

Commercial Alert
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April 8, 1999

David V. B. Britt
President and Chief Executive Officer
Children's Television Workshop
One Lincoln Plaza
New York, NY 10023
via telecopier (212) 875-6111

Dear Mr. Britt:

We write to urge Noggin to stop misusing schools and schoolchildren to conduct market research.

The New York Times reported that Noggin, a joint project of Children's Television Workshop (CTW) and Nickelodeon, a for-profit company, combined to conduct market research on students at the public elementary Watchung School during schooltime. According to the *Times*, Noggin arranged for Watchung students to be given an assignment without academic value for the purposes of market research:

The homework -- filling out a 27-page booklet called "My All About Me Journal" -- was not handed out by teachers at this public elementary school in the New York suburbs. Instead, the assignment, given to some 250 Watchung students, came from researchers for Noggin, a new educational cable television channel that forged a special partnership with the school earlier this year.

In exchange for \$7,100, which the school has put toward buying 30 classroom word processors, Noggin can go into the school one morning a week from January until June to run 30-minute focus groups with students.¹

¹ Mary B.W. Tabor, "Schools Profit from Offering Pupils for Market Research." *The New York Times*, April 5, 1999.

Schools exist to teach children to read, write, add and think. They are not market research factories. Noggin is wrong to use the schools for prying and snooping into the lives of innocent and impressionable schoolchildren. Noggin should not use captive students and the compulsory education laws to waste precious schooltime and tax dollars by forcing or cajoling children to participate in market research.

Once again, CTW is preying upon the children it professes to protect and nurture. In October, we criticized CTW for running advertisements on Sesame Street to deliver children to Discovery Zone. These commercials were an unfortunate turning-point because they are the first national commercials on Sesame Street, and they are benefitting a corporation that targets children. CTW acknowledged this difference in the headline of its news release announcing the Discovery Zone deal: "Children's Television Workshop Announces Discovery Zone as First National Corporate Underwriter of 'Sesame Street' on PBS."

Why does CTW persist in eroding the accumulated goodwill that years of Sesame Street have generated? Please reconsider your use of schools for market research. Do you need organized protest to stimulate your re-evaluation? Shame!

Sincerely,

Gary Ruskin
Director

Ralph Nader

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
Thursday, April 8, 1999

For More Information Contact:
Gary Ruskin (202) 296-2787

Nader Urges Children's Television Workshop and Noggin to Stop Doing Market Research in the Schools

Ralph Nader and Commercial Alert sent the following letter today to David V. B. Britt, President and Chief Executive Officer of Children's Television Workshop:

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Commercial Alert was founded last year to oppose the excesses of commercialism, advertising and marketing. The web address for Commercial Alert is <<http://www.essential.org/alert/>>.