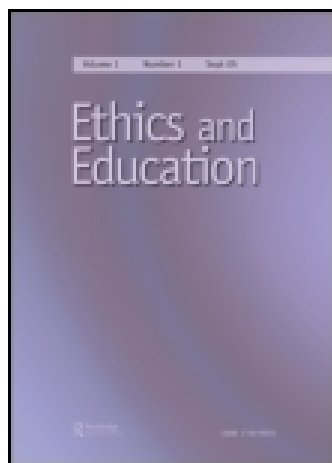


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Fairtrade in Schools: teaching ethics or unlawful marketing to the defenceless?

Peter Griffiths*

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Schools in the UK teach pupils about Fairtrade as part of Religious Education, Personal and Social Education, Citizenship, Geography and so on. There are also Fairtrade Schools, where the whole school, including staff and parents, is committed to promoting the brand. It is argued here that promoting this commercial brand to schoolchildren and using the schoolchildren to press adults to buy a product amounts to indoctrination using criteria of intent, methods of teaching and the subject matter. This conflicts with educational goals. It is also shown to be akin to the criminal offence of Unfair Trading: the methods used in teaching used would be unacceptable in normal commercial marketing. A completely separate criticism, based on a wide range of research evidence, is that the schools mislead by giving false information and by suppression of relevant information, again akin to the criminal offence of Unfair Trading. The question of who has the responsibility for preventing such actions is considered.

Keywords: Fairtrade; fair trade; ethics; education; values; Unfair Trading

Introduction

Schools in Britain routinely promote a commercial brand, Fairtrade, as part of their lessons on geography, citizenship, personal and social education, religious education and so on, claiming that Fairtrade is an example of ethical marketing that helps people in the Third World. There are a lot of schools (1000 (Fairtrade Foundation 2013) to 4000 (Fairtrade Foundation 2012)) which are registered as Fairtrade Schools, meaning that the whole school is committed to supporting and promoting the Fairtrade brand. Not only is the brand given the monopoly on supply of school uniforms and products such as coffee and chocolate within the school, but the children are organized into putting pressure on their parents and the wider public to buy Fairtrade. Children are also organized into groups putting pressure on retailers to stock the brand. The Fairtrade Foundation UK boasts of its success in getting school children to buy Fairtrade products and to put pressure on adults to buy Fairtrade (and also of its success in persuading children that any bananas not bearing its logo are ‘unfair’) (Fairtrade Foundation 2013) This raises a range of ethical issues.

In this paper, an assumption favourable to the promotion of Fairtrade in schools is made: it is assumed that it is right that schools and teachers educate in moral values and that they cover the ethics of alleviating poverty and providing support to developing countries. It is not argued that schools should be neutral, as argued by Snook (1972) for

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instance. I begin by distinguishing the brand Fairtrade from a range of other brands and systems described as Fairtrade. I ask first whether it is acceptable to advertise a product (e.g. 'crisps') to children as part of their lessons, second whether it is acceptable to advertise a commercial brand (e.g. 'Smith's Crisps'), third, whether the techniques actually used to market the brand to children in the UK are ethical and, fourth, whether the techniques conflict with educational objectives. Even if these issues were irrelevant, it would be serious if the information given to children misleads them, either because it is false, or because inconvenient information is suppressed. The teaching of Fairtrade is examined in relation to the 'three traditional accounts of indoctrination, according to which indoctrination is understood in terms of the intention of the teacher, the methods employed by the teacher, or the doctrinal nature of the subject matter' (Siegel 2009, 27), bearing in mind that the teachers may also be subjected to indoctrination. Finally, it is asked who carries the moral responsibility for ensuring that the teaching is ethical. Following this, a conclusion is reached on the ethics of teaching Fairtrade to schoolchildren.

What is fairtrade?

Fairtrade is a commercial brand, certifying that products bearing the brand have been produced and marketed according to certain political criteria laid down by Fairtrade International. This organization has operated under several names over the years, including Fairtrade International, Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International, Fairtrade Labelling Organizations, and FLO. For clarity, it will be referred to as Fairtrade International throughout this paper, though publications under the different names will be referenced in the normal way. It operates worldwide (under the brand name Max Havelaar in some countries). Good and generous consumers pay extra to buy the product because they believe that they are being virtuous, helping some of the poorest people in the world (Andorfer and Liebe 2012). This brand creates a 'credence good', one where consumers are willing to pay more because of what they believe about it, rather than what they can see, taste or experience. Similar credence brands are 'organic', 'free range' and 'appellation controlee'. The Fairtrade brand should not be confused with the large number of other goods claiming to be 'Fair Trade' (Ballet and Carimentrand 2010). Nor should it be confused with other uses of 'fair trade': for instance, the US Fair Trade laws from 1931 to 1975 supported retail price maintenance (now generally considered 'unfair'), the UK Fair Trading Act of 1973 covers the enforcement of trading legislation in general, and, in principle, anything that does not fall foul of the Unfair Trading legislation (European Commission 2005, 2011; Great Britain 2008) might be considered 'fair trade'.

The Fairtrade brand is owned by Fairtrade International, which determines the standards for production and marketing in producing countries that must be met if a product is to be marketed using the brand. Fairtrade International charges producers for inspections and for use of the brand. One requirement of the standards is that the importers must pay a price to exporting firms which is at least that specified by Fairtrade International. Within the UK, The Fairtrade Foundation UK manages the brand, collecting a fee from distributors which is mainly spent on marketing and promotion. The product is sold in the UK with the normal commercial brand (e.g. Nescafe) plus the certification brand (Fairtrade). A very small part of the total retail price may go to farmers' villages to finance clinics, women's movements, baseball pitches, etc. Reviews of the evidence

produced by various researchers on coffee (Griffiths 2012; Mohan 2010) suggest that 0.5–10% of the *extra* price paid went to the exporters in the form of Fairtrade Premium. This is certainly an overestimate as there is a lot of evidence that importers extort some of this premium from the exporters, sometimes paying them a lower price than the open market price (Raynolds 2009, 1089; Valkila, Haaparanta, and Niemi 2010; Valkila 2009; de Janvry, McIntosh, and Sadoulet 2010). While Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International standards clearly state that this form of extortion exists, there appears to be no auditing of this.

Ethics and the law

It is assumed that the EU law on Unfair Trading, agreed by 27 countries with different cultures, political histories and legal systems, reflects a widely agreed ethical position. This law (European Commission 2005; Great Britain 2008) makes it the criminal offence of Unfair Trading for a seller to make ‘a direct exhortation to children to buy advertised products or persuade their parents or other adults to buy advertised products for them’. It is also an offence for a seller to deceive consumers by making false and misleading claims, and by

Misleading omissions,

Hiding or omitting material information,

Providing information in a way which is unclear, unintelligible, ambiguous or untimely,

Knowingly or recklessly engaging in a commercial practice which contravenes the requirements of professional diligence.

The law (Great Britain 2006; Great Britain 2008; European Commission 2005) conforms to a more general ethical view that the offence is committed even if the person taking the action has not personally profited from it. It is enough that someone is harmed by it.¹

It is taken that if it is criminal for a retailer to promote a product in a certain way, it is unethical for a school to do it. The teaching methods and the content of the lessons will be considered in relation to the law on Unfair Trading.

Should schools tell schoolchildren to buy certain products?

Treating the pupils as consumers to be subjected to a marketing campaign for a brand, and persuading them and training them to act as unpaid salespersons for that brand may result in a diversion of school resources, teachers’ time and pupils’ time from the central purposes of education. Many activities in schools could be described as diverging from core purposes: school ski trips, chess clubs, learning to line up in the yard and marketing Fairtrade. Each of these needs justification so that schools use their resources wisely for educational reasons. The onus is on the people proposing such a shift of resources and time to justify the shift, and to defend it against criticisms.

Few people would object to a school using its teaching programme to encourage pupils to consume more fruit and vegetables or to use toothbrushes. The objective is to help the pupils, and nobody else. Pupil well-being is one aim in UK policies. There is an enormous amount of scientific evidence in favour of pupils consuming more, and very little against. The marketing does not aim to increase the income of anybody in particular, and the

product is unbranded. None of these considerations would apply if they were encouraging the consumption of Marlboro, Adidas, or Coca Cola. And none of them apply to Fairtrade.

Once it is decided to promote the consumption of a branded good – promoting Colgate Toothpaste rather than saying that children should clean their teeth – much of the teaching effort is devoted to increasing the profits of one firm, and, almost certainly, to reducing the profits of another. Promoting a ‘certification brand’ claiming that a product is ‘organic’, ‘sustainable’, ‘kosher’, ‘Fairtrade’ and ‘Made in England’ raises further ethical issues, some of which are addressed further in the text.

The marketing campaign for Fairtrade manages to convey the impression that it is not a normal commercial brand. It also manages to suppress the fact that it is a brand which is primarily there to make money for importers, retailers and distributors in the rich countries. Nearly all the extra price paid for Fairtrade coffee, for example, goes to the importers, retailers and distributors, with perhaps $\frac{1}{2}\%$ to 12% of the *extra* price going to the developing country and much of what goes there being used to pay the extra costs of being allowed to use the brand (Griffiths 2012; Mohan 2010). In the UK, the supermarket chains all claim to charge the same price as the supermarket chain which is generally believed to be the cheapest for ‘branded goods’ (e.g. Nestle), so, to survive, they have to make up for this by charging more for the supermarket’s ‘own brands’ where price comparison is virtually impossible. Marketing their own brand with the additional Fairtrade certification brand is a particularly good way of getting a higher price.

The teaching material for UK schools does not give this information. It is the criminal offence of Unfair Trading for a seller to fail to ‘identify its commercial intent’ – to let it be thought it is a charity when it is in fact a profit making business, for instance (Great Britain 2008, 6(d)). It is odd, too, that a paper that examines teaching ‘fair-trade’ in schools (Pykett et al. 2010) does not make it clear that most of what it discusses relates to the commercial brand Fairtrade and does not mention that the Fairtrade brand is highly profitable for UK businesses. Throughout the paper, the brand name ‘Fairtrade’ has been changed to ‘fair-trade’ – even for the firm, The Fairtrade Foundation and for its Fairtrade Schools campaign!

Indoctrination or education?

This section produces evidence that the primary objective of teaching Fairtrade in schools is to get children to buy Fairtrade products, to press their parents to switch to Fairtrade products, and to persuade and apply pressure on schools, shops and public authorities to support this brand. This implies indoctrination, under Siegel’s first criterion ‘according to which indoctrination is understood in terms of the intention of the teacher...’ (Siegel 2009, 27), though in this case it is rather the intention of the people devising the curriculum, or, indeed, those people and organizations influencing the teachers and people devising the curriculum. At the same time, the law bans as Unfair Trading advertising to children to get them to beg their parents to buy a branded product.

The Fairtrade Foundation and other organizations providing teaching aids on Fairtrade are clear that this is precisely what they are aiming at in their material for children:

If you don’t see Fairtrade products in your local shop, coffee shop or supermarket, then ask for it! Just go to the customer service desk and ask to speak to the manager... Ask your teacher to order the ‘Fair Trade in Action’ pack including lesson plans, role-play games and videos for use in your school. (CAFOD 2008, 7)

Make sure there are some Fairtrade products on sale in your tuckshop and canteen or available in the staff room.... The company that owns the vending machine decides what products are sold. You will need to approach them if you want Fairtrade products to be available in the machines. (CAFOD [n.d.-b](#), 11)

Then the children can write persuasive letters to the companies that produce their favourite choccies to explain why the company should go Fairtrade or the children will go elsewhere! (CAFOD 2008)

Invite the local community! Have a Fairtrade coffee morning for the children's families. (CAFOD 2008)

The intent is to concentrate on teaching children to buy a commercial brand, and getting them to act as unpaid sales people for that brand. Even if the benefits of the brand were not contested, this would constitute indoctrination.

Teaching methods

Another indication of indoctrination is the teaching methods used. Here, school teaching material has been prepared by the Fairtrade Foundation UK, and by two charities, CAFOD and Oxfam, which are founders and trustees of this organization (CAFOD 2010; CAFOD [n.d.](#); Oxfam 2012; Oxfam Education [n.d.](#)). These include detailed lesson plans which have been designed to fit into the national curriculum in many different ways, so the pupil does not get one single, discrete lesson on the subject, but is exposed to it in many ways from many directions (CAFOD [n.d.-a](#)).

CAFOD has produced a full lesson plan using guided fantasy, to get children to produce a fantasy about how Fairtrade works and what it achieves (CAFOD 2010; CAFOD [n.d.](#)). Oxfam, another founder, has similar material (Oxfam 2012; Oxfam Education [n.d.](#)). This is an extraordinarily powerful marketing tool: 40 minutes of guided fantasy about the virtues of any product must have a greater effect than hundreds of advertisements. But this is just the start of the process. There are Fairtrade Assemblies (CAFOD 2010), 80-minute role plays (CAFOD [n.d.](#)) and also whole day workshops.

Religious Education classes are a particularly powerful marketing tool. The CAFOD package for a morning assembly extolling Fairtrade in a primary school ends with the prayer

Dear God,

We pray for those people around the world who grow and produce the things we eat and buy.

We pray that they get a fair price for the things we buy from them.

We pray that we can help support these people by buying Fairtrade goods so that we can help create a better and more just world.

Amen

(CAFOD 2010) See also (CAFOD [n.d.](#))

Pupils are encouraged to press for their schools to become Fairtrade Schools, so that teachers, governors and parents are persuaded to collaborate in promoting the brand through the school, giving the brand a monopoly in school shops, and promoting the brand to shops and the general public. The plan is all-pervasive: it involves setting up a steering group including teaching staff, catering staff, governors, parents and pupils, proving to the 'FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION that your school is worthy of the title', using Fairtrade products, educating 'about Fairtrade issues' and integrating Fairtrade into the curriculum, and taking action to promote Fairtrade (CAFOD n.d.-b, 14,15).

Pykett et al. (2010) give many more examples of the use of teaching methods and teaching materials to promote Fairtrade in ways that would be widely denounced if used by brands that everyone believed to be purely commercial, like Coca Cola.

The National Fairtrade Fortnight is a mass marketing campaign that mobilizes volunteers as activists who will market the brand by non-traditional means. Particular emphasis is given to recruiting teachers and pupils as activists. All schools are encouraged to have events on Fairtrade during the fortnight, and Fairtrade Schools are expected to. Wheeler (2012a) describes the Fairtrade Fortnight in some detail, showing it as a highly sophisticated marketing operation financed by commercial firms selling Fairtrade goods, and delivered by these firms, by the Fairtrade Foundation (which is funded by these firms) and by people paid to promote Fairtrade. Unpaid activists are also used (see Wheeler (2012b) for an analysis of how activists become activists).

The satisfaction being marketed by the brand is a feeling of virtue, a strong emotion. With the strong, all-pervasive, promotion of the brand by the school, by teachers and by pupils, especially through religious education, the strength of the emotion is multiplied. The social discourse, largely emotion in this case, is powerful. Accordingly, this programme creates an atmosphere in the school where it would be a brave pupil or teacher who dared question the value of Fairtrade, and any pupil who applied critical, evidence-based analysis to it could expect to be marked down.

The use of these methods constitute indoctrination in Siegel's second sense in 'which indoctrination is understood in terms of . . . the methods employed by the teacher' (Siegel 2009, 27). In the previous section, it was shown that the choice of objectives itself implied indoctrination. In the next section, it is asked how the indoctrination affects educational objectives.

What effect does this have on educational goals?

Education on values

It is an objective of the curriculum to educate children in values related to the developing countries, in their obligations to people who are poor for reasons outside their control, and in behaving morally in their trading relations. The values developed and the complexity of the value systems are related to the children's age. In primary school, the values may be little more than 'We should not steal', 'We should treat the people who produce our food fairly,' 'We should help people in poor countries,' and possibly even, 'People in poor countries are just like us, but the "system" makes them poor.' However, as the last two sections have shown, both the intention of the people producing the teaching material and the people using it, and the methods of teaching aim at a very different end, to apply emotion to persuade pupils that, for moral and religious reasons, they should switch to one

particular commercial brand, and they should put pressure on the school, the governors, their parents, shops and politicians to support this brand.

The first objection to this is that time and resources are being diverted from the central purposes of education which inevitably implies a cost, without there being any clear educational benefit to compensate. Another objection is that there is an enormous gap between the values that children may develop, and the action that is promoted as being a necessary consequence of holding these values. It is far from obvious that buying Fairtrade does anything to help farmers in poor countries, or that Fairtrade is fair, or that it trades fairly – the research on whether it does or does not makes use of the immensely complex subjects of agricultural production economics, agricultural marketing, marketing economics, marketing and statistics, among others, and combines it with a large amount of experience of the practicalities of marketing in the rich and poor countries. Linking values to one possible course of action seriously hampers any education on values in future years. Children are told in lessons on Fairtrade, particularly in Fairtrade Schools, that most of their value concerns related to the poor countries can be solved by switching to one commercial brand, and the lessons amount to indoctrination. There is then an enormous pressure on the children supporting this, from advertising, from the social discourse, from their parents and from their peers. One might ask how, after this, teachers can develop pupils' values relating to international trading relations (Trade Justice), development aid, the conditions for factory workers in Bangladesh, health in poor countries, food security and famine, and the human rights of women, workers, people of different religions, etc.

Critical thinking

Proponents of the overlapping concepts of critical thinking and critical pedagogy consider that it is a very important part of normal education to teach pupils how to think critically (Burbules and Berk 1999; Siegel 2005; Ennis 1997). It is asked here whether the promotion of Fairtrade limits the possibility of educating children on being critical on issues of development. It is then shown that there are strong reasons to doubt whether any attempt will be made to educate children to think critically on Fairtrade.

Fairtrade is promoted to children from their earliest years, mainly by extraordinarily emotional means. They are encouraged to fantasize. They are told that it is morally imperative to consume Fairtrade. They are told to pray that they should consume Fairtrade. Before they can be educated in thinking critically about development and food, these indoctrinated beliefs have to be challenged, a painful process for teacher and pupil. The indoctrination excludes critical questions such as, 'How does writing the word Fairtrade on a packet prove that it is fairly traded?' and 'Why should we support Fairtrade rather than the Rainforest Alliance, Water Aid, the government aid programme, the World Food Programme, or Trade Justice's fight against the World Trade Organization?', which would have grown naturally out of a balanced discussion of development and world poverty. Is it ethically justified to indoctrinate infants and primary schoolchildren, and then to try to remove the indoctrination later?

Whatever the answers to these questions, teachers will find it very difficult to get students to apply critical thinking to Fairtrade, in view of the overwhelming emotional support for the brand in schools and society generally. The teachers themselves are the target of a sophisticated marketing operation, both the marketing aimed at the general

public through the sophisticated manipulation of social discourse (Griffiths 2014), and through a programme aimed specifically at teachers, including ‘training’ by paid and unpaid enthusiasts (Pykett et al. 2010; Wheeler 2012a). Teachers who are Fairtrade ‘teacher-evangelists’ proselytize to other teachers (Pykett et al. 2010, 501), recruiting other teachers to the cause and creating a situation where anyone who may be sceptical might be afraid to say so. The marketing creates a strong emotional charge.

Teachers will be aware that if they encourage children to think critically about Fairtrade or produce evidence unfavourable to it, they are likely to get hostile emotional reactions from their colleagues, their head teachers, the board of governors, the pupils and parents. They may expect hostile emotional reactions from the local education government and from central government school inspectors, none of which is good for their careers.²

The concepts of critical thinking, true belief and rational belief (Siegel 2005) do not address much of the issue of Fairtrade. The economics of information, for example, has it that most of the information we would need to have to reach true belief or rational belief do not exist. There are costs, not least being the time spent, in searching for what does exist, in obtaining it, and in processing it. The information is concealed and its meaning distorted by ‘noise’, by the existence of large quantities of irrelevant information, of unreliable information, information produced using incorrect techniques and false information. Information is a valuable commodity: firms pay for research and they may profit by withholding the information from their suppliers, competitors and customers. They can also profit by disseminating false information to suppliers, competitors and customers. The value of information is time-dependent (consider the value of knowing the name of the winner of the Derby half an hour before the race begins and half an hour after). Information gets obsolete as the world changes and becomes ‘noise’, while new information is produced and disseminated at a cost. Information overload is a problem. The costs of searching, acquiring and processing information mean that the rational consumer will often make a random choice of purchase, tossing a coin, perhaps, rather than attempting to make an optimum choice (rational belief?). The objective may well be ‘satisficing’ or ‘minimizing regret’ rather than optimizing when making a choice. Decisions are made on heuristics ranging from the simplicities of System 1 to the complexities of System 2 (Epstein 1994; Kahneman 2012), which might even include economic models. There is also a difference between a normal human thirst for knowledge of any kind, useful or not, and the desire for knowledge that influences decisions.

Is any marketing to pupils acceptable?

Inevitably, marketing a product as part of school lessons is very powerful, far more powerful than putting up advertisements around the school, for instance. Teachers have power and authority. It would be absurd to claim that infants and primary school children are capable of taking what teachers say on writing, spelling, arithmetic and science to be totally authoritative and at the same time believing that what teachers say on purchasing a branded product has no more meaning than any of the thousands of advertisements that we are exposed to every day.

It is clearly ‘aggressive marketing’, the criminal offence of Unfair Trading for a seller to use any teaching techniques to persuade children to buy Fairtrade and to act as unpaid salespeople for Fairtrade, and it is unethical for a teacher to use these techniques.

The actual teaching methods used are extreme: the less ethical commercial firms might wish to use them, for they are clearly very powerful, but no firm that was publicly seen to be commercial would dare to use them – praying that they should be allowed to buy Coca Cola!

The marketing programme also interferes with the education process.

For these reasons, it is concluded that the present process of teaching Fairtrade in schools is unethical.

Misleading by falsehood and suppression

A completely separate ethical and legal offence is committed if the pupils are misled by falsehood or by suppression of inconvenient facts. This would be enough on its own to classify the teaching programme as indoctrination. It would also be enough to classify it as cheating children and their parents: it is the criminal offence of Unfair Trading for a seller to deceive consumers by making false and misleading claims, and by ‘Misleading omissions, Hiding or omitting material information, [or] Providing information in a way which is unclear, unintelligible, ambiguous or untimely’ (European Commission 2005; Great Britain 2008). In this section, it will be shown that most of the factual information produced is false, and that a great deal of important and relevant information is suppressed.

There is a large literature examining the ethics of Fairtrade and whether it has any positive net impact (see Griffiths (2012) and Mohan (2010) for reviews), and it is constantly being added to (e.g. Cramer et al. (2014) and Sylla (2014)). It is deeply worrying that even the people preparing teaching materials on Fairtrade and ‘ethical marketing’ do not show any signs of having read any of it.

The legal basis of Fairtrade is the Standards produced by Fairtrade International: anything that does not conform with these is not Fairtrade, so any conflict between what these state and what is stated in teaching is misrepresentation. The standards say that retailers and traders are allowed to charge what they want for Fairtrade products. The standards are clear that the Fairtrade Premium and minimum prices are payable to the exporters at the port, not to the farmers who may be a thousand miles away (Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International e.V 2011c, 15; Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International e.V 2011b; Fairtrade International (FLO) 2011; Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International e.V 2011a). The exporters and other marketing firms incur substantial extra costs in handling Fairtrade, and these may not be covered by the extra price paid (Weber 2006). Most of the costs are incurred on all the coffee marketed, though only perhaps 17% of the total is sold as Fairtrade certified (Bacon 2005; Berndt 2007a, 2007b; Kilian et al. 2006; Mohan 2010; Renard 2005). If there is any surplus after paying these costs, it is spent on ‘social projects’ like building schools or baseball pitches or running women’s groups: the standards stipulate that it should not go as extra price to farmers. If the costs are greater than the increased revenue, the price to farmers is reduced. This means that the farmers receive the same price or a lower price as a result of Fairtrade membership, but they incur increased production costs, again on all their production, not just on the small part marketed as Fairtrade Certified, so they are worse off (Griffiths 2013; Griffiths 2012).

An examination of the lesson plans and literature for children produced by Fairtrade Foundation, Oxfam and CAFOD shows that the claims made do not tally with these facts, or the published Fairtrade International standards, and they misstate ‘results to be expected

from use of the product' (Great Britain 2008, 5(5) q). Some of the false statements are quoted below: other examples are to be found on my website. The information presented in this paper together with much of the research evidence was passed to Trading Standards Officers, who referred it to the top law enforcement organization in the UK (the Office of Fair Trading), Interpol and Europol. Some of the false statements were then removed from the website of the Fairtrade Foundation UK and may since have been removed by others. The documents cited may be obtained from the author.

ENOUGH FOOD FOR EVERYONE IF WE CHOOSE FAIRTRADE PRODUCTS
Unfair trade means many [smallholder farmers] still only receive a tiny proportion of the price we pay for our food, Choosing products with the Fairtrade Mark is one easy way to support them. Fairtrade means they can sell their crops on fairer terms and earn enough to provide for their families and invest in their futures. (CAFOD n.d.)

Just look at the Fairtrade logo! It's your guarantee that the farmers and producers of the food are given a fair wage for their work. (CAFOD 2010, 4) [cf. Cramer et al. (2014)]

The difference Fairtrade makes:

A minimum fair price paid to the farmers for their coffee beans at the market... Affordable loans for growers to buy fertilizers and tools. Traders come to the weekly market keen not to miss out on a chance to buy good coffee All the coffee that your farmers grow is sold at one market so the traders cannot buy the coffee from the farmers at different prices in different places . . . An agreed minimum price is paid to each farmer . . . An extra sum of money called the Fairtrade premium is given to communities for things like schools and health centres. (CAFOD n.d., 3,4) [cf. Griffiths (2013)]

Fairtrade has helped to lift millions of people out of poverty. When you buy Fairtrade goodies a larger share of the money you spend goes to the people who need it most – the farmers in the poor countries who grow food for us, or the workers who help produce it. These people are called 'the producers' . . . When you see the [Fairtrade] Mark on packaging then you can be sure that the producers got a good deal from Fairtrade. (CAFOD n.d.-b, 1)

With Fairtrade: Farmers are guaranteed a fair price for their goods; No child or forced labour is used to produce the goods. (CAFOD n.d.-b, 2) [cf. Cramer et al. (2014).]

Fairtrade means farmers get a fair price for what they grow. The Fairtrade price is often much more than they would normally get, and it covers the cost of growing the crop, plus enough to live on. The Fairtrade price is paid to farmers by whoever buys their crops. (Fairtrade Foundation n.d.)

Fair Trade is a global scheme which started to help guarantee a better deal for farmers struggling to earn enough money from their crops in some of the world's poorest countries. This is the fair trade logo and it is applied to any food which has been produced by growers who have been paid fairly for the work they have done producing the crop. (Oxfam Education n.d.)

Claims are also made that the Fairtrade marketing system is novel, and an alternative to a (discredited) capitalist system. This even appears in academic literature with Booth and Whetstone (2007) saying that Fairtrade's major failing is that it is not an extreme Free Market capitalist system, and Pykett et al. (2010) saying that its major advantage is that it is not a neoliberal (i.e. Free Market capitalist) system. In fact, it is the long established capitalist system of agricultural marketing cooperatives exporting a branded good. The only novelty is how the product is marketed in rich countries, through schools for instance. It is possible for a mainstream economist like myself to recognize the possibilities of

agricultural cooperatives, to be strongly opposed to Free Market economists and to criticize the concept and performance of Fairtrade (Griffiths 2003).

This means that the marketing aimed at pupils is based on false statements, and would be criminal if carried out by the sellers rather than the teachers – indeed it is criminal if the schools sell Fairtrade goods, though this is a relatively trivial matter. It is very difficult to find any statement in the literature aimed at schools and pupils which purports to be producing hard evidence: the literature concentrates on arousing emotion and on the selling message – a call for action to promote the brand and to consume more Fairtrade products.

It is a criminal offence for a seller to withhold information that would alter the purchasing decision of consumers. The fact that almost none of the extra price paid reaches the Third World, let alone the farmer, would alter the purchasing decision of most consumers. I examined ethical objections to Fairtrade and concluded that it is the criminal offence of Unfair Trading for a seller not to state

This product costs x pence more than the equivalent non-Fairtrade product. Of this, y pence (z %) goes into social projects, but we have no evidence that these produce benefits to the farmers. We have no reason to believe that any extra money is paid to farmers, though they certainly incur extra costs to get Fairtrade certification. Non-Fairtrade farmers are harmed. We spend much of the money trying to create a non-capitalist political and economic system, which is set out on www.politicalagenda.com. (Griffiths 2012)

The Fairtrade marketing strategy is based on absolute secrecy about what it does and what it achieves, and concentrates entirely on persuading consumers that it conforms to their ethical values, and arousing the emotions that lead to a decision to buy. It works by encouraging everyone, including workers in charities, volunteers, politicians, teachers, pupils, purchasers and consumers, to fantasize about what it is and what it achieves (Griffiths 2012, 2014). The amount of hard information is so limited that one cannot talk of them making a reasoned guess or even imagining this rather than fantasizing, making a reasoned guess: the number of people in the consuming country with any knowledge of small farmer production, of the social economy of an African village, of the management and governance of cooperatives and of agricultural marketing is vanishingly small.

And this raises another difficulty. We can look at the teaching material produced by the Fairtrade Foundation, Oxfam and CAFOD, but there is currently no information about what is actually taught. Observers could, conceivably, observe this in specific classrooms, once they have been alerted to the hypothesis being examined and the different narratives of the main players including Fairtrade International and the providers of teaching material, but the research design is by no means easy. The teachers, having no hard information, fantasize, and base their lessons on this fantasy. Then the pupils fantasize, whether in guided fantasy lessons, or in unguided fantasy. And the result of this chain of fantasies by person after person is then used to persuade parents, shopkeepers and the general public that they should buy Fairtrade.

The normal rules do not apply: it is ethical

It has been shown that teaching of Fairtrade in UK schools is indoctrination under commonly accepted criteria (Siegel 2009, 27): *'the intention of the teacher'* – it is made clear by teachers and teaching material that the primary objective is to get pupils to buy Fairtrade products and persuade others to buy them. It is not to impart information and

certainly not to impart knowledge or a critical approach. It is a criminal offence for sellers to do this; ‘the methods employed by the teacher’ – the methods, including guided fantasy or getting children to pray that they should buy more Fairtrade would be wholly objectionable if they were used by openly commercial firms; ‘the doctrinal nature of the subject matter’ – pupils are misled by false information and the withholding of true information, to promote the doctrine of the Fairtrade brand. At the same time, the teaching falls foul of a range of criteria akin to the criminal offence of Unfair Trading.

Almost none of the teachers or schools or government departments would promote an obviously commercial product such as Coca Cola or Adidas under any circumstances: they would see it as unethical. Somehow, these clear boundaries have vanished when a product is marketed as ‘ethical’: the normal rules no longer seem to apply.

Third World poverty is a very important issue: it results in widespread death and destitution. Because of this, there is an ethical imperative to concentrate on action that works and this throws an ethical burden on schools. If they push a false image of what the problem is and what actions address these problems, they divert resources to less-effective solutions. At the simplest, it diverts a lot of money from more effective charities – generous consumers around the world pay one to two billion Euros a year extra for Fairtrade, with perhaps 30 million Euros reaching the Third World. If the money had been given to charities instead, it could have bought 300,000,000 mosquito nets, for instance – enough to make a big impact on malaria, which kills 1.24 million people per year.

The problem is greater than just a few billion Euros being pocketed by big business. The schools and the teachers are very important in creating the social discourse on tackling Third World poverty. Their pupils tell supermarkets, their parents and other people they meet that Fairtrade is a wonderful thing. They back this up with ‘evidence’ – telling them what they have been taught, or have been told to fantasize, at school. Even if the message comes across as being garbled, the adults take it as evidence that there is a large body of evidence supported by the school and the Department of Education, while in fact there is no such evidence – the Fairtrade industry is obsessively secretive – and there is a large body of research evidence that throws the industry’s claims into question. This means that the schools and teachers have created a social dialogue, in which fantasized claims for Fairtrade become more powerful and more influential. It becomes increasingly difficult for politicians to act on professional advice when spending the development budget. And the social discourse becomes ever more powerful as the pupils grow up, and become consumers, voters, parents and teachers.

The message is that all you need to do to tackle world poverty is to switch to another commercial brand. This has an impact on political action now, and will have a greater impact as these pupils become voters. So will the fact that the teaching materials present a view of the problems and solutions which is not accepted by the agricultural economics or development professionals.

Who should take action?

Clearly, there will always be unscrupulous firms who would like to get teachers and schools to advertise their products. Whose job is it to prevent this happening?

It would be naïve to say that the school teachers should investigate Fairtrade and decide whether or not to teach it, or what to teach. They are busy. They welcome lesson plans produced by apparently trustworthy charities. They are encouraged to teach it by

their colleagues, school governors, parents, the Local Education Authority and the national department responsible for education. They are, like the population in general, as well as politicians and civil servants, subjected to an extremely sophisticated marketing programme based on controlling the public discourse, and encouraging fantasizing about Fairtrade (Griffiths 2014; Wheeler 2012a; Pykett et al. 2010). They cannot, however, escape responsibility for some of the aggressive marketing techniques being used, such as getting children to pray that they should consume more Fairtrade.

Local and national government departments do have the responsibility. Even here, the civil servants have been subjected to the very sophisticated marketing and public relations campaign, and may have completely unrealistic fantasies. Most believe that 'someone, somewhere, must have checked up on Fairtrade', so it is not their responsibility to do so – always a good excuse for avoiding action. I have not been able to trace any such investigation by the UK national or local governments, even using the Freedom of Information Act. Public servants have told me that the issue is so politically sensitive that they are afraid of even raising the matter. And politicians recognize that they can improve their reputation by supporting a popular issue like Fairtrade, but that they can only lose by attacking it.

However, it has been my experience, working in 35 countries, that it is possible to raise extraordinarily difficult issues, and get decisions on them, even in dysfunctional governments, though it may not be good for one's career (Griffiths 2003). The issues raised in this paper and the evidence published elsewhere on the ethics and impact of Fairtrade were brought to the attention of the government of the UK who refused to take action or respond to the points raised. The English Department of Education, for example, replied

While I have noted your concerns it is important to emphasise that schools are autonomous institutions run by the headteacher, under the control of the governing body, which has responsibility for the general conduct within the school.

I would suggest that you take your complaint directly to the schools which you believe are in contravention of the unfair trading laws. I would also suggest that you obtain a copy of the school's complaints procedure, which by law the school is required to publish. This should fully explain its process and you will also be able to establish whether the school is following its published complaints procedure when dealing with your concerns.

This Department has in fact put Fairtrade on the National Curriculum, and the political head, the Secretary of State for Education, personally alters the National Curriculum, changing what books may be studied for examinations. The present Secretary of State has introduced measures to make schools, including nurseries, and childcare providers, teach her values to children from the age of two, and to cut off state funding to schools, nurseries, nannies, and childcare providers which do not actively promote her values. The regulations allow local authorities to cut off funds to any provider that 'promotes, as evidence-based, views and theories which are contrary to established scientific or historical evidence and explanations' (Adams 2014a; Adams 2014b). There is also a large and powerful government inspectorate, which is mandated to inspect what is taught and how it is taught. That is to say the Department believes it has the right to act, and it certainly has the power to. To turn a blind eye to indoctrination is to support indoctrination.

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Notes

1. It is the criminal offence of 'Unfair Trading' when the misrepresentation or withholding of information 'causes or is likely to cause the average consumer to take a transactional decision he would not have taken otherwise'. Similarly, in the Fraud Act, 'Fraud by false representation' is where someone '(a) dishonestly makes a false representation, and (b) intends, by making the representation— (i) to make a gain for himself or another, or (ii) to cause loss to another or to expose another to a risk of loss' (Great Britain 2006). Again, in the Theft Act, '(2) It is immaterial whether the appropriation is made with a view to gain, or is made for the thief's own benefit' (Great Britain 1968).
2. The pressures exist. Because of my criticisms of Fairtrade, I have been subjected to accusations that I support a right wing, neoliberal, free market extremist approach, though my book provides some of its sharpest criticisms (Griffiths 2003)

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