

Sharon Beder, with Wendy Varney and Richard Gosden
This Little Kiddy Went to Market: the Corporate Capture of Childhood
 UNSW Press, Sydney, 2009, 307 pp., \$39.95.

Sharon Beder has written extensively about corporate power and propaganda, as well as about environmental policy issues. Here she teams up with Richard Gosden and with Wendy Varney, who has been researching and writing about the commercialisation of childhood for many years (including an article in issue no. 33 of this journal). Together they have written a devastating analysis of how corporate interests undermine children's well being.

Diverse interconnected angles are covered. A starting point is how corporations target children with advertising in order to turn them into 'hyper consumers' and transform children's play into commercial opportunities. Emphasis is also put on how schools are used for the diffusion of corporate messages. The authors argue that schools themselves have been turned into competing business enterprises, as reductions in government funding of public schools have shifted educational goals from quality to 'efficiency'. Standardised testing is one manifestation of this tendency. As the corporations have taken effective control over more aspects of schooling, they have also pushed for a narrowed curriculum 'that emphasises a business-friendly view of history and society alongside basic literacy, numeracy and computer skills'. Many examples are given of the flood of corporate-sponsored classroom materials. Privatisation is another theme in the book. The authors analysis of 'school choice' has particular poignancy in the light of recent developments, summarised in the proposition that 'the right of every child to receive a high-quality public education has been replaced by the right of parents to choose the school their children will attend' (p.4).

And what about the children that are naughty, bored or depressed as a result of these multiple assaults on the quality of their childhood? Put them on psychiatric drugs, from which the pharmaceutical companies directly profit. The final irony – on which the authors touch tantalisingly briefly at the end – is that the profound challenges of the modern world require young people with personal attributes that are the very antithesis of what the corporations seek.