surveys the stage, then sits down, leaning back on her hands. The lights dim as the fashion show music begins. The choice of music is left to the director: it should be upbeat, exotic, and contemporary. Lights mark out the runway while the rest of the stage, including where Justine sits, is darkened.

As the music plays, the screen shows stylized video of a fashion show. Kelly enters downstage right, then Mark enters down stage left. Her attire is sexy; his conveys machismo. As Kelly moves upstage, Mark feigns admiration and desire. When she arrives downstage, she strikes a seductive pose. Mark moves forward and strikes a pose next to her. They look into each other's eyes. Mark takes her hand, the two embrace then exit stage left hand in hand. The routine suggests a "pick up".

Molly and Antonio enter. Molly is wearing schoolgirl dress. Their routine is similar to the previous one. Molly, however, is uncomfortable with the final embrace. As they begin walking back upstage, Antonio places his hand at the top of her buttocks. She pushes his hand away, staying in character. He touches her again. This time she pushes his hand away and stops.

Molly: *(Yelling over the music.)* Kelly! Will you stop the music, please. Please stop the music *(Music stops. Kelly enters stage right, now wearing a sweatshirt over her above-mentioned sexy attire. She's carrying a clipboard.)*

Kelly: Can we have some lights please? Lights *(Lights rise)* Molly, like what's the problem?

Molly: I'm not comfortable with him touching me like that.

Kelly: Molly, it's part of the show; we choreographed it that way. It's like you're on a date with him.

Molly: That would never happen.

Antonio: You'd beg for it.

Molly: I would never be on a date with you.

Kelly: It's not that big a deal, Molly. You're just acting.

Molly: It's a big deal for me. It feels cheap.

Kelly: That's the kinda stuff the audience wants. It made them totally cheer at last year's fashion show.

Molly: Don't you think it's degrading?

Kelly: But it sells tickets, Molly.

Molly: You know what, maybe the fashion show isn't for me.

Kelly: Molly, the show's in two days, you totally said you'd do this.

Molly: I'm not sure about this anymore.

Antonio: What is your problem?

Molly: I need to give this some more thought.

Antonio: You'll talk to Freeman about nude women, but you won't pretend to be on a date.

Molly: Why don't you grow up, Antonio? Kelly, I'm going to have to think about this. I'll let you know tomorrow. Sorry, Justine, I wasn't expecting that.

Justine: Hey, no worries. *(Molly and Justine exit stage left.)*

Kelly: Just let her go. I can do her part, if she quits. Lights, music! *(Music and lights resume. Lights fade. Music fades)*

Scene Nine

Janet pushes a large rectangular table to centre-stage then sets up three chairs. On the table, there is a plate of sandwiches and a pitcher of juice. She exits, returns with an overhead projector, then exits again. Karl and Gwen Brunetti enter stage left. Karl is carrying a file folder. Gwen's elegant attire and demeanor suggest wealth.

Gwen: You remember my older boys, Chris and Jason?

Karl: Yes, of course, they made quite an impression around here.

Gwen: Since they're both doing business degrees in California, Bill and I decided to have the family Christmas somewhere in the middle. We chose Aspen, Colorado.

Karl: Sounds wonderful. *(Enter Jim stage left.)* Here's Mr. Freeman. Gwen, have you met Jim Freeman? He's one of our English teachers.

Gwen: Why yes, he teaches Antonio. We met briefly during Parent Night.

Jim: Yes, Mrs. Brunetti, Antonio's mother. *(They shake hands.)*

Gwen: I do hope that he does better this term? I wasn't at all pleased with this his English mark.

Jim: We'll do our best to make him successful.

Gwen: His father and I made it very clear that if his marks don't improve he'll be off the basketball team.

Jim: Yes, that was brought to my attention by Coach Baker.

Gwen: You know, he's become so quiet at home. He hardly spoke a word over the holidays. I wonder whether this new timidity isn't affecting his grades at school. He was a very shy toddler.

Jim: Well...I don't *think* that's the problem.

Karl: Have a seat, Jim, and we'll get things started. *(Jim sits with his back to the screen. To observe the information on the screen, Jim, will need to look back over his shoulder. This positioning emphasizes the fact that while Jim contemplates the policy change, he is not involved in the conversation. It also accentuates his different perspective on corporate sponsorships.)* Suzanne will be here in a few minutes, but we can start without her: a parent, a teacher, and an administrator are all we need. I'm sure both of you want to get home ASAP *(Gives each a sheet of paper from his file folder.)* This is a draft version of the new policy regarding corporate sponsorship. Take a look, then we'll need your signatures. On page two you'll find the essence of the change. In section three, dealing with revenue sources, we've added the following:

(Writing appears on screen. Jim turns around to read the screen.)

"The Clearview School District will raise funds through those corporate sponsorships that maintain the highest standards for public education. "

Take a moment to read over the document.

Gwen: Karl, how do these corporate sponsorships work exactly?

(Jim looks forward.)

Karl: A good number of corporations want to play a role in public education. *(Examples of logos begin flashing in succession on the screen. Jim turns back toward the screen. The rate at which the logos are flashing will increase with the intensity of their discussion. A slow industrial sounding pulse begins. The effect is ominous and foreboding. As the rate of the flashing logos increases, so does the volume of the pulse. Jim continues to watch the flashing logos as the other two converse.)* Possible involvement ranges from paying for advertising space throughout the school, to providing sports and computer equipment, even creating curriculum packages for teachers. Done properly we could bring in a lot of money and equipment.

Gwen: That sounds marvelous.

Karl: I had a very positive conversation with Frank Johnson. You've met Frank, the superintendent?

Gwen: Yes, he's a delightful man.

Karl: Apparently these arrangements are the way of the future.

Gwen: We could use the money to improve the school's tennis courts. They've needed work since my eldest graduated.

Karl: Or upgrade our computer facilities.

Gwen: Is it true, Karl, that Cedarview High replaced their entire computer lab?

Karl: Yes. Forest Glenn did the same. I was on the phone with beverage providers this morning. When we get this new policy inked, I'll arrange the contracts. I'll just need your signature here.

Gwen: Oh yes, of course. It's a great idea. *(She signs the contract.)*

Karl: Jim? Jim? Are you still with us?

Jim: Yes. I am.

Karl: I'll need your signature as well, then we can all head for home.

Jim: I have some questions. *(Logos are flashing very quickly. The pulse is clearly audible.)*

Karl: Fire away.

Jim: Is it ethical? *(Logos cut to static, as pulse abruptly cuts to static noise. Screen fades back to policy change. Static noise fades to silence.)*

Karl: I'm not sure I follow?

Jim: I mean, is it acceptable to market to children in schools?

Karl: What is your concern, Jim?

Jim: Do we really want big business, big corporations, actively marketing in our schools?

Karl: Let's stay within the parameters of today's meeting, Jim. This policy change is about ensuring the "highest standards for public education."

Jim: Doesn't advertising to students automatically lower the standards for public education?

Gwen: Mr. Freeman, the business community wants to play a role in education and frankly we need the help.

Jim: I'm sure the business community expects handsome returns on its investment.

Gwen: And as an English teacher, you have some insight into the business community?

Jim: I know a few things, yes. *(Slow fade in of WTO style protest, behind the words of the policy change. This is to be subtle, a few clips interspersed in static.)*

Gwen: *(To Karl)* This is the first idea for making money rather than spending it. Signing a mutually beneficial contract is not all doom and gloom, Mr. Freeman.

Jim: Mrs. Brunetti, the goals of business do not coincide with the goals of public education.

Gwen: How do you suggest we bring in more money?

Jim: *(With more emotion)* Why are we short of money in the first place?

Karl: Perhaps I'll interrupt. Jim, as usual, you've made some interesting points but this is not the venue...

Jim: Then what is, Karl?

Karl: *(With a slight hint of condescension.)* You've raised some interesting points, but we are here to approve a policy change that protects public education. Do you agree with that, Jim?

Jim: Of course, Karl, but there's more to this.

Karl: *(Karl's discomfort with Jim's contrary view is heightened by Gwen's presence. She is calm, almost aloof, as she watches Jim question Karl's authority. Karl becomes more stern.)* It's late, Jim, and I need a teacher's approval.

Jim: This deserves more discussion.

Karl: *(Pause)* If you refuse, another teacher will sign in the morning.

Jim: Then what's the point of having a meeting?

Karl: Jim.

Jim: I'm not comfortable with this. *(Pause)* I'm really not. *(Picking up the pen.)*

Karl: I'll be in my office, if you want to discuss it further. *(Jim signs.)*

(Screen rapidly shows logos then cuts to static.)

Karl: Good then. *(Standing)* Thank you, Gwen, for all your help. And, please, take some of these sandwiches. I'm sure Antonio will eat them.

Gwen: Oh no, there's never any room in our fridge. Besides they'd just sit in the car all night, we're off to the *Café Lyonnais* for supper. Perhaps, Mr. Freeman would take some.

Karl: Jim, help yourself to the sandwiches.

Jim: *(Picking up the paper in front of him. He's flustered.)* I'm fine, thanks.

Buchner: I'll let the cleaning staff know they're here. I'm sure they'll take some. Goodnight to both of you.

Gwen: I'll follow you, Karl. My car is parked by your office.

Buchner: Alright.

Gwen: Good-evening, Mr. Freeman.

Freeman: Good-bye.

(Buchner and Gwen exit stage right. Jim sits for a moment. Enter Suzanne Perkins stage left.)

Suzanne: Oh, poop, did I miss the meeting?

Jim: Yes.

Suzanne: Darn it all. Did you meet Gwen Brunetti? Isn't she just fabulous?

Jim: Yes, just fabulous.

Suzanne: Her volunteer work has done so much for this school. Is someone taking care of these sandwiches?

Jim: Karl's sending down the janitors.

Suzanne: Are you alright, Jim?

Jim: Just a little tired. It's been a long day.

Suzanne: Well then get home and get some rest. Nobody benefits from a tired teacher. I'll see you tomorrow. *(Suzanne exits stage right)*

Jim: Right. *(He stands, takes a few steps towards stage left, stops, then returns to gather a half-dozen or so sandwiches in a napkin. Molly enters stage right.)*

Molly: Hello, Mr. Freeman. I didn't know you were still here.

Jim: I'm still here.

Molly: How are you?

Jim: Not great. I just had a very unpleasant meeting.

Molly: That's too bad. If it's any consolation, I just had a very unpleasant fashion show rehearsal.

Jim: Are you heading this way?

Molly: I am.

Jim: Well then, why don't we share our stories of woe. Would you like a sandwich?

Molly: No thanks...well, maybe I will. *(Looking over his arm as they walk.)* What kind do you have?

Jim: There's a ham, a pastrami, a cucumber and I think a chicken salad....

(Exit Jim and Molly stage left. Lights fade.)

Act II

Scene One

(School Inc. commercial plays. Lights rise on Jim and Michael in school office lobby. Michael finishes writing then looks up. Jim is haggard looking, as in the first scene.)

Jim: They just expected me to rubberstamp the damn thing. They broad sided me, and I was tired. *(Pause)* I was so pissed off with myself with myself with myself for succumbing to their pressure as quickly as I did. Anyway, I stopped for a drink on the way home.

Michael: Did Molly join you?

Jim: *(Laughing)* No, of course not.

Michael: How many did you have?

Jim: A couple.

Michael: Is your drinking a problem?

Jim: I don't think it is, but my wife may disagree.

Michael: We could claim that substance abuse had a role in diminishing your judgement. Your actions then become the result of an untreated medical condition.

Jim: Do I want that following me for the rest of my career?

Michael: First we'll worry about this job, then we'll worry about your career. When I have a clearer picture of what took place, we'll determine our strategy. The law is all about the facts and particulars of each case. In the business of law, the devil is in the details.

Jim: I'm sure the devil plays a significant role in your business. *(Michael looks up from his writing. Waits for Jim to resume.)* I think I've actually become more dependent on work, than on drinking. Let's say I was impaired by untreated workaholism: "*we humbly submit that Jim Freeman's offense was the consequence of a severe addiction to work.*"

Michael: It's been done.

Jim: It sounds better than alcoholism. The work was giving me a good deal of relief. There's a part teaching that calms me down, makes me think that things are right in the world. And it's not just the students...it is the sharing of ideas...the sharing of truth. *(Stands and begins to pace. His exhaustion is visible.)* But who's kidding whom: most people aren't that interested in exploring truth. Most just want enough education to get a job, a house, and finance their fun – pizza and beer, bread and circuses. And so, it is into these vessels that I struggle to place knowledge and, dare I say, *humanity*. Sometimes they hear me. Molly Lind heard me.

Michael: She's the student with whom they allege....

Jim: Yes. It's hard to believe that a seventeen-year-old can be so effortlessly drawn to literature, music, art, languages and ideas. *And...quite fittingly, she was, is beautiful.*

Michael: Is there something more that you need to tell me, Jim?

Jim: About her?

Michael: About the nature of your relationship.

Jim: Do you believe their allegations?

Michael: I need to know what happened. Was there anything that might be considered inappropriate?

Jim: *(Tone should be neutral followed by a pause)* It's a privilege to be part of a truly gifted student's world. Isn't that the appeal of teaching? Having the opportunity to connect with a few uncorrupted minds and to give them something of what you've learned about life? And when you really connect on ideas of truth and beauty, what do you think that feels like? What emotion best describes that connection?

Michael: It's not the time to poeticize this.

Jim: It must be lonely to have a mind like hers at seventeen. Hell, at any age. All these kids are empty vessels, but the rare one is like...like a Grecian urn, waiting to be filled with literature and poetry, drama, music...

Michael: ...with a culture.

Freeman: ...it's culture for the anthropologist. To the poet it's beauty and truth, truth and beauty, "that is all ye know on earth..."

Michael: ...and all ye need to know." Shelley?

Jim: Keats.

(Lights fade. Music from Morricone's "Titoli di Coda")

Scene Two

(Music fades. Rapid version of the "Morning Sequence" shows on screen followed by static edit and the "Happy Freeman Family". Lights rise on the Freeman kitchen. On the table, there are two empty wine bottles, dirty dishes and the remote control. Jim enters stage right, picks up the wine bottles and exits stage left. Ella enters stage left. She is wearing her pajamas and carrying a bowl of cereal.)

Jim: Good morning, sweetie. You're up early.

Ella: I get up this early every morning.

Jim: I didn't know that.

Ella: You couldn't have because you usually get up and go right to the shower. Then after your shower, you go into the bathroom and stay in yours' and mommy's room until you're dressed and then you come into the kitchen to have your coffee. I get up and have some cereal and most morning's I'm almost finished my cereal before I hear you turn on the shower. *(Ella takes the remote control from the table and turns on the TV. The stylized cartoon loop begins on the screen. When Ella sits at the table, her face moves between Jim, who is across from her, and the screen. While the cartoon is on, the audience is denied a full view of her face.)*

Jim: I see. Do you need to watch that first thing in the morning?

Ella: It's my favourite. Did you sleep on the couch, Daddy?

Jim: Not on purpose. Where were you guys? I didn't hear you come home.

Ella: We were at Grandma and Grandpa's 'til late.

Jim: You must be exhausted. How are you going to learn anything at school today?

Ella: What about you? You slept on the couch and you have to teach.

Jim: I'm a grown up, it's different. Why didn't you wake me up last night?

Ella: I saw you on the couch but mommy said to leave you alone. Did you pass out, Daddy?

Jim: No. *(Sitting down at the table.)* Who taught you to say "pass out"? Did mommy say that?

Ella: I just know it. Why did you sleep in your clothes?

Jim: I sat down on the couch to edit the letter I was writing and dozed off.

Ella: Who's the letter for?

Jim: To the people in charge of the school where I work.

(Pam enters stage right, wearing her housecoat. She has not been awake for long.)

Ella: Good morning, mommy. I thought that you were going to sleep in 'till late.

Pam: What are you doing up?

Ella: I'm like Daddy, I don't need much sleep at all. Daddy was writing a very important letter.

Pam: Don't be ridiculous. You need nine hours of sleep, especially since you're going skating.

Ella: I forgot all about that.

Pam: Your father should also get more sleep, but he doesn't seem to care about his health, or the example he's setting.

Jim: I do so care. Mommy's right, Ella, you need more sleep. I was writing a letter to the school board and the newspaper, Pam. It's a shame you weren't home.

Pam: It's a shame *I* wasn't home? *I* was home until seven, watching your supper get cold.

Jim: I'm sorry, Pam, there was...

Pam: I'm sure you are.

Jim: There was a staff meeting after work, then I was corralled into attending this damn School Planning Meeting. You won't believe what they're trying to do. I guess I forgot to call home, sorry about....

Pam: Don't bother, Jim. It hardly matters

Jim: Of course it matters, they want...

Pam: I've heard it all before.

Jim: You haven't heard this before. They want to let corporations into schools. ...oh, by the way, there're a couple of sandwiches in the fridge for you. I've set one aside for my lunch...so I arrive at this meeting and it's just Buchner, a parent, this utter B-I-T-C-H named Gwen Brunetti and I.

Ella: I can spell, Daddy.

Jim: Of course you can, sweetie, of course you can. They want to have these big multi-national corporations play a major role in public education. *(Pam stands, then picks up a dish and a glass.)* But before the schools can take their money they need a teacher at each school to approve.

Pam: Ella, give me a hand with the dishes, please.

Ella: Okay, mommy.

(Ella picks up the dishes and follows her mother off stage left. Pam re-enters. Ella runs past her, not wanting to miss any of the cartoon. Throughout their coming and going, Jim continues to speak.)

Jim: No discussion about losing control of funding, let alone losing control of what we teach students. Big business already controls almost everything and now they want public education. Can you believe that?

Pam: *(Now back at the table collecting the remaining dishes. Again speaking over Jim.)* Hurry up and finish your cereal, Ella. You need to go back to bed. I'll give the school a call to say you'll be a few hours late. *(Pam carries more dishes off stage left. Ella quickly fills her mouth with three spoonfuls of cereal.)*

Jim: ...I tried to ask some important questions: should schools make money by selling their captive student audiences? And what about the control question? Doesn't *he who pays the piper call the tune*? Can anyone imagine that corporations will give all this money to schools then not have influence on what it is we're teaching? Of course they will, it's a no-brainer. Will teachers be allowed to criticize the sponsor, for example? Not a chance! *(Jim stands, becomes more demonstrative. Screen fades in headline regarding Nike's labour practices.)* "Today we are going to do a project on how Nike uses dirt cheap third world labour to produce its shoes; or better yet, "Let's do a history project on how IBM helped organize the Nazi's execution of six million Jews" *(Screen fades in cover of the book IBM and the Holocaust)* "No hard feelings" they'd say, "but we are not going to stick around while you make us look bad. We're leaving and we won't be renewing our sponsorship." Would any teacher be allowed to teach history that would cost the school its computer lab? *(Pam is now back at the table. There are no more dishes to clear. She sits.)* So, I stayed up half the night writing this letter. I'll post it in the staff room, then send a few copies to the local newspaper. I think I've got something pretty good here. What do you think? *"To the editor: As an English teacher at Clearview Secondary, I am strongly opposed to this school's decision ..."*

Pam: Don't bother, Jim...

Jim: What's that?

Pam: I don't really care about your letter.

Jim: How can you not care?

Pam: You promised you'd be home after work yesterday.

Jim: Sorry, Pam, I...

Pam: You had no idea where we were, and you didn't even bother to phone my parents.

Jim: I assumed you were there.

Pam: And when we get home, you're passed out on the couch. *(Ella looks back toward her father)* Do you honestly expect me to give a damn about your letter?

Jim: I wasn't passed out. And yes, I do expect you to care. We always talked about trying to make the world a little better and now that I'm doing something, you want to blame me.

(As Jim's voice rises, Ella raises the volume on the TV)

Pam: So that's it, me *blaming* you.

Jim: Can't you be proud of how hard I work?

Pam: Not when you leave us with the fucking dregs!

Jim: Jesus, Pam, watch your language in front of Ella!

Pam: I deserve a life too, Jim.

Jim: Babydoll, does that need to be so loud? And why do have to watch that first thing in the morning? *(She turns it off.)*

Ella: Sorry, Daddy.

Jim: Thank you. I'm sorry, Pam. I'm sorry that you prepared supper and I missed it, but somebody has to take time to speak back to power. And for God knows what reason, I'm that person. That's the person you married.

Pam: Is it, Jim? Is that what I did?

Jim: Yes.

Pam: So that's what I did.

Jim: I'm still the same person. And I sure as hell didn't go into teaching to kowtow to big business. I had enough of that before.

Pam: Ella, turn off the TV please. You're going back to bed. Are you going to sleep in your bed, or with mommy?

Ella: I'll come to your bed, mommy.

Jim: *(To Ella)* Have a good day sweetie, and I'll see you both tonight. This won't last forever, Pam.

Pam: I know.... I know. *(Pam and Ella begin walking off stage left. Pam stops before exiting.)* Jim, don't forget about picking us up from skating. I've told two other moms that we'll give them a lift. Just don't forget.

Jim: I won't. I'll see you tonight.

Ella: Bye, daddy.

Jim: Bye, sweetie.

(Ella and Pam exit stage right. Lights fade.)

Scene Three

Lights rise on Buchner's office down-stage left. Buchner enters stage left and begins working at his desk. Baker enters stage right, carrying a sheet of paper. He makes his way to Buchner's desk.

David: Hello, Karl.

Karl: Hello, David. What can I do for you?

David: I was wondering if you'd seen this letter.

Karl: What letter would that be, David? Please, sit.

David: Jim Freeman pinned it up in the staff room. I just read it, myself. You see it's been cc'ed to the newspaper.

Karl: Let's have a look.

David: *(Handing him the letter.)* You can keep that copy. I made two. *(Karl reads for a moment.)* I think he's way off base with this one. We really need this sponsorship money; he's not going to screw it up, is he?

Karl: No. No, David, he won't jeopardize the funding.

David: You now, sometimes I wonder how committed this Freeman guy is to the education in the first place, especially sports programmes. He makes life real difficult for my players.

Karl: Thank you for bringing this to my attention, David.

David: He's really an odd duck, you should hear what my players say about his teaching.

Karl: *(Buchner picks up the phone.)* Thank you for bringing this letter to my attention, David.

David: Right. I guess I'll get back to the gym. Thanks for your time. *(Baker exits stage right.)*

Karl: Hello, Janet. Could you put me through to Frank Johnson please? Thank you. *(Spot fades.)*

Scene Four

(Lights rise on classroom. A Cash-Cola advertisement is projected on screen. It displays a cola can with a dollar sign on it. Above the can, reads "Cash-Cola"; below reads, "Thirsty Yet?" Jim enters stage left carrying papers needed for the class. When he sees the ad, he stops in the middle of the classroom.)

Jim: Just like that.

(Kelly enters, followed by Mark, then Molly. Each one notices the sign.)

Molly: When did they put that up, Mr. Freeman?

Jim: During lunch. *(Jim begins reviewing his own notes.)*

Molly: It's ugly.

(Antonio enters.)

Antonio: Hey, "Cash-Cola". Right on.

(Justine enters.)

Antonio: Hey there, pretty Molly. Still thinkin' about me? *(Touches her shoulder.)*

Molly: Please don't touch me.

Antonio: *(Touching her again.)* Come on, I know you love it.

Justine: Why don't you keep your fuckin' hands off her?

Jim: *(Looks up, not having heard the entire conversation.)* Watch your language please.

Antonio: *(Quietly)* Are you gonna stop me, freak?

Justine: You want me to stop you, frat boy?

Antonio: Watch yourself, bitch, watch yourself.

Justine: *You* don't tell *me* what to do. Or is that too complex a thought for you ?

Jim: Alright, let's get started. Please take out your homework. I'll quickly check that it's done. *(Students leaf through their binders and bags. Jim picks up his attendance binder and begins verifying homework.)*

Antonio: I got a question, Mr. Freeman.

Jim: No homework, Antonio?

Antonio: Nope, but I got a question.

Jim: *"Have"* a question, not *"got"* a question.

Antonio: Yeah, Mark told me you worked in business. Whad 'ya do?

Jim: I was in the business of public relations.

Antonio: Why would you leave business for teaching?

Jim: There are many good reasons.

Kelly: What's public relations?

Jim: Well, I would say that...a public relations firm makes money by influencing people's thoughts.

Justine: Like teachers.

Jim: What's that Ms. Baylor?

Justine: Teachers are also paid to influence the way people think.

Jim: Good point, but it's different. *(Verifies the last student's homework.)* My main goal is to share truth with you. I'm not trying to sell you anything *(He looks up.)* And my truth will, I hope, make you more personally and socially responsible.

Justine: You're trying to sell us *your* version of the truth.

Jim: Well, yes, to some extent but...

Mark: Have you ever smoked drugs, Mr. Freeman?

Jim: What does that have to do with public relations?

Mark: You said you're here to share the truth, so I'm askin' ya: do ya smoke grass dude? D'ya burn the sweet weed? Let's go, Mr. Truth: smoke cheeba, or no smoke cheeba?

Jim: Truth with limitations. I'm also paid to be a role model.

Antonio: He asked you if you ever smoked pot, dude. Let's have the truth. Smokie or no smokie?

Jim: As a spokesperson for the state's values, I respectfully decline to answer your question.

Antonio: Yes or no? Let's have the truth.

Justine: I think that he's answered your question, Einstein.

Jim: Justine, please. Enough of this, we do have some curriculum to cover. Here we go: Part A... "Re-write the sentence using more formal language." Molly, why don't you start?

Antonio: *(Quietly)* Brown nose.

Molly: Alright. Number one: "*There's this one guy in my Math class who's got the biggest mouth. He drives me nuts*"... There's a boy in my Math class who is extremely talkative..."

Jim: Good...

(Lights fade to dim on class then rise down stage left on Buchner's desk.)

Scene Five

(Buchner is sitting at his desk. Frank Johnson appears stage right.)

Karl: Thank you, Frank, for coming so quickly. I thought we should give this our full attention.

Frank: *(Taking a seat)* You'll have to make this brief, Karl. I've a meeting to attend in fifteen minutes.

Karl: Do you know Jim Freeman? He's an English teacher here.

Frank: No. Should I?

Karl: Until now, no. But I expect you'll be hearing more of him. *(Picking up the letter)* Freeman posted a copy in the staff room, and sent another to the newspaper. You'll want to hear this.

Johnson: Let's have a listen.

(Lights begin to dim, except for a spotlight on Buchner, and the light from the Cash-Cola sign. As the letter is being read, the Cash-Cola sign fades out, intermittently showing static blurred footage of anti-corporate protest.)

"To the editor:

As an English teacher at Clearview Secondary, I am strongly opposed to this school's decision to raise money through corporate sponsorships.

First, when corporations pay schools to display their advertisements, they are making corporate propaganda part of the state-enforced curriculum. They are paying us to "brand" our children with their product. In this way, we are selling access to the most vital part of our children: their minds."

(Lights fade on administrators, rise on class.)

Scene Six

Jim: *(Leaning at his desk)* Good, most of you can recognize a colloquialism. Are there any questions before we move on? *(Justine raises her hand.)* Yes, Justine.

Justine: Yeah, I was thinking about *colloquialisms*, the “dudes”, the “likes”, and the “like totallies” What exactly is wrong with them?

Jim: For one, they’re less formal.

Justine: Aren’t clarity and honesty more important than formality? Isn’t formality just a way for people to control who’s considered smart or dumb?.

Jim: Colloquialisms also lack precision. For example, the word “*dude*” originally meant someone who was very fashionably dressed in the 1800’s. How do I know you don’t have that in mind when you say “dude”?

Justine: Come on, *dude*, I like totally disagree. Words change over time and everybody knows it. We all know exactly what “dude” means. It expresses familiarity and warmth.

Jim: They can also show disrespect.

Justine: But any word can be made to sound disrespectful. Wouldn’t you agree, “*sir*”? (“*Sir*” is said with mock contempt.)

Jim: For now, I’d rather you didn’t call me “dude”.

Justine: No problemo. But you agree that I have a point.

Jim: Yes, you’ve certainly made your point very well. Let me give it some thought and I’ll get back to you. Alright, I’ll collect your homework from last night. Justine, did you have an opportunity to work on the letter?

Justine: I started it, but I wanna give it some more thought.

Jim: Great, get it in when you can. (*After papers are collected*). Since we’ve been given an unexpected visual aid for our study of advertising, we are going to change directions a little. First question: why is it here? (*Antonio’s hand goes up*). Yes, Antonio.

Antonio: ...because the school gets money and stuff for it.

Jim: Yes, but what does Cash-Cola get in exchange?

Mark: To put their ad on the wall.

Jim: Then why don’t they just build their own wall? (*Kelly raises her hand*.) Kelly?

Karen: They get to like advertise.

Jim: Yes, that’s what they’re *doing*, but what are they buying? (*No responses*) What do advertisers pay for?

Mark: They get space on the wall.

Jim: Advertisers don’t just pay for wall space, or to be on TV, or in a magazine. They pay for access to an audience, to you, to *your minds*, so that they can make *you* think about *them*. And that is the product in all advertising. Take a note. (*He moves to the overhead projector and begins writing. Script appears over the “Cash-Cola” sign.*) “The advertising industry’s product is you. You are the product.” Your attention is being sold. And, if they have your attention, they can influence you to think a certain way and therefore spend your money a certain way. Note: “Cash-Cola has paid for access to students’ minds to influence their behaviour.”

Mark: I don't think they'd be payin' too much for my mind.

Jim: Well, let's figure it out. You watch basketball, correct? *(Jim finds an overhead transparency on his desk.)*

Mark: Yup.

Jim: *(Places transparency on overhead.)* And I'll assume that you're watching basketball on channel six, on Tuesday and Saturdays.

Mark: Sure do.

Jim: Good, because I met with a sales rep at Channel six over the holidays. *(Places the advertising grid on the overhead. The Cash-Cola ad fades to allow for the grid)* The average regular season basketball game has four hundred thousand television viewers in this region, one of whom, is you. To advertise a product to those viewers for thirty seconds costs eight thousand dollars. Divide the total cost by the number of viewers, and you get, wait for it, two cents per viewer. Mark, the market has determined that access to your brain is worth two cents for thirty seconds.

Antonio: That's shit.

Jim: Entirely inappropriate language, Antonio, but nevertheless, I agree. *(Lights fade. Cash-Cola poster remains.)*

Scene Seven

(Spot rises on administrators.)

Buchner: "Secondly, one must remember the adage that he who pays the piper calls the tune. By allowing corporations to fund public education, we begin the process of giving up control of what is taught to our children. When corporations help to pay the bills, they will necessarily have influence. To lose control of our schools, is to lose control of the only mode of mass communication where the public, and not corporate interests, shapes the values. If we lose the ability to teach our children public values, we will lose the essence of our democracy.

*Most sincerely,
Jim Freeman
Teacher, Clearview Secondary."*

Johnson: Christ, almighty! How the hell does he go from an ad on the wall to losing our democracy? Is he completely off his rocker?

Buchner: No, he's actually quite a gifted teacher.

Johnson: We're sure as hell not going to give him a soapbox for spouting off this crap. If he continues, we'll have to terminate him.

Buchner: I don't think that'll be necessary. I'll speak to him.

Johnson: Do. And don't be too soft, Karl. *(Standing to leave.)* Let me know how it goes.

Buchner: We'll nip this before it leaves the school. I'll speak to him now. *(Standing.)* Then I have to take Julie to the hospital.

Johnson: How's she doing?

Buchner: We'll see. (*Showing his fatigue*) They're going to intensify the chemo.

Johnson: I'm sorry to hear that, Karl.

Buchner: This will be the test.

Johnson: (*Putting his hand on Karl's shoulder*) I'm confident that she'll pull through just fine. Call me if you need anything.

Buchner: Thank you, Frank. That's decent of you.

Johnson: We'll be in touch. (*Exit stage left*)

(*Buchner organizes a few papers on his desk then stands, picks up his briefcase and exits stage left. Lights on office fade. Rise on classroom.*)

Scene Eight

Antonio: Are you saying that business is bad, Mr. Freeman? You sound like a communist.

Jim: I'm not saying that business is bad, and no I'm not a communist. Public education uses laws to *force* every child between the ages of five and sixteen to come to school. Then something dawns on the people who run schools, something that the TV, radio and newspaper businesses have always known: *once you have the attention of a lot of people, you can sell it to those who want to condition them to think, and behave a certain way.* Is that what we want to do with public education? But whoever is providing the money will obviously have some control. There are countless examples in newspaper and television of how the advertisers influence what is published or broadcast. Of course we'd like to believe that the sponsors have no control but the moment you offend them, the moment you do something they don't like, they withdraw their money- that's it - that's their power - it's that simple. (*Buchner enters stage left. He is wearing his overcoat and hat, and carrying his briefcase.*) Hello, Mr. Buchner, what can I do for you.

Buchner: Hello, Mr. Freeman. Hello, students. Jim could I steal a moment of your time?

Jim: Right now? I am in the middle of a lesson.

Buchner: Yes, now.

Jim: (*To the class*) Alright then. Class, I'll need to step out for a moment. Your assignment will be to respond to what I've said. Tell me what you think, do you agree or disagree, and why? Make it at least one page in length. It's due for tomorrow's class. (*Jim walks down stage left, as if walking into the hall. Lights dim on class and rise on Jim and Karl.*) What is it, Karl.

Karl: Jim, did you post that letter in the staff room this morning?

Jim: I did.

Karl: And were copies sent to the newspaper?

Jim: Yes.

Karl: What, may I ask, did you hope to accomplish?

Jim: People need to hear that not everyone in education agrees with corporate sponsorship.

Karl: It is not your job publicize the Fairview School District's business.

Jim: Isn't it my obligation as a citizen?

Karl: As a teacher, there are channels by which you can voice your concerns, but the newspaper isn't one of them. There is very clear wording in contract law to prevent an employee from publicly criticizing his employer. This applies to schools and is therefore grounds for very serious discipline.

Jim: Are you disciplining me for writing a letter to the editor?

Karl: I've already had a meeting with the superintendent, Frank Johnson, and he's very concerned. Has there been any response from the newspaper?

Jim: Not yet.

Karl: When they call to confirm your authorship, tell them that they no longer have permission to publish the letter.

Jim: What about free speech, Karl? Are you giving me a gag order?

Karl: You'll have your chance to speak, but that must be balanced with the school's right to maintain its reputation. Now, I have to be at the hospital in twenty minutes and you've a class waiting. (*Earnestly*) I do respect what you are trying to do, but you can't publicly shame the district.

Jim: I'm not *shaming* anyone, I'm presenting a perfectly reasonable position on a...

Karl: Jim, I've directed you to not allow your letter to be printed.

Jim: Jesus, Karl. I can't believe what I'm hearing.

Karl: I've been in this business for thirty years and I've seen contentious issues come and...

Jim: This isn't a business, Karl.

Karl: We'll talk more about this tomorrow. (*Turns to leave.*) This is bigger than us, Jim. Let the swords clash above our heads. You don't need to fight this.

Jim: Then who will?

Karl: Be careful, Jim, be careful. (*Exit Karl. Jim stands alone for moment, down stage left. Spot fades, lights rise on class. Jim walks back into the class.*)

Jim: We've only about ten minutes left, so let's get ready to go. Here's another worksheet on colloquialisms. I've come down with a bit of a headache, why don't you sneak off early. (*Students stand, organize their work, and start leaving. Justine and Molly remain behind. They move toward Freeman's desk.*)

Justine: Mr. Freeman, I like didn't mean to be rude by callin' you "dude".

Jim: I know, Justine. I thought you made your case very persuasively.

Justine: Cool, and I'm workin' on that letter. It's kinda connected to what you're sayin' in class.

Jim: Great.

Justine: It'll be ready for tomorrow. And I'm usin' only formal language.

Jim: Even better.

Justine: I disagree that colloquialisms are bad, but you'll get it your way.

Jim: Thank you, Justine.

Justine: We'll see how it goes, I'll catch ya later. And hey, I liked the class.

Jim: Thank you, Justine. Hello, Molly, how are you?

Molly: I'm fine. You look tired.

Jim: I've got myself caught up in a bit of a controversy with this Cash-Cola sign.

Molly: Did you have a chance to listen to the rest of the cd?

Jim: I did. Let's put it on now; maybe that's what I need. (*Puts the cd in the portable stereo.*) I listened to it most of last night. It was very comforting. (*Music starts.*)

Molly: It's so beautiful that it almost brings tears to my eyes. (*Pause*) Or it's so sad that it's beautiful.

Jim: (*Starting to relax.*) That's an interesting little paradox, Molly. Perhaps, like so much in life, beauty implies its opposite.

Molly: (*They listen for a moment.*) I also want to tell you that my father got the job in Montreal, he starts immediately. We fly out tomorrow.

Jim: That's wonderful...not wonderful that you're leaving. You'll be missed... I'll miss you. But it's wonderful that your father is being promoted. You're going to love Montreal.

Molly: (*Hesitating*) I...before I went, I wanted to tell you that...well...

Jim: (*Showing discomfort*) You don't have to say anything...

Molly: (*She steps toward him*) But I want to. I wanted to say that you've made... (*Janet Larsen enters stage left*)

Jim: Ms. Larsen! To what do we owe this pleasure? (*Jim turns down the music.*)

Janet: Jim, there's a camera crew down at the office and they want to interview you.

Jim: Interview me? Why would they want to interview me?

Janet: Something about a letter you wrote. What shall I tell them?

Jim: Well...I imagine I should probably speak to Karl first.

Janet: Mr. Buchner's already left for the hospital, but Suzanne's still in her office.

Jim: I guess I'll speak to Ms. Perkins. (*Motioning to leave, then remembering Molly stops.*) Janet, will you please tell them that I'll be down in a moment?

Janet: Certainly. *(Exit Janet)*

Jim: *(To Molly.)* This is exciting.

Molly: What do you think it's about?

Jim: I'm sure they want my opinion on corporate sponsorships. *(Motions toward the Cash-Cola sign.)*

Molly: I'm sure you have a very good one. I just wanted you to know, Mr. Freeman, before I leave, that I think you're a really good teacher. You show that you care, and that it's okay to care. Thanks for that.

Jim: You're very welcome, Molly.

Molly: I won't forget your class. You showed me that it's worth trying to make things a little better. *(She moves forward and hugs him. At first he is reluctant, then he relaxes and hugs her in return. Coach Baker and Antonio enter. As they are pulling apart, Molly kisses Freeman's cheek. The kiss is held for a brief second too long.)*

Jim: Thank you.

Molly: Thank you, Mr. Freeman.

Molly: I'll see you tomorrow. *(Molly exits. Jim turns off the music.)*

Jim: Yes, yes please do. *(He notices David, and Antonio)* Mr. Baker, Antonio, how can I help you?

David: Hello, Jim. It's about the letter you posted in the staff room, Jim. I, I mean... *(He assumes a somewhat intimidating tone and posture)* ... a number of us don't think you really know what talking about here.

Jim: You're welcome to your opinion.

David: Good, because you're going to hear it. I don't think you give a damn about our athletics program or what's good for students at this school...

Jim: Have you actually read the letter?

David: Yes, I've read it, and you wanna know what, I think it's a load of socialist hippie crap. It's anti-business and just plain ignorant and...

Jim: Anti-business? Do you have any idea what you are talking about? You know what, don't even answer that. I have neither the time, nor the inclination to have this conversation. I'm wanted down at the office.

David: You should watch yourself, Freeman. People notice what you're doing around here.

Jim: What exactly am I "*doing around here*"?

David: People are talking, Freeman. People are talking.

Jim: Why don't I tell you what I'm doing around here, David. It's called thinking critically, applying intelligent thought. *(Enter Suzanne)*

Suzanne: Hello, gentleman. Jim, you've won some admirers in the television business.

Jim: You must have seen them.

Suzanne: I was chatting with them. They're waiting for you in front the school.

Jim: Suzanne, may I have a word with you? *(They take a few steps toward stage right.)* Did you discuss this with Karl? *(Molly enters and approaches Freeman.)* Hi there, Molly.

Molly: Hello Mr. Freeman. Hello, Ms. Perkins.

Suzanne: Hello, Molly.

Jim: Suzanne, I'd like to be certain that I have your permission to speak with these television people about corporate sponsorships.

Suzanne: Of course, I'm sure you'll do the school very proud. Enjoy your fifteen minutes of fame, Jim. Give 'em hell.

Jim: Thank you, Suzanne. Can I help you, Molly?

Molly: I was wondering, well since I'm going to start applying to universities in the spring, and my new teachers won't really know me that well, I was wondering if you'd be able to write me a letter of recommendation.

Jim: Of course, but I'll have to mail it to you. I won't have time to finish it by tomorrow.

Molly: That's okay. I can email you my new address when I get to Montreal. Then you can send it.

Jim: Are you walking this way?

Molly: I am.

Jim: I'll walk with you, if you don't mind.

Molly: Not at all.

(Exit Molly and Jim stage right. Enter Gwen Brunetti stage left.)

Suzanne: Why hello, Gwen. I haven't seen you in ages. How've you been?

Gwen: I'm quite fine thank you, Suzanne. How are you?

Suzanne: Just fine, just fine. Busy, busy, as usual. You must be looking forward to seeing that son of yours in tonight's fashion show.

Gwen: I am, though I hardly know what to expect. I've never actually attended a fashion show, let alone one that involved my own son.

Suzanne: Well, I've seen them rehearse a number of times and I'm sure that you'll find it most entertaining. And how is Coach Baker today?

David: I've been better.

Suzanne: That's a rare glum face for Mr. Baker. What seems to be the problem, David?

Baker: It appears, well, there's no easy way to say this...but there are many reasons to believe that Jim Freeman... Antonio spoke of this before... and then just now...

Suzanne: What is it, David?

David: I believe that Jim Freeman is having...that he's having an inappropriate sexual relationship with a female student.

Suzanne: David, is this a conversation that we should be having in front of a student and a parent?

David: Unfortunately Antonio's already involved. He and I both just saw Freeman kissing a student.

Suzanne: Is this true, Antonio?

Antonio: Yeah, there's been some other stuff too.

Gwen: What do you mean by "other stuff", honey?

Antonio: They're always talking about nudity, and like women's body's 'n stuff.

Suzanne: Okay, alright, we should stop now. This is very serious. I'll have to ask you both to follow me. Ms Brunetti, perhaps you would join us, given your son's involvement.

Gwen: Certainly. *(They begin moving toward stage right. Janet Larsen enters stage left.)*

Janet: Oh, there you are. Has anyone seen Mr. Freeman?

Suzanne: *(Somewhat flustered)* Yes, he's being interviewed out front.

Janet: Oh that's too bad, his wife's called twice. Something about Jim picking her up at the rink. Oh well, I guess I'll just tell her that he's busy for a while. *(Exit all. Lights fade. Cash-Cola sign remains.)*

(Intermission)

Act III

Scene One

(News broadcast is shown on screen.)

Woman: As local schools enthusiastically embrace the business community and so called "corporate sponsorships", teacher Jim Freeman has very different view.

Jim: *(Filmed in front of the football uprights)* Corporate sponsorships have no place in schools. Schools promote critical thinking in the pursuit of truth. Advertisements do exactly the opposite: they condition people to have a reaction to something without thinking at all.

Woman: Superintendent Frank Johnson thinks differently:

Johnson: *(Cut to Johnson sitting on his desk)* As far as we're concerned corporate partnerships provide us with a new source of much needed funding. That new money will improve all sorts of programmes, and that's good for kids. We're very excited about the possibilities here.

Jim: *(Cut to Freeman)* Our school's corporate sponsorship arrangement is allowing Cash-Cola to use manipulative advertising techniques to brainwash kids in a place where their mental health should be our first priority: our own schools *(static edit)*... manipulative techniques to brainwash kids *(static edit)*...

manipulative techniques to brainwash kids ...*(static edit, then very rapid version of the School Inc. commercial, static edit back to Cash-Cola sign, then static edit to "Fairview School District: Investing in Children, Investing in the Future.")*

Scene Two

Lights rise on the school lobby.

Jim: When I arrived at work this morning, I was told to go home, call my lawyer, and to prepare to meet with the superintendent.

Michael: And your wife?

Jim: Picking her up didn't even dawn on me until I was half way home. When I arrived at the skating rink, they were gone. At home I found a note that she was leaving me. I called her parents and her father said that she would contact me when she was ready. *(Pause)* Everything in our house became a symbol of what I may have lost: the art on the fridge, the shoes by the door, all the reminders of a family under the same roof. I grabbed my coat and ran for the car. I spent most of the night driving.

Michael: You didn't sleep last night?

Jim: I slept for an hour.

Michael: *(Standing)* You haven't really slept in three days, Jim. We don't need to do this today. Why don't we reschedule the meeting?

Jim: No. Let's get it over with. I'll need to focus on my family in the weeks to come. I don't want this hanging over my head.

Michael: You should go home and get some sleep before we respond to these charges.

Jim: *(Pause)* When you asked me about my relationship with Molly, I asked what emotion best describes the close connection between two minds on truth and...

Michael: It's love, Jim, of course it's love, but it scares the hell out of me that you're calling it that.

Jim: But it's the truth. A good teacher feels love for his students.

Michael: On some level, yes, but nobody's comfortable with a teacher saying that.

Jim: It also works the other way, you know. As the best teaching is an expression of love, so the best love contains a willingness to teach, and to learn. Think of a mother and her child. When adults love, they teach each other about themselves, about living, about staying hopeful. I think that over the past four years I've stopped paying attention to what Pam has to teach me.

Michael: *(Michael sits)* Jim, what do you expect to come from all of this?

Jim: *(Pause)* When Pam was two months pregnant with Cameron, we left Ella at her grandparents' and flew to Paris for a week. Down some back street, I saw a poster in a bookstore window. You know it, the photo of the man standing in front of three tanks in Tieneman Square.

Michael: I do. *(The school district motto fades from screen and the very grainy Tieneman Square footage fades in.)*

Jim: Under the poster, was written the word "courage". I was transfixed. Then it struck me: the man was wearing a business shirt and holding his suit coat. He was a *working stiff*, a *suit* like me. Which means that he hadn't set out that day to protest. He'd just gone to work like every other day. But that day something had changed. For some reason, stepping in front of a tank appeared the best option. Had he just been fired? Had a loved one died? Had he caught his wife with another man? Then it dawned on me: likely nothing had happened. He'd probably been stuck in the same rut for too long, festering away a life that he couldn't stand.

Michael: Is that what you're doing now, stepping in front of a tank?

Jim: No, the message for me was to make a change before it came to that. When Pam and I returned from Paris, I began the process of leaving public relations and becoming a teacher. And when I finally made that decision, I realized what exactly I'd been doing. However, I'd tried to rationalize it, I'd been twisting the truth for profit. Nobody hires a PR firm to tell the truth; the truth practically tells itself. It's the lies we need help with. And I was that help. I was a professional liar. How 'bout that? That's a pretty tough realization, especially for a father with another child on the way. So I decided, rather than wait until I stepped in front of a tank, I'd become a teacher for the sake of defending the truth. So that's what I did. And now I'm about to lose my job for it. (*Tieneman square footage fades out. School District motto fades in.*)

Michael: I don't think that their accusation of sexual misconduct will hold, Jim (*Picking up a sheet of paper*) If Molly confirms your story, they'll have a difficult time building a case around a good-bye kiss. As for the television interview, we'll build our case around Suzanne Perkins giving you permission to speak.

Jim: Do you think they'll fire me?

Michael: They may try, and if they do, we'll certainly protest. But school boards aren't inclined to dismiss teachers for speaking publicly. It tends to draw more media attention, which in turn gives the disgruntled employee an even larger platform. If a teacher shows contrition, generally dismissal's not pursued.

Jim: ...and free speech?

Michael: Do you want to lose your job for it? (*Enter Janet Palmer*)

Jim: I don't know what I want.

Janet: Hello, gentleman. Jim, are you almost ready?

Jim: Yes, let's get this over with.

(*The two men stand and straighten their clothes. Ella appears stage right. She's been crying.*)

Janet: Would either of you care for a cup of coffee? I'm on my way down to the staff room.

Michael: No thank you. I'm fine.

Jim: You know, Janet, that might not be such a bad idea...

Ella: Daddy?

Jim: Ella, honey, what are you...what's wrong, Ella? (*They meet centre stage*)

Ella: I got in a fight.

Jim: What? What kind of a fight?

Ella: A fistfight at school.

Jim: Oh, honey. Are you okay?

Ella: I'm fine. My hand's a little sore.

Jim: Where's mommie, sweetie?

Ella: She's in the car.

Jim: Is she coming in?

Ella: No, she said she doesn't want to see you right now.

Jim: Oh, sweetie. Janet, Michael, will you give us a moment, please?

Michael: Certainly.

Janet: I'll get those coffees. *(Janet and Michael exit stage left.)*

Jim: But Mommy drove you all the way here.

Ella: ...because I wanted to speak to you. Mommy had to pick me up at school and I started to cry in the car and she thought I was crying because of the fight but I wasn't really crying because of the fight. Are you and mommy getting a divorce?

Jim: No, honey. Who told you that?

Ella: Nobody. We saw you on TV last night.

Jim: Really? How'd I look?

Ella: Fine, I guess, but fatter. Are you mad at me for getting in a fight?

Jim: I guess that depends. Why were you fighting?

Ella: Because Barbara Johnson was calling Sandra Hutchins fat at recess, and when Sandra Hutchins started to cry she kept saying it and saying it and Sandra just didn't know what to do. It made me so mad, Daddy, that I pulled her hair really hard and she hit me on the head, so I hit her back on the mouth and she fell down. Are you mad, daddie?

Jim: No, sweetie. Did you get in trouble at school?

Ella: Yes. Mommy had to come and take me home.

Jim: Was mommie mad?

Ella: At first, but after in the car, when I told her how mean Barbara was being to Sarah, she smiled a little and said that I was just like my father.

Jim: Is that what she said?

Ella: Yes, and at first it made me feel happy but then I started to cry and I couldn't stop and I just wanted to see you because...because I thought that maybe you were really sad.

Jim: I'm okay, princess, but thank you. Thank you for thinking about me. *(He hugs her. Pam enters stage right.)*

Pam: Ella, honey, it's time to go.

Jim: Hello, Pam.

Pam: Let's go sweetie, Grandma and Grandpa will have supper waiting.

Ella: Alright. *(Starts moving toward Pam)*

Jim: Pam, can we talk about this for just a minute?

Pam: Not right now, Jim. I don't have the energy right now.

Jim: I deserve at least a few minutes. I'm really struggling with this... please understand how important this family is to me. *(Pause.)* And I know that I've been dropping the ball lately. I am so very sorry. I really did some thinking...

Pam: Please stop

Jim: You just need to know...

Pam: Would you please just stop talking. For Christ's sake, just stop talking. *(Pause)* Would you please just stop talking. For Christ's sake, just stop talking. *(Pause)* Ella, wait for mommy in the hall please. I need to speak to your father alone. Then we'll go to grandma and grandpas for supper.

Ella: Okay, Mommy. Bye daddy. *(She hugs him)*

Jim: Bye sweetie.

Ella: *(She takes a few steps then stops.)* I'll call at exactly seven o'clock tomorrow night, so be home, 'kay?

Jim: Okay. I love you, Ella.

Ella: I love you, too...I love you in your two tutus, too.

Jim: I love you, in your two tutus, too. *(Ella exits stage right.)* Please forgive me, Pam.

Pam: Not another word, Jim. I don't have the energy to listen to one more word. I've finally realized why I've been so tired. For four years I've been struggling to convince myself that you don't place your family after your...you know it's not even your work, Jim,...it's you...

Jim: That's not fair. I've always put...

Pam: Please don't debate this. I'm trying to tell you what I've been feeling for four years. I've watched you obsess with your work and your ideas to the point where you have no time for us. And every time I say something, you make a speech about how this family means everything to you. For four years, I've searched my heart for the strength to believe you. But I can't anymore. I'm absolutely empty. There's nothing left.

Jim: *(Long pause, then coquettishly)* Can I speak now?

Pam: Yes.

Jim: Last night, Pam, I took a hard look at my, *our* life together. And you are right, since I started teaching I've been very self-centered, probably my entire life. But coming home to an empty house and facing the possibility of losing my family...it changed me, Pam. I realize now that one's first obligation is to one's family, to the people that one is closest to. I was wrong to put...I don't know what the hell to call it..."saving the world" before you. *(Pause)* I love you and I beg you to give me an opportunity to make it up to you.

Pam: You only say you love me, when you're asking forgiveness.

Jim: I do love you.

Pam: Do you, Jim? I mean do you really?

Jim: I do.

Pam: *(Pause)* I don't love you, Jim. I've tried for so long to deny it but I can't. I no longer love you. I've nothing in common with you, anymore. And I think, if you were honest with yourself, you'd admit the same...

Jim: Don't say that.

Pam: But it's true, Jim. It's the truth. *(Turning to leave the stage right.)* I have to go. Ella will be worrying.

Jim: Don't leave like this.

Pam: *(She stops.)* You know, maybe you do love me, but I'm not your first love. Perhaps you have to admit that to yourself.

Jim: Don't say that, this family's my first love.

Pam: I don't believe you.

Jim: How can you even say that?

Pam: *(She does not respond but walks toward stage right.)* Jim, I'm setting you free. *(Exit Pam)*

Jim: Pam? *(Louder)* Pam? *(Fists to his eyes, looks upward. Michael enters stage left.)* Fucking hell! *(Quietly, to himself.)* You're breaking my fucking heart.

Michael: *(Long pause)* Are you alright?

Jim: I don't know. I don't know anything anymore.

Michael: Jim, you need to get some rest. We'll reschedule this meeting for another...

Jim: No. Let's get it over with. I don't really care what they say.

Michael: That's what worries me.

Jim: I'm going through with this.

Michael: Please reconsider, Jim.

Jim: I have nothing to consider. *(Jim exits stage left. Michael follows.)*

(Lights fade. School motto fades.)

Scene Three

(Cash-Cola advertisement appears on screen. Lights rise on board room table, with dossiers, an open laptop, and notes. There is a briefcase next to the chair where Frank will sit. Frank enters, followed by Karl and Suzanne. They are carrying coffees. They seat themselves at the table.)

Karl: She's at home now. The boys are taking care of her.

Suzanne: Your boys are just wonderful, Karl.

Karl: Thank you. They've really impressed me. What time is it? *(Looks at his watch)* Maybe, I'll give them a call.

Frank: It's already five-thirty. I wouldn't put it past Freeman or that union lawyer to purposely keep us waiting.

Suzanne: What would that accomplish?

Frank: Maybe it causes us to cancel, maybe he makes us impatient. Either way it's an attempt to throw us off our game.

Suzanne: I hadn't considered that.

Karl: That's not his style.

Frank: It's a common strategy.

Karl: He's always struck me as being very up front.

Frank: Don't be soft with this guy, Karl. This sexual misconduct may not stick, but we need to teach him a lesson.

Karl: I have to admit, I'm not entirely comfortable with what we're putting him through.

Frank: I've seen his type before. They come to teaching late, with all sorts of trumped up notions of what kids should be taught. They've some misdirected idealism and they don't give a damn for authority. They can poison a school if they're left unchecked. So, if he doesn't show some regret, he'll be let go. It's that simple.

Karl: Isn't that somewhat extreme?

Frank: A head needs to roll here, Karl, or we'll have half our teachers going on the nightly news every time they're pissed off about whatever bee happens to be in their bonnet.

Karl: I don't see what we gain by silencing him.

Frank: It's not the role of a teacher to speak on behalf of the school. We've got a 400 million dollar organization here that's a constant target for liability. That's the bottom line, and that's why we have to control who speaks on our behalf. By the way, Karl, I mentioned your name last night. It looks as though you're a shoo-in for the assistant super's position over in Lakefield.

Karl: We'll need to discuss that, Frank.

Frank: What's up?

Karl: Julie and I have given a lot of thought to what's next for us. I've told her that if, no, *when* she recovers, we'll do things differently. I'll be taking my retirement next year.

Frank: That comes as a surprise.

Karl: We've seen first hand how fleeting life is. I've been in the education business...I've been *educating* for thirty years. I think I've done all that I can.

Frank: I respect your decision, Karl. Now I'm very sympathetic that you and your family are going through this. But I'm sure in a year's time Julie will have recovered completely and this will be behind you. As far as I'm concerned, you're on the brink of your best years as an administrator.

Karl: Thank you, Frank. There's more to it though. These last few years, with all the changes and the budget cuts, somehow, I don't feel the same about what I'm asked to do.

Frank: You just need a change of scenery. That's why you should consider the position in Lakefield.

Karl: No, Frank. It's as though I've been feeling the ground shift beneath me. And what little I sense of it, makes me feel a profound sense of loss and sadness. That's not the stuff of leadership. No, we've made up our minds, this'll be our last year.

Frank: Well Suzanne, you keep yourself out of trouble and you'll have a shot at the helm next year.

Karl: Last night, Julie and I discussed this corporate sponsorship business.

Suzanne: What did she have to say?

Karl: What she always says, "Do what's best for the kids."

(Enter Janet)

Frank: Exactly.

Karl: How are they doing in there, Janet?

Janet: *(Carrying a coffee)* They're on their way.

Frank: They'd better be. I have things to do.

(Jim enters stage left, followed by Michael. Karl and Suzanne stand. Frank, at the far end of the table, remains seated.)

Buchner: Hello, Jim.

Jim: Karl.

Buchner: *(To Michael)* Hello, my name is Karl Buchner. I'm the principal at Clearview Secondary, and I'll be chairing this meeting. *(Offers his hand.)*

Michael: Hello, I'm Michael Lerner, Mr. Freeman's counsel. *(He shakes his hand.)*

Karl: This is Suzanne Perkins, vice-principal here at Clearview; Frank Johnson, superintendent of the Fairview School district; and Janet Larsen, whom you've already met. *(They acknowledge each other.)* We might as well get started. Janet? *(She nods)* Ms. Larsen will be taking the minutes. I'll take a moment to outline our two concerns: first, a teacher and a student both allege that you've been engaged in an inappropriate sexual relationship with a student.

Jim: That's bullshit.

Michael: Jim.

Karl: I remind you, Mr. Freeman, that what you say is on the record. You will be given the opportunity to respond. The second breach of conduct concerns you disobeying a directive from your employer and publicly criticizing the Fairview School District's policy regarding corporate sponsorship. We'll start with the inappropriate sexual relationship.

Jim: I seriously question the puerile minds that would make such an accusation.

Frank: Are you suggesting that it is *puerile* to express concern for the safety of a student?

Jim: I'm suggesting that you have no idea what you're talking about.

Michael: Jim, please. During our conversation, Mr. Freeman shared with me his version of events, a version that will offer a very reasonable explanation for what you've cited as *(Lifts the memo to read it)* "romantic gift giving, inappropriate reference to a student's physical appearance, and kissing." If you'll give me a few minutes, I'll briefly recount Mr. Freeman's version of events.

Karl: Alright then.

Michael: *(Looking down at the memo.)* The gift to which you refer in the memo, in this case a cd of music...*(Lights begin to fade.)*...was given to Mr. Freeman by Molly Lind following a conversation regarding...*(Lights fade on meeting. The Cash-Cola advertisement remains.)*

Scene Four

(Lights rise down stage right. Enter Molly stage left. She's carrying a box. Enter Justine stage right.)

Molly: Hey there, Justine. What's up?

Justine: Not much, what's up with you?

Molly: I just came back to empty my locker.

Justine: You goin' somewhere?

Molly: I'm moving to Montreal. Can you believe it? My father was transferred.

Justine: No kidding. That sounds cool.

Molly: I was going to say good-bye to everyone in English class today, but Mr. Freeman wasn't there. It would've been weird in front of the substitute teacher.

Justine: Freeman'll be upset he missed you.

Molly: Oh, I said good-bye to him after class yesterday.

Justine: That's cool.

Molly: You know, it surprised me how emotional I was about saying good-bye.

Justine: Why should that be surprising? You guys were close.

Molly: Yeah, I guess, but I think I embarrassed him by kissing him.

Justine: You kissed him?

Molly: Hardly. It felt a bit like kissing your brother. He's a great teacher, so I kissed him on the cheek. It was nothin'.

Justine: I was gonna give him this letter today. I'll guess I'll just leave it on his desk. (*Fashion show music is heard in the wings.*) Isn't your fashion show starting soon?

Molly: I decided not to do it.

Justine: What did you tell them?

Molly: I actually used Mr. Freeman's words and told him that the pick up routine with Antonio was compromising my dignity.

Justine: How'd they take it?

Molly: They were a bit upset. I think Antonio was a little insulted. I could tell that he was insulted. It felt good to show him that his actions have consequences.

Justine: Good for you.

Molly: It's kind of shame though because I think the fashion show could be really beautiful.

Justine: Do you think so?

Molly: Yeah I do, but instead they make it vulgar and cheap to sell tickets. I heard that they sold out both nights, so they probably don't care at all that I dropped out.

Justine: I dunno about that. What ya' did might totally piss 'em off but down deep I'm sure they respect it. I think it always goes like that for people with brains who stand up for their beliefs.

Molly: Hey, you're pretty smart aren't you?

Justine: Whatever the hell that means.

(*Enter Kelly stage left*)

Kelly: Hi Molly.

Molly: Hello, Kelly. You know Justine.

Kelly: Hey, Justine.

Molly: I guess the fashion show starts soon.

Kelly: Yeah, it's sold out tonight and tomorrow.

Molly: I heard.

Kelly: I just wanted you to know, Molly, well like, about yesterday an' everything. I understand why you did what you did. Antonio can be a real jerk about things sometimes. Don't tell him or anything but I'm happy you stood up to him, it looked good on him.

Molly: Thank you.

Kelly: It's true. I don't totally agree with what you said about the fashion show, but I'm glad you stood up to Antonio. Hey, I heard you're moving.

Molly: Yeah. I leave tomorrow.

Kelly: I'm sure they'll love you there. Why wouldn't they? I should really get goin'. See ya later.

Molly: Okay, bye. Thanks again.

Kelly: Bye, Justine.

Justine: See ya later.

Molly: Good luck with your fashion show.

(Exit Kelly stage right.)

Molly: She's a funny one. Sometimes I feel a little sorry for her though. Anyway, I should go too. My mom's waiting out front. Hey, would you like my email address? We could keep in touch. You could share some more of your ideas.

Justine: Sure.

Molly: Here. *(Gives her a card)* You can send me yours. *(Sound of a locker slamming shut. Looking off stage right.)* Oh great, here comes the jerk. I'm sure he's still upset. I should sneak off before he sees me. Bye. *(She picks up the box)* Email soon. *(Exit Molly stage left.)*

(Enter Antonio and Mark stage right.)

Antonio: So freak, does the bookworm know that the fashion show sold out both nights?

Justine: She knows.

Antonio: You see, it doesn't matter at all that she quit. We'll still make our money.

Justine: It burns you that she quit and you know it.

Antonio: Yeah, whatever.

Justine: All the money in the world doesn't change the fact that she wants nothing to do with you.

Antonio: No, 'cause she's too busy screwin' a teacher.

Justine: What?

Antonio: Oh yeah. Freeman's down in the boardroom right now tryin' to save his sorry ass.

Justine: What did you do?

Antonio: We caught them kissin' yesterday. That dude's a total pervert.

Mark: Freeman and the bookworm? Ah, dude, that's like totally ba-zarre.

Antonio: Coach Baker and I reported it to the vice-principal. He's as good as fired.

Justine: You know somethin', you're so stupid, you're dangerous.

Antonio: You should watch your mouth.

Justine: As if you're gonna to tell me what to do.

Antonio: I'll tell you what to do. *(Moves toward her.)*

Mark: Ah dude, lighten up.

Antonio: This bitch needs a lesson.

Justine: I'm gonna save you some time, tough guy. I have no fear. I'm a little fucked up that way. I expect to end up in jail. Makes ya think, don't it. You touch me, and I'll make you my ticket to jail.

Mark: Dude.

Justine: *(She reaches behind her, as though to pull something out of her belt. She stares intensely at Antonio. He hesitates.)* Your fear is justified, frat boy: I will kill you. How bad do you want this?

Mark: Wow, dude. That's some freaky shit!

Antonio: This isn't over freak. We know about you at Cedarview. We don't want you here either.

Justine: *(Loudly, like a deranged roar held for three or four seconds)* Raaahhhhn! Not one bit, you scare me not one fucking bit! Bring it on right now, frat boy! Bring it motherfuckin' on and I will kill you!

Antonio: You are a freak.

Mark: Let's get outta here, dude, let's just get outta here. *(Antonio and Mark exit stage right.)*

(Justine gathers herself then looks down at the letter, then quickly exits stage left. Lights fade. Cash-Cola sign remains.)

Scene Five

(Lights rise on meeting.)

Karl: Given the nature of the evidence, we're not persuaded that the accusation of sexual misconduct is warranted. And we're not inclined to confront Molly Lind with this. It would likely be the first she's heard of it, and that has the potential to be rather traumatizing if she were to discover that her good-bye kiss led to her teacher being charged with sexual misconduct. We will therefore keep this information on file, although we won't be advancing the charges. *(The others nod their confirmation.)*

Michael: On what date will the file be destroyed?

Karl: Two years is standard. It is also understood that Mr. Freeman will have no contact whatsoever with Ms. Lind.

Jim: So we just accept that I'm somehow partially guilty.

Karl: A teacher and a student have both raised concerns, Jim. For the sake of school liability, we must exercise maximum precaution.

Michael: I think their offer is reasonable, Jim.

Jim: And Molly's request for a letter of reference? She asked me to send her a letter of reference.

Karl: We would prefer no contact whatsoever.

Suzanne: Karl, may I interject?

Karl: By all means.

Suzanne: I've worked with Molly Lind in a number of clubs. I could write the letter.

Karl: Are you satisfied with that, Jim?

Jim: Do I have a choice?

Karl: We'll put this behind us then and move on to our second concern. *(Takes off his glasses.)* I have been most troubled by this, Jim. I made it very clear that publicly disparaging the school was grounds for serious discipline. What on earth possessed you to so publicly and brazenly criticize the school policy?

Jim: You told me to not allow my *letter* to be published. You said nothing about responding to a journalist's questions.

Karl: You knew that the intent was to prevent you from publicly criticizing school policy.

Jim: That's why I asked Suzanne for permission.

Karl: Suzanne, is this true?

Suzanne: Why, yes.

Karl: And did you grant him permission?

Suzanne: Yes, I did.

Frank: Jesus, Suzanne. Why didn't this come up earlier?

Suzanne: I gave him permission, but I made it very clear that he was not to criticize district policy and/or personnel in any way, in any way.

Jim: You didn't say that.

Suzanne: I did.

Jim: No you didn't. You said "go ahead and enjoy your fifteen minutes of fame...give them hell."

Suzanne: I have it right here in my notes. *(Begins leafing through papers.)*

Karl: This should have been brought to our attention sooner, Suzanne.

Suzanne: It must have slipped my mind, Karl, my apologies. Yes, here it is, "...*I made it clear that Mr. Freeman was permitted to speak but that he was in no way authorized to disparage school policy and/or personnel...*" It's right here.

Jim: She did *not* say that. I don't give a damn what's in her notes.

Suzanne: I sat down this morning, Mr. Freeman, and painstakingly recorded the details of our conversation.

Jim: You painstakingly covered your ass!

Micheal: Jim.

Karl: Perhaps we've arrived at an impasse here. Maybe it's in our best interest to keep things moving forward.

Jim: No way! Let's not move anything forward! She's lying and there's an easy way to settle it. There was a witness.

Suzanne: I don't recall anyone else being...

Jim: Molly Lind listened to our conversation before asking for a letter of reference.

Suzanne: That's right, she did.

Karl: Jim...

Jim: Let's call her, we'll settle this now.

Karl: I don't think we'll call her.

Jim: Why not? (*He stands.*)

Michael: Jim, let's just move on.

Jim: Why the hell don't we call Molly? For God's sake, Suzannes's lying to protect her reputation!

Frank: Or you are, Mr. Freeman.

Jim: So that's how you get me? You back me into a corner. (*Sitting down.*) Why does it even matter if I had permission in the first place? The problem isn't *that* I spoke, it's *what* I spoke. I had the temerity to openly criticize corporate sponsorship of public schools and you're punishing me for it.

Michael: Jim, this line of argumentation is not advantageous. Please, Jim, sit down and stop talking.

Jim: Don't tell me to stop talking! I made them look like fools and that's what this is about. Do not tell me to stop talking!

Michael: Jim, control yourself.

Frank: (*Stands and begins placing his notes in his briefcase.*) I'm not going to watch you dig a deeper hole for yourself. For your information, Mr. Freeman, this morning our lawyers advised us that your little quip about *manipulative techniques to brainwash kids* provides Cash-Cola with grounds for a defamation

suit. Your comment might end up costing this school district millions of dollars in a long, protracted lawsuit. Had you considered that, Mr. Freeman?

Jim: *(Leaps to his feet)* That's my whole point! That's exactly what I've been trying to tell you. If Cash-Cola decides to drag us through an expensive trial over something a teacher says, we're screwed, regardless of whether or not what I said was true. So out of fear, you're already censoring me to avoid offending them.

Frank: *(With briefcase in hand.)* Mr. Lerner, we'll contact you in the morning. I don't need to listen to this. *(He begins walking.)*

Jim: *(Stepping in front of Frank.)* Yes, you do need to listen.

Frank: Excuse me.

Jim: You've put me through this, you can damn well hear me out.

Frank: *(Attempting to walk past him.)* Excuse me. *(Static on screen, then cut in rough, blurred footage of Tienneman Square tanks behind the Cash-Cola ad.)*

Michael: *(Standing)* Jim, let him leave.

Karl: Mr. Freeman.

Janet: Oh, Jim.

Frank: Let me pass.

Jim: No, I won't.

Frank: *(He smiles, aware that Jim's insubordinance and use of physical intimidation provides the grounds for his contract to be terminated.)* Alright then. *(Calmly returns to his seat, sets down his briefcase and sits.)*

Jim: *(Very Intensely)* You're censoring me because you know we're in bed with an elephant. And if he shifts his weight, we'll be crushed. That's the control they have. Why can't you see this for what it is? You strut around like peacocks thinking that you know about business, but you forget the most important rule: whoever's got the money calls the shots. You're gleeful when the same damn companies that lobby for lower taxes, come to the rescue of cash-strapped schools. Somehow they've got us convinced that rather than pay for education through taxes, which we control, we should pay for it by selling parts of it to big business. But now, we have to teach our kids that Cash-Cola is part of their education. This stuff is so dangerously full of sugar that no parents in their right mind would try to get their kids to drink more of it. More of it, for Christ's sake! But that's exactly what that sign is trying to do. That sign is now part of what we teach at Fairview Secondary. That's absurd! Do any of you actually think that what you see on the wall doesn't affect your understanding of reality? And you now want me to accept my new role in teaching my students to pledge allegiance to the flag of the Cash-Cola nation? And it is a nation: the people who own and run that company have as much economic clout as half the *countries* on this damn planet. And they're sure as hell not democratic. You won't be voting in the C.E.O of Cash-Cola any time soon. So to save a few measly bucks on our taxes, we start handing over the best means we have to shape the values of our children to the handful of goddamn aristocrats who run the Cash-Cola nation, or whatever other corporation has something to give. Do you think that's a really *positive* step for democracy? "But Jim," you'll say, "that's just the way things are going." For God sakes, this is politics! Not some fucking natural phenomenon. *Things don't just go! They get pushed!* Pushed by real, self-interested people who will make real money that they can spend on themselves. That's the whole reason for Cash-Cola's existence. Why doesn't anyone have the goddamn balls to stand up to this? Where the hell did everyone go? Huh? Or do we just imagine it's not happening? And surely you know this is just the beginning. Because once

you boys get the taste of profit you'll stop at nothing until it's all up for sale. Then we're right back where we were two hundred years ago: the dream of quality public education is lost – and those with the money get educated while the poor are destined for ignorance and servitude. And when I speak out against the party line, when a teacher speaks the truth, you silence him. What does that teach our students? I'll tell you what it teaches them: when power starts to march, duck and run for cover, or get stomped on by one big black corporate boot! Congratulations! Congratulations for the triumph of corporate education. (*Jim sits. He is defeated. Tienneman footage fades out.*)

Frank: (*Pause*) Are you finished, Mr. Freeman? (*Pause*) Yes? Good then. Mr. Freeman, your contract with the Fairview School District is terminated. Mr. Buchner, Ms. Perkins and I will accompany you to your classroom. You will collect your personal affairs, then vacate the premises. After which you'll no longer be permitted on school property. Is that clear? (*Freeman does not respond.*)

Michael: We'll protest this.

Frank: Of course. But there'll be no shortage of witnesses this time for Mr. Freeman's flagrant insubordination. (*Pause*) Mr. Freeman. (*Frank stands. Pause*) Mr. Freeman, we're waiting. (*Pause*) The next step is calling the police. (*Pause*) and that would create a rather untoward spectacle for the students...and likely the local media. (*Pause, then standing*) I'll make that call then.

Janet: Jim. (*He doesn't look*) Jim, dear. (*He looks up. Janet makes eye contact, places a finger under her chin and motions for Jim to lift his chin. Jim reflects for a moment, then slowly lifts his chin, inhales, stands, pushes in his chair, acknowledges Janet with a nod, then exits stage right. Frank, followed by Suzanne, Michael, then Karl stand and begin exiting stage right. As Karl passes Janet, he puts his hand on her shoulder. She touches his hand. Karl exits stage right. Janet packs up her lap top, picks up the coffee cups, then walks toward front stage left. Lights fade on table, a spot rises on Janet. Enter Justine stage right. She is moving quickly, somewhat out of breath*)

Scene Six

Justine: Excuse me, are you the secretary?

Janet: Yes.

Justine: Have you seen Mr. Freeman?

Janet: He's not available right now.

Justine: He's not, like, getting in trouble is he?

Janet: That's not a student's concern, dear.

Justine: If he is, it's not at all true.

Janet: May I ask your name?

Justine: Justine, Justine Baylor. That Antonio guy said that he saw them kiss, but Molly said it was a good-bye kiss, like one you'd give your brother.

Janet: Thank you, dear, for sharing that.

Justine: So he's not in trouble?

Janet: Mr. Freeman has been let go.

Justine: What? The kiss was totally nothin', Molly Lind said it...

Janet: It was not because of the kiss...

Justine: Then why?

Janet: Dear, I'm not able to tell a...

Justine: Please tell me.

Janet: Honey...

Justine: I want to understand why. I *need* to understand why.

Janet: Mr. Freeman had...no *has*...the type of character that sees things differently.

Justine: What does that mean?

Janet: It means that he didn't agree with corporate sponsorships, and he wasn't afraid to say it.

Justine: So they fired him?

Janet: They backed him into a corner and he came out swinging.

Justine: Where is he?

Janet: He's very emotional.

Justine: I want to thank him...to really thank him.

Janet: Dear...

Justine: He should know what his students think.

Janet: He's packing up his belongings in his classroom.

Justine: Thank you.

Janet: Justine?

Justine: Yeah.

Janet: Respect his dignity.

Justine: I will.

(Exit Justine stage right. Janet puts the chairs on the table then pushes it off stage. Lights rise on classroom. Jim enters stage left, followed by Frank, Michael, Karl and Suzanne. Jim begins packing his desk into his box, while the others stand in an arc around him. Justine enters stage left. Frank Johnson, facing Justine from across the stage, notices her enter. He motions to Suzanne who is standing closest to Justine. Jim continues to pack without speaking.)

Scene Seven

Frank: *(Motioning for Suzanne to look behind her.)* Ms. Perkins.

Suzanne: *(Turning around)* I'm sorry young lady, but you'll have to....

Justine: I want to speak with Mr. Freeman.

Suzanne: Mr. Freeman is unavailable now. You're not...*(She touches here elbow).*

Justine: Don't touch me!

Suzanne: Young lady! *(Justine aggressively walks past)*

Frank: Young lady, please leave this classroom immediately...

Justine: I want to say good-bye to with Mr. Freeman.

Karl: Let her speak, Frank.

Frank: I'll get her out of here.

Michael: Mr. Johnson, that wouldn't be in your best interest...and there will be no shortage of witnesses.
(Frank steps back.)

Justine: Mr. Freeman? *(He continues packing without making eye-contact. He is afraid that if he looks he will break down. Justine's voice softens)* Mr. Freeman? I finished that letter, remember those three questions. Do you want it? *(He is too emotionally vulnerable to acknowledge her. He continues to pack without looking up. Justine decides to read the letter.)* Okay then...

She begins to read as Jim continues packing.

"Mr. Freeman,

You asked me what I value. Over the last few years, I've had to survive my parents divorce and five different schools. Do you want to know what I value? Not being afraid, courage.

Why do I do the things I do? To be courageous and to shock people back into caring. Unless my history teachers have been lying, the bullies are always taking advantage of the weak. But most of us just pretend it's not happening, as we always have. Maybe courage is contagious and if people see it enough, they'll discover their own.

What do I expect from English class? I don't really know. Every teacher has a different view. But the last thing I need to hear is that everything is just fine. That's such a cowardly waste of education. Anyway, it sounds like you have the courage to speak the truth and I really like that. So keep doing what you're doing, Mr. Freeman. It's inspiring.

Yours truly,
Justine

(Jim still does not make eye contact with Justine) Did you notice that I didn't use any colloquialisms? Not one. It was completely formal, just like you asked. But I could've said it even better if I'd used colloquialisms. *(Jim places his box under his arm, and begins walking toward stage right.)* Mr. Freeman!

(Ennio Morricone's "Titoli di Coda" begins. Justine speaks more loudly.) Mr. Freeman! (Jim is close to exiting. Justine hollers.) Mr. Freeman!! (He turns.) You're like one totally cool dude, dude.

Jim: Thank you, Justine, thank you.

Justine: No problemo.

Jim: *(Pause. A faint smile.)* Maybe I'll take that assignment. *(They meet at centre stage. She gives him the paper.)*

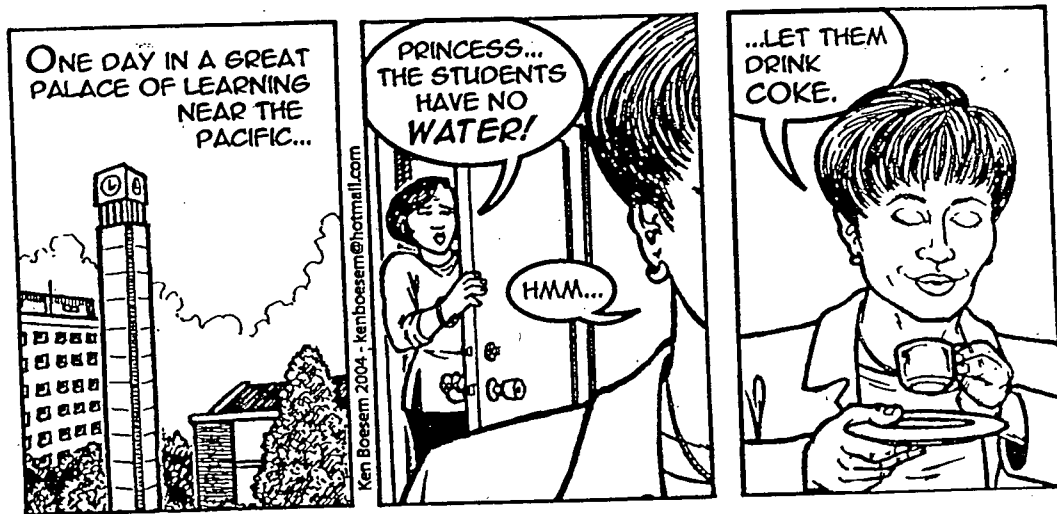
Justine: Stay real.

Jim: You, too, dude. *(Jim exits stage right. Justine exits stage left. Suzanne steps out of Justine's way. Michael exits stage right. Frank exits stage left, followed by Suzanne. Karl is left on stage alone, beneath the screen. He pauses, then turns to observe the screen. Staticy protesting fades through the image of the Cash-Cola sign. Then for a moment, the real-time video of the audience fades in. Karl observes the audience on the screen, then looks over this shoulder at the audience before exiting stage right. Cash-Cola advertisement fades in, then "pops", as though a TV tube has blown.)*

Curtain.

CHAPTER THREE

Changing Tastes: "Let Them Drink Coke"



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Introduction:

“Congratulations! Congratulations for the triumph of corporate education.”
School Inc. (page 88)

The play *School Inc.* is a fictional account of the capacity of corporate sponsorships to have a detrimental impact on public education. As further evidence of this effect, I offer the following factual account of how the University of British Columbia’s cold-beverage contract with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company has had a significant correlation with the university’s removing or disabling forty-four percent (44%) of the drinking fountains on campus. The details of this turn of events provide a distressing glimpse of the impact of corporate sponsorships, and corporate values in general, on educational institutions. At the very least, the following account demonstrates the extent to which the University of British Columbia’s increasing commitment to maximizing revenue is distorting the very practice that defines the institution itself: clear thinking.

Research:

On a hot August afternoon in the summer of 2003, after using my last few coins for parking, I began the fifteen-minute walk from UBC’s Parking Lot B to the Faculty of Education. A few moments later, in search of a drinking fountain, I stepped into the state-of-the-art Forest Sciences Centre that lies en route. To my surprise, there were no public drinking fountains in the building.

My preference for waiting to find a drinking fountain, rather than buying Dasani Water from one of the many Coca-Cola machines in the Forest Sciences Centre, both for environmental and financial reasons, was irrelevant as I had spent my last coins on parking. Not to be disheartened, I continued on to the Faculty of Education where I knew there to be fountains

Ten minutes later, the walk and my failed attempt to find water having accentuated my thirst, I arrived at the Faculty of Education, located in the Scarfe Building. To my chagrin, the first fountain I came across had been neatly covered in clear plastic. I walked to where I remembered another fountain to be only to discover that it too had been covered in plastic. In fact, as I would soon learn, every fountain in the building, save one in the basement, had been neatly bagged.

As I walked through the Scarfe Building, I recalled having read of students elsewhere who had suspected their university of diminishing access to drinking fountains in order to promote beverage sales. I shook my head in disbelief at the possibility.

For the time being, however, I was genuinely frustrated by my inability to quench my thirst. A Coke machine selling Dasani water, conspicuously placed at the main entrance sometime after I had completed my Bachelor of Education in 1997, reminded me that my circumstantial lack of funds was also playing a role in my inability to find water.

These events initiated my ongoing investigation of the direct correlation between the removal and/or disabling of 114 drinking fountains, 44% of all drinking fountains on the campus of the University of British Columbia,² and UBC's signing of a lucrative cold-beverage contract with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. This is a troubling account of how a significant number of students and staff were persuaded, over the course of approximately six years, of the false notion that the tap water at UBC was unfit for consumption. Whether the result of misunderstanding and excess credulity, or a

² In a letter dated February 9, 2004 (see page 103), Terry Sumner, UBC Vice-President-Administration and Finance, states that there are "some 165 water fountains on campus". As I had discovered, seventeen of these were covered in plastic. Before UBC plumbers removed ninety-seven fountains, between 1997-1999,

willful misrepresentation of the facts in order to sell more beverages, the result was the same: the University's actions placed undue pressure on students and staff to consume Coca-Cola products, including Dasani Water, and thereby increase sales revenue for both the university and the Coca-Cola Bottling Company.

After wandering the halls, quiet in the final days of August, I came across two instructors of whom I asked why the fountains were covered in plastic. They suggested two possible explanations: either the water was not safe to drink due to old pipes or, rumour had it, it was somehow related to the contract with Coca-Cola. One instructor offered me a coffee cup to fill from the faucets in the washroom. I thanked him but chose to grapple with my thirst until I could find a working fountain, which I eventually did a few hundred metres away in the Student Union Building.

During the next few months, as I settled into life as a graduate student, my curiosity about the fountains persisted. On Thursday, November 6th, 2003, I began a formal investigation by emailing Dr. Robert Tierney, Dean of the Faculty of Education: "Since returning to Scarfe in August," I began, "I have been quite curious as to why all the drinking fountains are covered in plastic. If you could take a moment to explain the reason for this I would certainly appreciate it" (Cook, 2003)

The following day, Dr. Tierney forwarded my email to Mr. Win Hunter, Director Administration of the Scarfe Building. On Tuesday, November 11th, Mr. Hunter emailed me the following explanation:

...UBC Plant Operations actually covered them quite some time ago, as they had concerns about the quality of the water which is affected by our 40 year old (sic) plumbing system. Many of our administrative offices within the building are therefore forced to purchase commercial water from Canadian Springs because

there would have been 262 fountains. Therefore, 44% represents the total number of disabled or removed fountains, 114, expressed as percentage of the previous total of 262 fountains on campus.

of this deficiency.

...the building water supply is currently being tested by the UBC Utilities Office to ensure that it can be properly filtered in such a way that no possible contaminants such as lead, or whatever, remain in the supply after it has been filtered. Assuming this can be achieved, we plan to install such a filtered system in the ESA[Education Students Association] Lounge (Scarfe room 2F). It is a significant problem and I appreciate your concern. As you are a CUST [Curriculum Studies graduate] student I understand you have access to bottled water through your department which provides a supply in the CUST photocopy room. (Hunter, 2003)

The fact that Mr. Hunter had responded publicly on what appeared to be the faculty and staff email list became apparent when, that same day, I received a number of related emails.

One staff member, who I will not identify as she did not send her message publicly³, emailed to offer other reasons for closing the fountains: "Besides the old piping and horrible tasting water, the cleaning staff got tired of cleaning out fountains that had coffee dumped into them." Furthermore, "[W]hen the building was renovated, the pipes didn't get redone!" Her message reiterated the widely held belief that the water was contaminated due to "old piping" and introduced the alternative explanation that the cleaning staff had grown tired of cleaning them. It is worth noting that in her view, preference also played a role i.e. that the cleaning staff, and those who employed them, *preferred* not to maintain fountains.

I received another email from a recent doctoral graduate from the Faculty of Education at UBC, who wrote the following:

I'm interested in your pursuing the matter of drinking fountains in Scarfe.
...Last year one of the students running for an ESA position claimed that

³ Throughout this thesis, I will identify only those sources that meet at least one of the following criteria: they gave me permission to publish their words, their words were previously published, or their professional responsibilities within a public institution include being accountable for that on which they provided information.

the fountains were disabled because there was some deal with the bottled water suppliers. The other interesting thing about Win Hunter's letter is that he assumed since your personal needs were being taken care of (i.e. you are a CUST [Curriculum Studies] student and therefore have access to bottled water) that you should not care if other people's needs aren't being met.

On Tuesday, November 11th, a Professor at the Faculty of Education sent to Mr. Hunter and myself the following email:

Win-

Thank you very much. In thinking about our own coffee-making (and that of other offices on our wing) for which use tap-water, I think we will have to move to bottled water. But that led me to the next question: are coffees and teas in Edibles [the Faculty of Education cafeteria] made with Scarfe tap-water?

This faculty member had recognized some significant inconsistencies with the administration's claim that the water was not safe to drink. The cafeteria appeared to be using the "contaminated" tap water, and there had been no effort to prevent consumption from faucets throughout the building. Furthermore, this professor articulated an example of how the belief that the fountain water is contaminated leads one to consume more bottled water.

Since Mr. Hunter had responded publicly, on Wednesday, November 12, I sent an email to Mr. Hunter and my advisor, Dr. Stephen Petrina, a Professor at the Faculty of Education, asking the latter to forward my message through the Faculty of Education email list:

In the brief note that Dr. ... cc'd to me, he posed what I thought was an interesting question: are the coffees and teas in Edibles made with Scarfe tap-water? I inquired and, sure enough, they are. But that's just one example of how the covering of fountains is a little difficult to understand. Given that the water is [presumed to be] below acceptable health standards for drinking, would not common sense suggest that serious steps should be taken to prevent people from consuming the water in any way i.e. coffee, tea, soup or just filling their water containers in the washroom? I think that UBC is putting themselves at

risk in allowing unsafe water to come out of faucets with no warning whatsoever. In fact, I know a number of students who regularly fill their water bottles from the taps in the washrooms.

If it is not too much of a problem, I would be most interested in knowing what exactly is in the water that makes it unfit for consumption, and how far out of the range of acceptability it is.... (Cook 2003)

Although the evidence was not yet available, the absence of any warning against the consumption of water from the faucets was a strong indication that there was no real threat from "possible contaminants such as lead" (Hunter, 2003). One can reasonably assume that if the water contained dangerous amounts of lead, for example, UBC would have taken immediate action to prevent harm befalling students and staff.

That same day, in response to the above-mentioned query, Mr. Hunter, expecting that "Food Services [had] recognized the condemned Scarfe water supply at the fountains and addressed the problem in an appropriate way", referred the message to Andrew Parr, the Director of Food Services at UBC. Mr. Parr responded on November 12th :

Hello Peter and Win,

Thanks for your questions and I'm pleased to bring you a good answer! Tap water is used, however, all coffee brewers, hot water dispensers and bulk beverage dispensers on campus have had an "after market" filtration system added to them. We added these about five years ago at great initial and on-going cost (filter replacement) but it is well worth it as the quality of water on campus is the worst in the city. Believe it or not, the GVRD tests the water here on campus and if it is OK here they assume that it is OK everywhere!!

Andrew

Mr. Parr's email offered an example of how the defense of the contaminated water theory created an atmosphere at UBC that tolerated a number of unsubstantiated claims.

Is doubtful that the GVRD (Greater Vancouver Regional District) would make *assumptions* regarding water safety. That they would base their assumptions concerning the quality of water "everywhere" on the quality of water at UBC is entirely untenable. Mr. Parr's assertions, the last in string of claims that did not stand up to scrutiny, persuaded me that there was likely very little substance to the claim of contaminated water.

Dr. Petrina expressed a similar opinion in his email to Mr. Hunter, dated November 19th, 2003:

Other buildings on campus built in 1962 still have their water flowing from the fountains. For example, the Lasserre Building, built in 1962 like the Scarfe, has open fountains; however, and this is the kicker, Lasserre does NOT have a massive coke [sic] machine greeting their students and visitors at the entrance. There is no a priori reason to believe that educators are more gullible than architects, so something else...is at work....It would help if Rob [Dean Robert Tierney] could answer these questions....Instead of sinking more money into bottled drinks and filters, which don't work anyhow, why not sink the students' money into fountain repairs and something sustainable? And, just for the record, does the faculty directly or indirectly profit from the sales of coke [sic] products. (Petrina, 2003)

Dr. Petrina's comparing the Scarfe building with the Lasserre building was one more piece of evidence that further undermined the claim that Scarfe's water was not safe for consumption. I therefore determined to test the alternate hypothesis: that the diminished access to drinking fountains was related not to contaminated water, but to the presence of a cold-beverage contract with Coca-Cola.

The surest way to provide conclusive evidence either supporting or refuting the contaminated water hypothesis was to test the water. On Wednesday, November 19th, I drove to the Burnaby office of JR Laboratories Inc. and obtained two sterilized plastic

water bottles: one to test for metal contaminants, the other for bacteria. Later, while filling the plastic bottles from a sink in a first-floor Scarfe classroom, a male student looked up from his group-work and warned me to not drink the water, dude. He added that the water in the building was of very poor quality. In so doing, he provided more anecdotal evidence of the extent to which the contaminated water claim, supported by the sight of bagged drinking fountains, had permeated the school culture.

After filling the two water bottles, I returned to Burnaby to submit the samples and pay the \$160.50 fee for testing, a considerable sum for the vast majority of students, myself included.

The next step was to investigate the contract that the University of British Columbia had with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. The confidential nature of the cold-beverage contract, signed by UBC, the Alma Mater Society (AMS), and the Coca-Cola Bottling Company in August of 1995, had been controversial from the start. That same year, Stanley Tromp, then a reporter with *The Ubyyssey*, the UBC student newspaper, began a series of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that would, after five years and two Supreme Court hearings, result in the contract being made public and placed on reserve in the UBC Law Library.

According to Steve Clark, Coca-Cola's Western Canada spokesperson, Coke wanted to keep the terms of deal confidential "to protect the business terms and proprietary information that was in the contract from falling into the hands of the competitor" (Choo 2001). It is also these "business terms" that provide a very compelling motivation for taking action to maximize the sale of cold beverages on the UBC campus.

The contract provides UBC with two sources of revenue. First, UBC receives an \$844,260 “annual sponsorship fee” for each of the contract’s ten years between August 1995 and August 2005. Furthermore, the university receives a 23% commission “that shall be payable monthly on the fifteenth day of each month in respect of Net Revenues from Vending Machines for the previous month.” This payment “shall be accompanied by a monthly report...setting out the volume of Cold Beverage Products [including water] ...dispensed ...for such a previous month” (Agreement Among the University of British Columbia and the Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia and Coca-Cola Bottling Company Ltd., 1995, p. 27).

The most persuasive motivation for selling more beverages is the penalty that UBC faces for failing to meet the volume quota set out in the contract. In the event of a “Commitment Shortfall,” where UBC fails to sell the “Minimum Volume Commitment” of 33,600,000 cans or bottles of Coke beverages, including water, by August 2005, the contract is extended for two years or until the quota is met, at no expense to the Coca-Cola Bottling Company (Agreement Among the University of British Columbia and the Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia and Coca-Cola Bottling Company Ltd., 1995, p. 29). Consequently, starting in August of 2005, the University and the Alma Mater Society stand to lose up to \$1.7 million in revenue if they fail to sell enough Coca-Cola products.

It has been widely reported that U.B.C. is not likely to meet this target. As recently as January 2004, Brian Duong, Vice President of Finance for the AMS reported that they “could fill up the Empire Pool [at UBC] with Coke and we still wouldn’t make it [the quota]” (Thomas, 2003).

The likelihood of not meeting their quota would have been apparent to whomever was reviewing "the monthly report[s]...setting out the volume of Cold Beverages dispensed....", if not in the contract's first year (1995 to 1996) then certainly in the second (1996-1997). Simply multiplying the volume of beverages dispensed in the first two years by five would have made clear the financial loss on the horizon.

Faced with such a contract, on course to lose the considerable sum of \$1.7 million in revenue, one can reasonably conclude that those responsible for negotiating and/or administering such terms would have cause for concern. It therefore seems logical that some action would have been taken to augment the sale of beverages on campus. To draw such a conclusion is not unreasonable; to the contrary, it would be surprising to discover that the university had *not* attempted to remedy this situation.

One obvious course of action would have been to inform whomever was responsible for the sale of cold beverages of this looming shortfall and to implement a strategy for increasing beverage sales through promotional and/or marketing strategies. Again, reason suggests that the Director of Food Services, Andrew Parr, the person responsible for selling beverages on campus, would have been aware of the need to increase beverage sales. Along with marketing and promotional strategies, another strategy for increasing beverage sales exists: to discourage the consumption of a competing product.

Although distasteful to some, the idea that the free water provided by drinking fountains is undesirable competition is a notion that the Coca-Cola Company takes very seriously. In the documentary *The Cola Conquest* (Wood & Buder, 1998) concerning the history of Coca-Cola, Roberto Goizueta, then Chairman and CEO of the Coca-Cola

Company, articulates his intent to conquer the competition that tap water, among other beverages, represents to the sale of Coca-Cola products:

Right now at this point in time in the United States, people consume more soft drinks than any other liquid, including ordinary tap water. If we take full advantage of our opportunities, some day, not too many years into our second century, we will see the same wave catching on in market after market until, eventually the number one beverage on earth will not be tea or coffee or wine or beer, it will be soft drinks, our soft drinks.
(Wood & Buder, 1998)

In 1997, the second year of UBC's beverage contract, the Coca-Cola Company, in its annual report, included the following text next to a photo of a drinking fountain:

Because some fountain drinks are still easier to find.[sic] In many places it's still easier to find a water fountain than a Coca-Cola. That's why we continue to strengthen our distribution system. We're working hard to make our products an integral part of any landscape so they are always within reach.
(Adbusters, 1999, p. 57)

This "strengthening" of the "distribution system" is exactly what was accomplished in both the Faculty of Education and the Forest Sciences Centre. In both buildings, Coca-Cola products were "always in reach", while public drinking fountains were, as I had discovered that August afternoon, much more difficult, if not impossible, to find. As I was to discover, covering existing fountains with plastic and constructing new buildings with no public fountains were not the only means by which Coca-Cola's distribution systems were strengthened.

In an article written for the *Georgia Straight* in June 1999, journalist Stanley Tromp, the same reporter who fought to make UBC's Coca-Cola contract public, reported that ninety-seven fountains had been "accidentally" removed in seventeen buildings across the university campus:

A UBC study in 1994 found that most of the fountains' water quality was safe but that two fountains in a pre-1960 building had slightly higher than

expected lead levels and needed to be removed. They were built with copper pipe using lead solder, which eventually leaches into the water system.

UBC plant-operations director Paul Becker issued a work order in 1997 to remove the two fountains and repair others. But former UBC plumbing-shop staffers misinterpreted "repair" as "remove", Becker said, and pulled 97 fountains in 17 buildings. "I think at that time we should have been more proactive at looking at other options and communicating better to campus," he told the Georgia Straight.

Several reasons were offered by the plumbing shop for the removal: some of the fountains were in washrooms, which building codes no longer allow; they were costly to maintain; they often broke down, with no spare parts available; and the galvanized piping produced a bad taste. (Tromp, 1999)

Again, we see the same inconsistent logic that characterized the bagging of fountains in the Scarfe Building. Paul Becker's relative insouciance for a mistake that removed tens of thousands of dollars worth of fountains, to say nothing of labour costs, seems inappropriate to say the least. (Consider the consequences if ninety-seven toilets, an item of similar monetary value, had been mistakenly removed.) One imagines that such egregious incompetence would certainly have resulted in some measure of disciplinary action, at the very least a warning for those responsible for the mistake. Instead, Mr. Becker suggests that he "should have been more proactive at looking at other options and communicating better to campus...."

As for the staff plumbers, they appear to know nothing of their very costly, not to mention time-consuming, blunder. Quite to the contrary, they offer five different explanations for removing the fountains, not one of which corroborates Mr. Becker's claim that they had misinterpreted "repair" as "remove."

The timeline of the affair also raises a number of important questions. Certainly, over the course of two years, Mr. Becker would have learned that his staff plumbers were in the process of *removing* ninety-five fountains, rather than *repairing* them, as his work

order had instructed. For this there are two possible explanations. First, Mr. Becker displayed an extraordinary disregard for what his plumbers were undertaking for two years. This is doubtful given his subsequent promotion to Associate Vice-President of Facilities Management at the University of Saskatchewan. The second explanation is that he had indeed directed the staff plumbers to remove the fountains for the same reasons the plumbing shop had explained to *The Georgia Straight*. The latter seems much more plausible, given that he did not seem particularly bothered by such an extremely costly oversight.

The timeline of these events poses another troubling question: if the tests demonstrating "slightly higher than acceptable lead levels" in two fountains were conducted in 1994, why did Paul Becker, then Director of Plant Operations, wait until 1997 to issue a work order to "remove the two fountains and repair others" (Tromp 1999)? Taken at its word, this demonstrates a half-hearted commitment to public safety similar to that which characterized the apparent concerns for contaminated water in the Scarfe Building. More likely, the delay demonstrated that the UBC fountains did not pose a particularly grave threat.

This timeline lends further support to the correlation between the introduction of corporate sponsorship contract with Coca-Cola, and the loss of 44% of the fountains on the UBC campus. In 1995, one year after the UBC water study, UBC entered into the contractual agreement with the Coca-Cola bottling company. In 1997, the year that the UBC administration had solid numerical evidence that they were not likely to meet their ten-year sales quota, Paul Becker issued a work order resulting in the removal of ninety-seven fountains in fourteen buildings. It is also at this time that seventeen of eighteen

drinking fountains in the Faculty of Education were covered in plastic and a Coca-Cola beverage dispenser was placed at the front entrance. In the first year of the Coca-Cola contract, in the winter of 1995, construction began on the Forest Sciences Centre, built with a \$47 million provincial grant and containing "leading edge technology equipment" and "state-of-the-art value-added manufacturing equipment" (FSC 2004). As stated earlier, there are no public drinking fountains in the building.

During the last week of December 2003, I visited Mr. Hunter to establish the dates the fountains were covered and who had issued the work order. Mr. Hunter was unable to tell me the date but did confirm that it was approximately six or seven years previous. He did not know who had covered them.

Mr. Hunter also informed me that in response to my request he had undertaken to have the water in the Scarfe Building tested. He then showed me a report from Levelton Analytical Services, dated November 21st, 2003, proving the water to be safe to drink. He also reminded me of the filtered water dispenser that was available in the ESA Lounge in the basement of the Scarfe Building.

When asked why the fountains needed to be covered if the water was safe to drink, he suggested that perhaps somebody had complained about the taste. I asked if he thought it suspicious that fountains providing perfectly safe water for over forty years had been covered in the first years of the university's signing a very lucrative contract with a beverage company that sold, among other drinks, bottled water. He responded that he did not believe that such a motivation [to sell more beverages] was behind the covering of the fountains. He had "more faith in his fellow man" than to suspect that anyone would do such a thing. Mr. Hunter provided me with a printout of a UBC media release concerning

the details of how the revenue from the Coca-Cola sponsorship was spent. He also suggested people were not interested in using the fountains since tastes in water had changed: he cited his own household use of a Brita Filter as evidence of this change.

On December 3rd, 2003, the results of the \$160.50 water test that I had undertaken were reported. Not surprisingly, the water was perfectly safe.

Analysis:

An important principal for logical thinking is known as *Occam's Razor*, or the *law of economy* or *the law of parsimony*. This principal, first articulated by William of Occam in the fourteenth century, admonishes us to choose the simplest explanation when faced with a number of possible explanations. When attempting to understand a phenomenon, Occam's razor helps us to "shave off" those concepts, variables or constructs that are not needed to explain it. In so doing, developing explanations becomes much easier, and there is less chance of "introducing inconsistencies, ambiguities and redundancies" (Heylighen, 1997).

This principal is helpful for understanding what took place at UBC. The explanations offered by university administrators - that the water was contaminated, that a two-year work order was unknowingly misinterpreted, and that they were simply responding to changing tastes - serve only to increase complexity. The first explanation proved to be categorically false; the second is unlikely, given the timeline and conflicting explanations for removing fountains; and the third suggests that the presence of a "tastier" commercial option provides a legitimate rationale for limiting access to a basic necessity such as a clean, safe source of drinking water. Furthermore, none of these explains why this unprecedented phenomenon happened at the same time as the

introduction of a very demanding quota for beverage sales. This set of explanations requires an acceptance of falsehoods, inconsistencies, conflicting interpretations, unsubstantiated claims and an extraordinary coincidence. Rather than simplifying our understanding of the phenomenon, these explanations complicate it.

Another theory “shaves off” the need to accept such shoddy reasoning and offers a much simpler explanation. The introduction of an extremely lucrative corporate contract brought with it a greater commitment to a new set of values, corporate values, that have less regard for the benefit of providing free drinking water for public consumption when it can be provided more profitably through private distribution. When senior administrators’ commitment to providing this public service waned, a number of rationales appeared to warrant the disabling and/or removal of drinking fountains: rumours of contaminated water, changing tastes, expensive maintenance, and, of course, the capacity of such an action to help generate revenue.

When asked why the fountains were taken out of service, those responsible would quite naturally avoid the most politically contentious reason i.e. they no longer value the fountains, and cite what appeared to be the reason most likely to deflect further questioning: that the water was unsafe. Since other UBC administrators share this new set of values, the reasoning was accepted.

As the consequences of the actions taken in light of these new values became apparent, i.e. fewer fountains and more people drinking bottled water, the UBC community accepted this as evidence supporting the initial rationale for disabling the fountains. The sight of bagged fountains and the absence of fountains altogether further strengthened the view that UBC water was unsafe. (Recall the student who told me to

not drink the water, dude.) This error in reasoning is called a circular argument: one uses the existence of a phenomenon, such as the belief that the water is unsafe, as a justification for the actions that helped to create the phenomenon in the first place.

One problem with this line of reasoning, however, is that the most objective rationale, that the water is unsafe, is also the easiest to disprove. Another problem is that all of this was taking place at a university, an institution that promotes research, critical thinking and the falsification of hypotheses. It was only a matter of time before somebody applied these skills to understanding what happened to the drinking fountains.

I do not believe that the participants that I met personally intentionally misrepresented themselves. It is reasonable to assume, however, that some of those responsible for selling more beverages understood the positive impact that diminished access to fountains would have on beverage sales, just as a number of students and professors had. Furthermore, the discrepancy between former UBC plant-operations director Paul Becker's explanation for the "accidental" removal of ninety-seven fountains and the plumbers' explanation certainly merits further investigation.

I do not, nor will I, claim that this is part of a conspiracy theory. Conspiracies require a great amount of time and secrecy, both of which I suspect are in very short supply in public institutions. Furthermore, the accusation that a group of people have conspired is difficult to prove and easily dismissed as the product of an overly imaginative mind.

Not surprisingly, those defending the university's actions would later claim that my hypothesis was part of a conspiracy theory (Steffenhagen, 2004). Their use of the term appears to be a rhetorical device aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the

concerns that this investigation raises. In any case, a conspiracy is hardly necessary for accomplishing an ethically questionable goal, such as removing fountains, when an understanding of the perceived benefit of the goal is shared by those with the power to enact steps toward accomplishing it.

More likely, and in many ways more troubling, the diminished access to free water on campus is the result of a profound value-shift. The current UBC administration increasingly measures value by the amount of revenue it can generate, and costs it can eliminate, and less by its ability to offer the best possible learning environment for its students in a way that places the least financial burden on them.

The cold-beverage contract, and the correlating loss of 44% of drinking fountains, is one manifestation of how UBC, an institution with \$1.1 billion in yearly revenue (UBC 2003), has increasingly espoused corporate values. So pervasive among senior administrators are the values that underpin the view that water is now better i.e. more profitably, provided through a private distribution system, that few members of the UBC community publicly questioned the unsubstantiated and inconsistent reasoning offered for diminishing access to fountains.

Other examples of the manifestation of corporate values include the escalating tuition costs, luxury condominium development in lieu of providing affordable housing, numerous corporate sponsorship arrangements, corporate driven research, and a 63% salary increase for President and Vice-Chancellor Martha Piper while teaching assistant wages remained frozen (Good, Smith, Burgess, 2003).

The absence of a conspiracy in many ways accentuates the troubling nature of the events that took place at UBC and the value-shift that is at their root. The parable of the

emperor's new clothes reminds us of the all-too-human capacity to overlook or be oblivious to unsubstantiated claims, especially those made by people in positions of authority. To question the claims made by those with authority over us risks creating a difficult dilemma. If the question leads one to believe that our superiors have erred, or worse, acted unethically, we are left with two disagreeable options: we can do nothing and suffer a sense of guilt and powerlessness or we can take action and risk opprobrium and retribution. The least threatening course of action is to avoid the dilemma altogether by not questioning the claims of our superiors. In short, to have more faith in one's fellow man, to borrow an administrators phrase.

Sadly, the twentieth century is strewn with examples of our willingness to unquestionably accept the actions of those in charge, or worse yet, apply faulty reasoning in their defense. This is especially true during times of "a radical and pervasive change in society and the social structure" (see page xi).

The diminished commitment to providing free drinking water at UBC is just one example of the extent to which an alarming shift in the values underlying North American educational institutions (and the bodies that fund them) is underway. In his recent book, *Universities in the Marketplace* (Bok , 2003), Derek Bok, former President of Harvard University and Dean of Harvard Law School argues that the desire to profit is at the heart of this shift:

...the profit motive shifts the focus from providing the best learning experience that available resources allow toward raising prices and cutting costs as much as possible with out losing customers. (Bok, 2003, p. 108)

In the case of the water fountains, the *price* of water was raised, as more students felt the need to buy their water, and the *cost* of maintaining the fountains was lowered. The combination of the two very likely augmented the profit both for UBC and Coca-Cola.

Of course the principal advantage of corporate sponsorships for educational institutions is that they generate money that the university can then spend on programmes, research, facilities, etc. When UBC was forced to make public the details of their previously confidential contract, their May 2001 media release emphasized the benefit of the additional money:

Thus far, UBC's revenues from the agreement have supported a range of student activities, including:

- 2.4 million to the AMS, student athletics and event s sponsorships
- \$640,000 to improve disability access
- \$525,000 allocated to the UBC Library last year
- \$100,000 for UBC's most recent open house (UBC, 2001)

The tangible benefit of the money is of course the central reason for engaging in these contracts in the first place.

Conversely, the cost of these sponsorships is much more difficult to calculate. The impact on the fountains at UBC is just one example of how corporate sponsorship, and the underlying shift in values, manifest themselves negatively. According to Bok, the desire to maximize revenue at universities also threatens to undermine academic standards, to introduce bias to research, to undermine collegiality and trust in the academic community, and to damage the university's standing with the community. (Bok, 2003, pp. 105-115).

The play *School Inc.* suggests that any value shift affecting our public schools and our confidence in their capacity to serve the public good will affect the nature of our

democracy. Bok draws a similar conclusion when considering the negative effects of increased commercialization in universities:

At a time when cynicism is so prevalent and the need for reliable information is so important, any damage to the reputation of universities, and to the integrity and objectivity of their scholars, weakens not only the academy but the functioning of our democratic, self-governing society. That is quite a price to pay for the limited, often exaggerated gains that commercialization brings to even the best-known institutions.

(Bok, 2003, p. 118)

Bok understands, as did the fictional Jim Freeman in *School Inc.*, that a shift in the values with which we educate students will have an impact on the shape of our common future.

Report of Outcomes, Recipients of Outcomes, and Utilization of Knowledge:

Given the far-reaching implications of my conclusions, I determined to do that which researchers strive to do: to allow my findings to contribute to the general understanding of the subject that I had chosen to explore. With this in mind, on Friday January 23rd, 2003, I hand-delivered the following three-page letter to the office of Dr. Martha Piper, President and Vice-Chancellor of UBC:

Sean Cook
Master of Arts Student, Faculty of Education

January 21, 2004

Attn: Martha Piper (President, Vice-chancellor, University of British Columbia)

Re: Reimbursement for \$160.50 spent on testing the water at the Faculty of Education

Dear Ms. Piper:

Please accept this request for reimbursement of the \$160. 50 (see attached copy of the receipt) that I spent to test the water at the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. This test confirms my suspicion that the faculty's drinking fountains have remained covered in plastic for approximately six years for what appear to be unsubstantiated reasons. As a fellow educator, this has compelled me to pose some very troubling questions about the conditions that allowed this to happen.

When I arrived on campus in August of 2003, I discovered 17 of the 18 fountains at the Faculty of Education were covered in plastic. I was told by U.B.C. staff that there were "concerns about the quality of the water" and "that the quality of the water on campus is the worst in the city." It was suggested that there were "possible contaminants such as lead in the water."

These explanations were unsatisfactory for the following reasons: the Faculty of Education cafeteria served the same water in their coffee and tea, one fountain remained open with no warning whatsoever, and no warnings were placed on washroom faucets. Furthermore, when I contacted the City of Vancouver, who is responsible for regularly testing the water at U.B.C., and who by law must be informed of any unsafe water in a public distribution system, they knew nothing of the allegedly unsafe water.

I therefore took a water sample from the Faculty of Education and paid JR Laboratories Inc. in Burnaby \$160.50 to analyze it. The analysis proved the water to be entirely safe for consumption.

Although I have asked plant management repeatedly, they have not been able to tell me exactly when the fountains were covered or who made the decision to cover them. From what I have been able to gather, it appears they were covered sometime around 1997. Given that the water is entirely drinkable, an important question remains: why were students and staff denied access to free drinking water? A number of people at the university have suggested the likelihood of a correlation between the fountains being covered and the very lucrative cold-beverage contract that U.B.C. has with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. Here is some of the evidence that supports this hypothesis:

1. U.B.C. receives an \$844,260 "annual sponsorship fee" for each of the ten years between August 1995 and August 2005, as well as 23% of net revenue from selling exclusively Coca-Cola beverages, including bottled water.
2. If U.B.C. does not sell 33,600,000 cans or bottles of Coke beverages by August 2005, the contract is extended for two years or until the quota is met, at no expense to the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. It has been reported that U.B.C. is not likely to meet this target. This means that starting in 2005, the University stands to lose \$1.7 million for not selling enough cold beverages, including bottled water.
3. Between 1995 and 1997, the first two years of the beverage contract and roughly the same time the fountains were covered in plastic, U.B.C. plumbers "misinterpreted repair as remove" and mistakenly tore out 97 fountains in 17 buildings. They claimed the water did not taste good and that the fountains were too costly to maintain.
4. Many new buildings, such as the Forest Sciences Centre, have no fountains whatsoever.
5. The idea that drinking fountains represent competition and therefore detract from the sale of Coke beverages was circulated in the Coca-Cola Company's Annual Report in 1997. It stated that "(I)n many places, it's easier to find a water fountain than a Coca-Cola. That's why we continue to strengthen our distribution system. We're working hard to make our products an integral part of any landscape so they are always within easy reach."
6. 1997 was about the time that a Coke vending machine, that also sells water, appeared at the entrance of the Faculty of Education.

This information suggests a strong co-relation between the signing of a very lucrative exclusive beverage contract and the restricting of access to free water for unsubstantiated reasons. It is very unlikely that 17 of 18 fountains would have remained out of service for approximately six years had not water been for sale at that time. It would appear more than coincidental that, after almost a century of the institution's existence, the fountains at U.B.C. became problematic in the second year of a lucrative beverage contract. It seems reasonable to conclude that U.B.C.'s diminished commitment to providing free water through fountains was influenced by the fact that the university profits immensely from the sale of water.

I have never, and will never, claim that this is part of a "conspiracy theory". Anyone who uses this phrase is trying to discredit my concerns with simplistic rhetoric. I do, however, claim that

there has been a profound value shift at the University of British Columbia. It now appears that the university measures its success more by the amount of revenue it can generate and less by its ability to offer the best possible learning environment in a way that places the least financial burden on students. For those who care deeply about the quality of Canadian post-secondary education, this is a most troubling development.

For many of us, it is heartbreaking to see U.B.C. behaving more and more like the corporations that are sponsoring it: giving a nod to the public good, while its true goal appears to be maximizing revenue. More often than not, the victims are students who feel compelled to pay \$1.50 each time they need a drink of water.

For the last six years, U.B.C. has seen their revenues increase as a result of covering perfectly good fountains in plastic. That is a fact. Regardless of the reasons, this is a very problematic situation. Perhaps most egregiously, students and staff at one of our country's most respected universities were made to believe the entirely false notion that U.B.C. tap water is undrinkable.

It is my sincere belief that the time and money I have spent on this has been in the University's best interest. It is with this in mind that I am asking to be reimbursed by the University of British Columbia for \$160.50. Furthermore, I would ask that you have the plastic removed from the fountains in the Faculty of Education and ensure that students have easy access to free drinking water.

I would be my pleasure to discuss this with you further.

Most sincerely,

Sean Cook

The response to this letter, dated February 9th, would not arrive until mid-February.

The play *School Inc.* was written in an attempt to produce scholarship that effectively conveys the fruits of my research into the public discourse regarding corporate influence in schools (page 98). A rapidly expanding body of research (Bakan, 2004; Bok, 2003; Klein, 2000; Korten, 1996; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Saul, 1998; Ungerleider, 2003) suggests that the public institutions on which democracies rest are threatened by a rising tide of corporate values. It is vital that this debate involve the public whose institutions are at stake. With this in mind, on Sunday, January 25th, I faxed a press release to a number of media institutions throughout the Lower Mainland. The considerable media response underscores the public concern.

On Monday, January 26th, Radio-Canada Television, CTV, Global TV, and CBC Radio sent reporters to investigate the correlation between the diminished access to water fountains and UBC's contract with Coca-Cola. Two newspapers, *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Ubyyssey* were also interested in the story.

All three television networks ran their stories on that evening's news. CBC Radio broadcast the story the following morning. On Tuesday, January 27, *The Vancouver Sun* ran the story, "Student asks why UBC cut off drinking fountains" (Steffenhagen, 2004, p. B1) on the front of its "West Coast" section. The UBC student newspaper, *The Ubyyssey*, placed the story, "Where's the free water? A UBC student investigates why some campus drinking fountains have gone extinct" (Thomas, 2004) on their front page. Canada's national weekly magazine, *Macleans*, made reference to the events at UBC in their February 9th issue:

Sean Cook: University of B.C. grad student crafts clever hypothesis: claims drastic decrease in working fountains tied to school's lucrative deal with Coca-Cola. UBC brass denies link, but students tired of buying pop and bottled water, thirst for answers. (ScoreCard, 2004, p. 13)

The Response:

The first week of February I returned to teaching high school English at Centennial School in Coquitlam, British Columbia. When I attended a course at the Faculty of Education the following Tuesday, the plastic had been removed from all of the fountains in the Scarfe building. The fountains were in perfect working order.

The next week, in response to my letter to Dr. Piper, I received the following letter, dated Feb 9th, from Terry Sumner, Vice President – Administration and Finance, denying my request for reimbursement of the \$160.50 that I had spent to test the water:

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Office of the President
6328 Memorial Road
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: (604) 822-8300
Fax: (604) 822-3134

February 9, 2004

Sean Cook
Master of Arts Student, Faculty of Education
503 - 1521 Burnaby Street
Vancouver, BC
V6G 1X1

Dear Mr. Cook

Your letter to President Piper dated January 21, 2004 regarding a request for reimbursement for testing water at the Scarfe building has been forwarded to me for a response.

Water on the UBC campus is safe to drink. Weekly water samples are taken at various locations around campus by a consultant firm under contract. Samples are forwarded to the GVRD for testing, with results sent to the Lower Mainland Health Board and us. In addition, we test individual sites when we receive complaints and concerns.

We understand that you were aware that the Scarfe building was also tested by the Faculty administrator and found to be potable late in 2003. Given these facts, your decision to submit a sample for testing was unnecessary and unauthorized; your request for reimbursement of your \$160.50 test fee is therefore denied.

There are many free sources of potable drinking water on campus. You should know that an alternative of free bottled water was provided to students in the Scarfe building when the drinking fountains were bagged.

Be assured that, working with the Faculty Administrator, and as funding becomes available, we will take appropriate action to ensure there is no confusion as to the availability and quality of potable water in the Scarfe Building. This will continue to be reflected elsewhere on campus.

There has been, over time, a move towards bottled and filtered water on campus, as there has been throughout the region with changing tastes in water consumption. This preference is reflected in a simple statistic: while there are some 165 water fountains on campus, there are more than 400 water coolers in our buildings.

Should you have renewed concerns about the quality or taste of campus water, please alert the Faculty Administrator

Yours truly,


Terry Sumner
Vice President – Administration and Finance

(G:\yn\Corresp\WaterJan04.doc)

There are a number of problems with Mr. Sumner's letter. The fact that he informs me that the "water on the UBC campus is safe to drink" suggests that he did not fully understand the concerns that I outlined in my letter to Dr. Piper, or else his unwillingness to address them. That the water was safe was precisely the point that I had invested considerable time and money to prove, contrary to UBC's previous claims. The claim that the test was "unnecessary", given that I was "aware that the Scarfe building was tested by the Faculty administrator and found to be potable in late in 2003", is false. My receipt for the \$160.50 test is dated November 19th, 2003, while the results of the test that Mr. Hunter undertook, a copy of which Mr. Hunter gave to me, were not reported until

November 21st, 2003. I could not have known the results of a test that were not yet reported.

Mr. Sumner's assertion that my test was "unauthorized" is true. However, the authorities, in this case the Director of Administration for the Scarfe Building and the Director of Food Services, had both publicly supported the unsubstantiated claim that the water was contaminated. It was for the purpose of validating their claims that I was having the water tested.

Although it is true that "an alternative of free bottled water was provided to students in the Scarfe building when the drinking fountains were bagged", it is difficult to imagine that two filtered water dispensers, one in the Education Students Lounge and the other in the Curriculum Studies mailroom, could be considered an adequate replacement for seventeen bagged fountains on six floors.

In the sixth paragraph, Mr. Sumner intimates that the actions of the university were justified given the "changing tastes in water consumption" throughout the region. In support of this argument, he offers the "simple statistic" that "while there are some 165 fountains on campus, there are more than 400 water coolers in our buildings." Again we see the circular argument described earlier. After having removed ninety-seven fountains, covered seventeen, and promoted the false claim that UBC water was contaminated, university officials then offer the relatively few number of fountains and increase in bottled water consumption as justification for their actions.

Most troubling is the belief that *changing tastes* warrant diminishing the accessibility to something as vital as a free source of clean, safe drinking water. As Coca-Cola, UBC's corporate cold-beverage sponsor, demonstrated throughout the

twentieth century, taste preference is something that is easily manipulated by savvy branding campaigns. The fact that the cola giants, Coca-Cola and Pepsi, spend hundreds of millions annually promoting products whose tastes have remained the same for the better part of a century is testament to the fact that taste preference can have little to do with objective reality. It is reasonable to conclude that the sophisticated branding campaigns that Coke and Pepsi have undertaken in recent years to promote bottled water have also played a role in "changing tastes in water consumption" on the UBC campus and elsewhere.

A thus far unexamined concern, but one that would warrant future investigation, is the environmental cost of trucking in plastic containers of water while a safe, clean water source already exists on campus. There is an obvious contradiction in UBC undertaking its "Sustainable U" programme (UBC 2004) during the same years that it strives to fulfill ten-year beverage quota of 33, 600, 000 units, of which bottled water is a significant portion. We may discover that UBC has adapted another element of corporate values: given the choice of minimizing the detrimental impact on the environment or maximizing short term revenue, the latter will prevail.

Finally, one imagines that the university officials who previously oversaw construction of UBC buildings did not base their decision to purchase, install and maintain fountains on the notion that they provided the tastiest beverage on campus. The decision to make water accessible to this degree was based on the understanding that clean water, given its essential role in maintaining basic health (and health being necessary for learning) was better provided publicly. The provision of water was considered too important, too essential, too sacred to be left to the inherent inequality of

the market place. It was, at its root, a question of value. UBC removed and/or disabled 44% of its fountains on campus in the years following the signing of a lucrative cold-beverage contract with Coca-Cola because, for UBC officials, the decreased cost of maintaining fountains and increased revenue from beverage sales were more valuable.

The Investigation Continues:

Given that UBC's contract with Coca-Cola was "the first of its kind in Canada" (Choo, 2001), the details of its impact are significant. With this in mind, I formally requested to see the monthly volume reports as per the contract with Coca-Cola (see page 112). These reports would provide evidence that I believe would likely support the claim that the loss of fountains correlates with an increase in sales of Coca-Cola products. Following my formal request to view these documents, UBC estimated that the fee for finding and photocopying the reports would be \$905.00. UBC refused my subsequent request to have the proposed fees waived due to the public interest in the issue, as per the Freedom of Information legislation. Following this, I began the process of bringing the issue before the Information and Privacy Commissioner in Victoria.

Although this investigation is not yet complete, the correspondence, copies of which are included as an appendix to this thesis, provide insight into the extent to which current UBC administrators fail to acknowledge that the impact of corporate sponsorships is an issue in which there is growing public concern. Nevertheless, the research conducted thus far, in combination with the themes presented in *School Inc.*, permit us to draw a number of important conclusions regarding the true *cost* of corporations sponsoring our schools and universities.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions:

In the first week of August 2004, a year after beginning my graduate studies at the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, I find myself thumbing through books at one of the Toronto International Airport's many bookstores. One book, Robert Greene's *The 48 Laws of Power*, found in the business section, has captured my attention. Greene, a classical scholar, magazine editor, and playwright, has distilled "three thousand years of the history of power into forty-eight well-explicated laws." These laws are the subject of his "bestselling book for those who want power, watch power or want to arm themselves against power" (Greene, 2000, back cover).

The provision of education, both in public schools and at universities is, among other things, a means of distributing power: to educate is to provide students with the capacity to be more personally, socially, and professionally empowered. Furthermore, whoever controls that which students learn today, i.e. the curriculum in its various forms, wields great influence over the ideas and values that will shape future citizens.

Of Greene's forty-eight laws, one in particular seems relevant to the issues that I have raised in this thesis:

Law #40:

DESPISE THE FREE LUNCH

JUDGEMENT

What is offered for free is dangerous – it usually involves either a trick or a hidden obligation. What has worth is worth paying for. By paying your own way you stay clear of gratitude, guilt, and deceit. It is also often wise to pay the full price – there is no cutting corners with excellence (Greene, 2000, p. 333).
[Format, italics, and uppercase letters are Greene's]

This law provides an important starting point for understanding the conclusions that can be drawn from the writing of *School Inc.* and the subsequent investigation of the impact of Coca-Cola sponsorship at the University of British Columbia.

For cash-starved public schools and growth-oriented universities, corporate sponsorships have the allure of “free” money. For both the principal who negotiates a beverage contract worth a few thousand dollars and the university administrator who adds millions to school coffers, there is a sense that they are getting something for nothing. In both cases, the schools receive the sponsorship money on top of a portion of the revenue from sales. Furthermore, the beverage company provides all necessary service and maintenance. One might reasonably wonder what could be wrong with receiving additional revenue for allowing cola companies to do the work that the schools were previously paying their own employees to do. Is this not indeed free money?

Of course, it is not. Corporations do not give out “free money”. In fact, publicly traded corporations are bound by law to only engage in those activities that will, sooner or later, augment share value (Bakan, 2003). With this in mind, it is essential that we i.e. members of the school community and the community-at-large, begin to examine the increasingly evident *cost* of corporate sponsorships and the commercialization of education in general.

The true *cost* of corporate involvement in schools is the impact on the foundational values with which we understand the role of our educational institutions. Simply put, schools and universities are beginning to adopt the values of the corporations that are sponsoring them.

Implications:

The most obvious manifestation of this value shift, and certainly the one that media have been quickest to identify, is a diminished commitment to the health of students, especially those in elementary, middle and secondary schools. Over the past five years, there have been numerous incidents of school administrators, teachers, and corporate sales representatives actively promoting unhealthy soft drinks in order to augment the school's and the sponsor's revenue. In one such instance in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Sandra Banks, a vice-president of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, a position of considerable authority in the broader community, promoted a Coke per day to two classes of Grade Nine students while denying any ill-effects caused by caffeine consumption (see page 12). A recent study at Johns Hopkins University documents the range of negative withdrawal symptoms associated with caffeine addiction, including headaches, fatigue and difficulty concentrating. The researchers subsequently urged to have caffeine addiction included in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, considered the bible of mental disorders (CTV.ca, 2004).

Interestingly, when asked to defend the promotion of soft drink consumption to students, defenders cite the fact that students would otherwise obtain these drinks at the local corner store. Following this logic, schools should therefore enjoy the financial benefit that would otherwise go to the store.

This reasoning provides us with a troubling glimpse of the extent to which corporate values have permeated our schools: many members of the educational community now consider our schools to have no greater moral obligation than the local corner store to protect the health of their students. As a result of increased engagement in and dependence on the for-profit activities of their corporate sponsors, our schools have

begun to equate their moral obligation to students' health with that of a corner store. This provides an example of schools increasingly adapting the values of the marketplace.

Another manifestation of this value-shift is the impact on intellectual freedom. In the play *School Inc.*, protagonist Jim Freeman's discovery of the capacity of corporate sponsors to limit intellectual freedom, particularly free speech, has disastrous professional consequences. In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein offers numerous examples of how corporate sponsors and partners on campuses have limited the ability of students and staff to speak freely, to demonstrate, and to publicize the results of their research, even when doing so, as in the case of University of Toronto's Nancy Olivieri, would save lives. In 1998, Dr. Olivieri learned that the drug-company giant Apotex, who had funded her study of the effectiveness of deferiprone in treating the blood disorder thalassemia, had the contractual right to prevent her from warning patients, and other doctors in the field, of her evidence of the possible life-threatening side effects of the drug. When she went ahead and published her findings in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, both the university and the hospital with which she worked, failed to protect "the sanctity of academic research conducted in the public interest" (Klein, 2000, p. 100). The following year, she was demoted from her top-level research position. Only after a long public battle was she eventually given her job back (Klein, 2000, pp. 87-105).

The investigation into the diminished access to drinking fountains at the University of British Columbia reveals another manifestation of the value-shift associated with corporate sponsorship. For approximately six years, school officials maintained the entirely false notion that the water in the Faculty of Education was unfit for consumption.

Despite the inconsistency of their reasoning, this view was passed on to the approximately six classes of education students. Given the role that the Faculty of Education plays in promoting the merits of critical thinking, this manifestation is deeply problematic.

It is worth noting, and with some irony, that the money corporations spend to sponsor schools is ultimately provided by the same communities that enter into these arrangements in order to relieve taxpayers from the burden of education. The extraordinarily profitable nature of selling beverage at inflated prices, a result of the market domination that the purchase of campus monopolies helps make possible, allows beverage providers to easily recoup the cost of sponsoring educational institutions. Consequently, the revenue acquired through corporate sponsorships is ultimately provided by the members of the school community who are paying for the beverages. Since the consumer willingly enters into the exchange for the beverage, it is difficult to suggest that such an arrangement is unethical, or constitutes a hidden cost.⁴ The point, however, is that the additional funds are ultimately derived from the same community that appears to be benefiting from the “free-money” of sponsorship.

Rather than funding schools as taxpaying citizens, a process over which their democratically elected representatives have control, the public now provides a portion of their funding through purchasing sweetened beverages and bottled water at vastly inflated prices. That the funding is now governed by contracts negotiated with predominantly

Difficult, but not impossible. Given the campus monopolies that the cola companies have purchased through exclusive contracts, one could certainly argue that students and staff are unfairly compelled to buy beverages at inflated prices. This, of course, is the reward that all monopolies offer the seller, and the cost that they foist upon the consumer.

foreign multinational corporations constitutes a loss of control and represents one more deleterious manifestation of corporate sponsorships.

A final and perhaps most troubling result of the value-shift that constitutes the true *cost* of corporate sponsorship is the impact on our convictions regarding what we consider too important, even too sacred, to be left to market forces. Chapter Four of this thesis explores the extent to which UBC has increasingly adopted the view that the provision of water can now be better served by the private sector. This stands in stark contrast to the previously held view that water provision was more suitable for public distribution, given the relatively low cost of installing and maintaining water fountains, and the vital importance of water for sustaining basic health. In the Third Act of *School Inc.*, Jim Freeman suggests where this increasingly common trend of transforming formerly public services into private services will take public education if left unchecked:

And surely you know this is just the beginning. Because once you boys taste profit, you'll stop at nothing until it's all up for sale. Then we're right back where we started two hundred years ago: the dream of public education is lost and those with money get educated while the poor are destined for ignorance and servitude (see page 88).

Freeman recognizes that the trend of privatizing certain elements of education i.e. water distribution, international education, all-day kindergarten...etc, has the potential to result in the privatizing of public education in general. As noted in the introduction, it is this possibility that has, according to the investment firm Merrill Lynch, "attracted significant interest from leading financiers, venture capitalists and visionary business leaders." As of April 1999, \$3.4billion (USD) had already been invested in the prospect of privatizing public education (see page 12).

These examples represent the manifestations of the value-shift that results from the corporate sponsorships of education, and the more general trend of commercializing education. This list is by no means complete; it is very likely that other examples exist, and that more will arise. The manifestations cited above represent the *true cost* of corporate involvement: a shift in the core values of public education. Understood in the context of the widely documented challenge that corporate power poses to the public institutions that uphold democratic values, we can no longer afford to overlook this considerable price tag.

Presently those administrators who decide to enter into corporate sponsorships focus solely on the benefits while paying little heed to what Greene might consider the trick or hidden obligation of the perceived free lunch. For them, the added revenue offers such immediate and concrete benefit that it does not warrant any abstract discussion regarding how educational values might be affected.

This is a perilous view to take.

Values are the defining essence of any educational system. Few educators contest the merit of providing students with basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. An important distinction between educational policy in the most repressive of totalitarian regimes and in the most compassionate and progressive societies are the values instilled alongside basic skills. It is such values that will dictate how students will apply what they have learned in school.

To blindly rush into corporate sponsorships in a way that risks the very values that underpin education entails, in the words of former Harvard President Derek Bok, a "Faustian bargain" that schools make "in order to enjoy the rewards of the market-place"

(Bok, 2003, p. 200). Whatever new programmes, services, or prestige an institution may acquire through corporate sponsorships, the damage to the school's moral authority, integrity, and reputation will harm the very soul of our schools.

It is worth noting that in his chapter concerning the troublesome nature of the free lunch, Greene explains its reversal. Preying on our deep desire to get something for nothing "offers great opportunities for swindling and deception if you apply them from the other side. Dangling the lure of a free lunch is the con artist's stock in trade" (Greene, 2000, p. 346). The larger the promised pay off, the more we are willing to overlook the warning signals that emerge.

Surely the time is ripe to acknowledge that there is, in fact, no free lunch. At least then we can begin to openly and vigorously discuss the true cost of corporate sponsorships, a necessary first step toward protecting the core values of our educational institutions.

Recommendations:

I am inclined to accept Greene's wisdom that we should "despise the free lunch" and that what "has worth is worth paying for." Bok draws a similar conclusion: "[t]he hazards of accepting corporate money and involvement [in universities] seem sufficiently obvious and serious to warrant stopping such support altogether" (Bok, 2003, p. 166) For me, and I suspect Bok as well, maintaining the moral authority and educational values of our schools is a priority that outweighs any perceived benefit from corporate sponsorship and other forms of commercialization. Greene's words are worth repeating: "*It is also often wise to pay the full price – there is no cutting corners with excellence.*"

Of course, this is not the view held by those administrators who negotiate corporate sponsorship arrangements. Genuinely committed to their vision of what is best for students, defenders of corporate sponsorship believe the benefits of corporate sponsorship outweigh the costs. Furthermore, a number of factors make it difficult for administrators to give serious consideration to the negative effects of corporate sponsorships.

Given that our values are subject to many different influences, it is impossible to prove definitively that corporate involvement at a school *caused* a school's value-shift. At best, critics can demonstrate the presence of a correlation between corporate involvement and the deleterious manifestations of changing values. On the other hand, the positive results i.e. more money to spend on programmes, equipment...etc., are immediate, tangible, and incontestable. Furthermore, an administrator's success is more often measured by the fiscal health of the institution over the course of his or her tenure than by anything as intangible as the protection of educational values. An example of this tendency is *Vancouver Magazine's* ranking Martha Piper, UBC's President and Vice-Chancellor, as the thirty-sixth most powerful person in Vancouver for 2003. As evidence of her success, the magazine cites her tripling the money available for research, much of the money coming from corporate donations (Good, Smith, Burgess, 2003). In light of these circumstances, entering into corporate sponsorships is the path of least resistance for administrators.

Nevertheless, as Bok points out, "[a]nalyzing commercial opportunities in the usual ad hoc way is virtually certain to result in a gradual decay of basic principles" (Bok, 2003, p. 121). In other words, continuing as usual guarantees the steady

advancement of the commercialization of education and the resulting deterioration of our most important values.

A first step toward halting this “gradual decay” is to formally recognize, both within educational institutions and the community-at-large, that our schools are fast approaching a critical juncture. If we continue on our current path, the seemingly small, well-intentioned compromises made for the sake of increased funding will dramatically alter the values that shape our understanding of the role our schools play. This reshaping has and will continue to favour an emerging corporate order that threatens the very foundations of our democratic values (Bakan, 2004; Barlow and Robertson, 1994; Klein, 2000; Korten, 1996; Saul, 1998; Ungerleider 2003). It is this recognition that I have endeavoured to hasten with the writing and future production of the play *School Inc.* on April 25th, 2005, at the Roundhouse Performance Centre in Vancouver, British Columbia.

As the tally of the “hidden costs” of corporate sponsorship continues to grow, many people still have very little idea of the extent to which academic values are shifting. No changes will be made to the status quo until a critical mass of people feel deeply committed to the notion that corporate involvement in education carries with it a threat that should be taken very seriously.

It is important to remember that UBC’s signing of a cold beverage contract in 1995 was touted as the first of its kind in Canada (Choo, 2001). The evidence suggests that the effect of this contract played a role in what appears to be another Canadian first: the removal or disabling of forty-four percent of the drinking fountains on a university campus. The vital lesson is that lucrative corporate involvement in schools represents a new phenomenon, the full consequences of which we have only begun to understand.

Any serious examination of the issues should therefore include representatives of the various interests within the academic community, as well as the community-at-large. A forum should be created to promote vigorous exploration and debate concerning the full ramifications of corporate involvement in our schools. The question of corporate involvement in education is, at its root, a question of values, and a community's values are best understood and articulated through such debate.

Our educational leaders can use the ideas that emerge from these forums as a starting point for the process of setting clear, enforceable guidelines for protecting academic values from increasing levels of corporate sponsorships and commercialization in general.

In 1999, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) published a brochure entitled *Guidelines for Education/Business Partnerships*. The nine points of the BCTF policy provide an example of the concerns regarding corporate involvement in public schools that future guidelines would want to address:

Education/business partnerships should not be established to compensate for inadequate funding of education.

- (a) Programs of corporate involvement meet an identified educational purpose, not a commercial motive.
- (b) Ethical standards (developed by the BCTF) that protect the welfare of students and the integrity of the learning environment are agreed to and followed by all parties.
- (c) Sponsored teaching resources and materials are evaluated for bias before they are used, and teachers retain discretion in the use of the materials; sponsored and donated materials are held to the same standards used for the selection and purchase of curricular materials.
- (d) Corporate involvement does not require students to observe, listen to, or read advertising. Sponsor recognition and corporate logos, for identification rather than commercial purposes, are kept to minimum.

- (e) Corporate involvement does not increase inequality in the education system. Money and other donations are made to school districts, to be administered centrally, not to individual schools.
 - (f) Partnership agreements are reached after full discussion among participating school staff, parent representatives, and the prospective partner, and any agreements are open as public information.
 - (g) Partnership agreements are for a limited time.
 - (h) All partnership agreements are systematically evaluated.
 - (i) Teacher and student participation in partnerships is voluntary.
- (BCTF 1999)

It is worth noting, however, that such policies only strive to diminish what I earlier referred to as the *true cost* of corporate sponsorship. They do not eliminate it. In terms of intellectual freedom, for example, the sponsor will still retain the core of its influence: its ability to withdraw funding. The potential threat of lost funding will always discourage members of the academic community from criticizing the sponsor. This is why a secure source of adequate public funding is the best way to ensure the highest academic principles. Given the current reality of corporate involvement in education, policy guidelines such as these are nevertheless necessary. They are not, however, sufficient.

The existence of such policy guidelines since 1999 is a reminder that ideas for improving the situation are not lacking: we lack the broader community's commitment to defending the values that are threatened by excessive corporate involvement in our schools and universities. Once such a commitment exists, our institutions will be capable of implementing a system of governance with safeguards and methods of accountability to encourage school administrators to act appropriately.

With *School Inc.*, I have attempted to assist in generating an awareness of the detrimental impact of corporate involvement and to generate the emotional engagement that may lead to an increased commitment to defending our educational institutions. Through the vast array of stories that we experience over the course of our lives – be they religious parables, nursery rhymes, novels, movies, Thursday night sitcoms, or the stories that families pass through generations – we learn to shape our deepest convictions regarding who we are and what we hold sacred. It is through the powerful emotions that accompany a well-told story that we may begin to understand and, more importantly, to *feel* the paramount importance of protecting the values at the heart of our schools.

It is with the hope of this possibility in mind that I have written the play *School Inc.*. When we lay down a foundation of new stories, stories that take an unflinching look at the reality of corporate power encroaching on our capacity to protect our democratic values, we may then discover that paying to maintain full control of how and what our students learn is a bargain at any price.

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FEE ESTIMATE RESPONSE FORM **UBC file: N-04-16**

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Please make your cheque or money order payable to the **University of British Columbia.**

In his letter, University Counsel, Mr. Hubert Lai, makes the following claim in reference to my request:

... although your "investigation of the link between limited access to UBC drinking fountains and Coca-Cola sponsorship" has attracted some recent media attention, there is no evidence to demonstrate that the requested information has been the subject of recent public debate. Further, the records do not show how UBC is allocating [sic] financial resources and dissemination of the information would not yield a public benefit or provide any greater understanding to the general public. As such, your request for a fee waiver under section 75(5)(b) of the Act has been denied.

As stated in my earlier correspondence, the correlation between diminished access to drinking fountains on the UBC campus and the signing of a lucrative beverage contract with Coca-Cola was the focus of considerable media attention in the first few months of 2004:

1. **Maclean's, Canada's Weekly Newsmagazine**, "Up Front" section, February 9, 2004, "... University of B.C. grad student... claims drastic decrease in working water fountains tied to school's lucrative deal with Coca-cola....".
2. **The Vancouver Sun**, "Student asks why UBC cut off drinking fountains", January 27, 2004
3. Investigation of the link between limited access to UBC drinking fountains and Coca-cola sponsorship featured on January 26th news broadcasts:

BCTV	Global Television, British Columbia
CTV	British Columbia and Canada
CBC Français,	British Columbia, (television)
CBC am Radio	British Columbia

In her attached letter, **Sara Ehrhardt, the National Water Campaigner for The Council of Canadians** states that my investigation "has attracted worldwide attention" and that "many water policy analysts, community water activists, and academics studying the global water movement are interested in further information on this particular issue."

Mr. Lai's claim that this issue's "recent media attention" does not provide evidence of "the requested information being the subject of recent debate" is illogical. The provincial and national coverage demonstrates the public nature of the issue. The fact that the UBC administration publicly *disagreed* with my hypothesis satisfies the definition of debate. This highly publicized disagreement can only be considered "public debate" regarding the reasons for UBC's diminished commitment to providing free and accessible drinking water and the extent to which the university has profited from this shift in priorities.

The information that I have requested will indeed yield a public benefit. It will help determine whether the volume of Coca-Cola beverages sold on campus correlates with UBC's removing or disabling 114 drinking fountains (since the signing of a lucrative contract with the Coca-Cola bottling company in 1995) and constructing new buildings with no drinking fountains at all i.e. The Forest Sciences Centre.

This, in turn, will enhance the general public's understanding of how the desire to profit from the sale of beverages (including water) correlates with UBC's diminished commitment to providing free and accessible drinking water. Any information that would enhance the quality of debate concerning the trend toward greater commodification, and, therefore, diminished accessibility of drinking water can only be considered a public benefit.

I have also enclosed a letter from **Sara Ehrhardt, the National Water Campaigner for The Council of Canadians**, in which Ms. Ehrhardt confirms the public benefit from the requested information and the extent to which this information is very much "the subject of recent public debate."

In an email sent to me, **Charlie Smith, the news editor for *The Georgia Straight*** offered the following comment concerning the public interest in this issue:

Every week, I make editorial judgements on what might interest readers of *The Georgia Straight* which reaches the UBC community. I believe people in this community, as well as our wider readership, would be interested in knowing if there is any correlation between the sale of soft drinks and the disappearance of water fountains.

The opinions of both Ms. Ehrhardt and Mr. Smith corroborate the notion that the requested information would play a significant role in an important public debate and would therefore provide a public benefit.

Finally, I find it very troubling that I must go to such pains to obtain information that would advance the community's understanding of an issue that, although new in its current manifestation (i.e. UBC and Coca-Cola benefiting from what the sale what was once considered solely a public resource) has been a central theme in scholarship for centuries. This theme concerns who controls our most important resources and how they benefit from this control.

It is a sad irony indeed that the University of British Columbia - for whom a founding principle is the advancement of critical, higher level thinking - is now resisting my attempt to more completely understand a vitally important issue for which there is such public concern. This contradiction appears to confirm the increasingly common suspicion that UBC's growing commitment to maximizing revenue is having a