

## **Scholastic Books: Greed Trumps Literacy, No Surprise**

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, November 03, 2010

<http://politicsrespun.org/2010/11/scholastic-books-greed-trumps-literacy-no-surprise/>

Another example of corporate moral whitewashing emerged yesterday when I found out that a small elementary school in Vancouver is not worthy of a [Scholastic book fair](#) this year because their order last year was only \$800, much much lower than the \$1200 necessary for the corporation to bother with them.

Of course, it would be inappropriate to hold this corporation to any kind of significant moral standard as a champion of literacy. They are a corporation with a bottom line to worry about, after all.

The neoliberal defunding of public education in BC that we are struggling under for this decade is in part designed to open up space for private corporations to take over aspects of public education. Early in my teaching career, before I really started to think of the political implications of this kind of corporate intrusion into public education I used the Scholastic order forms in my classroom to give students a chance to order books. My "commissions" were in extra books that I would keep for students to read in the classroom or cycle over to the library.

For every venture like this, we see one more government excuse for why it is just fine to continue defunding education: people and corporations will pick up the slack.

In Vancouver, there are a number of annex schools, small sites located between larger elementary schools to allow younger students an opportunity to have more of a neighbourhood school as opposed to travelling too far. Small schools have many intrinsic advantages, but lack economies of scale to the point of falling under the profit radar of Scholastic.

Part of the reason I left teaching was to work more in the political arena to oppose the forced fundraising for schools that comes from the intentional defunding of the system to justify massive tax cuts. Not coincidentally, one week ago, the desperate, haggard BC premier just tossed out the province's second largest tax cut in history [which will go mostly to the rich](#), to shore up his pathetic level of support.

This will create another funding crisis for public services which will lead to the "tough choices" required to balance the budget with a voluntary reduction in revenue. It's quite shameful.

Back to Scholastic and their slogan, "[Helping Children Around The World To Read And Learn](#)," they are more than happy to trumpet noble claims about pursuing literacy, but like many corporate social responsibility projects, that kind of altruism is not at the expense of profit goals; they aren't a non-profit, after all.

But it's when I read [how Scholastic defines themselves](#) that I become even more disturbed with the funding crisis and back-door privatization of BC's public education system:

For over 50 years Scholastic Canada has introduced young people to the joys of reading, and has

enlarged their understanding of Canada and the world.

Just let's be clear here. Parents, families, public library, communities and schools are the ones introducing young people to the joys of reading. Scholastic offers inexpensive books that, among a small percentage of really good literature, largely promote popular entertainment brands already bombarding students in other media. In one sense, the books could be free because they are essentially ads for [Taylor Swift](#) and



Captain Underpants.

By the way, yesterday, [Scholastic's stock price](#) on the NASDAQ exchange rose by US\$1.02 to close at US\$30.59. This makes their 34.5 million shares worth just over one billion dollars. Clearly, the private delivery of books into public schools is big business around the world. Scholastic should be sending kickback "commissions" to the BC Liberal Party.

By the way, yesterday on the NASDAQ, Microsoft closed at only US\$27.39.

So while the BC Liberal government is contributing to manufactured funding crises in public education, many schools' Parent Advisory Committees have turned into de facto fundraising committees to soften the blow. But one of the social costs of this arrangement is a massive disparity in funding, which undermines the universality principle: one Vancouver west side school's PAC last year collected 30 times more revenue than a school only one-fifth its size on the east side.

One solution might be to turn Parent Advisory Committees from fundraisers into the other kind of PAC, Political Action Committees. As the Liberals' [massive defunding of the education system](#) forces school boards to choose which schools to close, perhaps we need more political action, even from schools that aren't facing closure in 8 months.

A little solidarity can go a long way. And we desperately need it now.

And while fundraising and funding crises are [not unique to BC](#) or to [public education itself](#), our solidarity must span the sectors where citizens are having to make the difference when governments want to cut taxes for the rich.

The sooner we get organized, the sooner we can stop the fiscal beatings.