Chapter 2

Public–Private Partnership Principles Applied to Industry–School Partnership to Support Technical and Vocational Education

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Abstract

The term partnership is increasingly used by governments, industry, community organizations and schools in supporting their daily activities. Similar to the terms ICT and learning, partnerships are now ubiquitous in policy discourse. Yet, the term remains ill-defined and ambiguous. This chapter reviews and reflects on a government-led industry-school partnership initiative in the state of Queensland, Australia, to understand how the concept was applied and the consequences. PPP principles derived from the literature were used as a framework to review this initiative. The methodology of this qualitative case study involved consultations with stakeholders and an analysis of Gateway schools’ policy documents, and research literature. The review suggests that despite the use of terminology akin to PPP projects in Gateway school program and policy documents, the implicit suggestion that this initiative is a public-private partnership can be interpreted as partially tenable. The majority of principles shaping a PPP have not been considered in any significant manner in the Gateway schools program. Although the review recognizes the legitimate and sincere purpose of the Gateway schools program, a more explicit adoption of a PPP framework during the design, monitoring, and evaluation stages could have strengthened the initiative in terms of outcomes, benefits, and sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years the word partnership seems to have become a new mantra for public sector policy formulation. Partnership as a general concept means to bring capacities of two different entities together in pursuit of a mutually beneficial enterprise (Pillay & Hearn, 2009). While this may be stating the obvious, different conceptual frameworks have been used to research, design and support this inter-organizational arrangement called partnerships. Consequently, different interpretations of roles, processes and impacts of partnerships in provisioning agreed goods and services emerged (Acar & Robertson, 2004; Cardini, 2006). The various permutations of partnerships range from formal contracts to informal community relationships. In this study we seek to reflect on the concept of public private partnerships (PPP) in education which, over the last decade, has increasingly taken center stage in public sector education policies in the UK (Davies & Hentschke, 2006; Gulson, 2007; Mann, Stanley & Archer, 2014), the USA (Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006) and Australia (Caldwell & Keating, 2004; Crump & Slee, 2005). The term PPP is used to denote collaboration between government departments (public), the business sector and civil society (private) in a benevolent connotation of cooperation, trust, and the achievement of shared objectives (Cardini, 2006). The UK education sector embraced PPP as a new form of social relations between education providers and the government in which partners would benefit from cooperation proportionate to their investments in order to achieve effective and efficient delivery of education services (Davies & Hentschke, 2006). PPPs in the education sector are not new. In Australia, for example, there is the long-standing arrangement between the government and private school systems such as the independent schools and church schools (see Weihe, 2008). Similarly, in the Australian vocational education, partnerships with industry for vocational education and training purposes can be observed in various apprenticeship programs. What is new is the rapid expansion in the use of PPPs in the belief that adoption of neo-liberal policies and marketization of education and training may increase quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the system of education services (Caldwell & Keating 2004).

We first review PPP typologies and establish a synthesized framework that comprise the underlying principles used to inform the different typologies of private and public partnerships. We then use these principles to analyze the data from the Gateway schools program, which is an industry-school partnership initiated by the Queensland state government, to review and understand the conceptual and operational challenges of these partnerships. It should be noted that education is a state responsibility in Australia.

REVIEW OF UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS IN PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS

Proponents of PPPs in education (Ball, 2003; Caldwell & Keating 2004; DEEWR, 2012; Deloitte Access Economics & Queensland Resources Council, 2011; PhillipsKPA) note three apparent benefits. These are cost efficiency; responsiveness to local demands to overcome an over-reliance on a centralised and rigid state bureaucracy; and adaptability to changing work practices stimulated by industry-led continuous knowledge innovations.

The cost efficiency argument is linked to the ever-increasing demand for education services in the midst of a perceived inability of the state to fully fund a burgeoning demand. The number of people seeking education and training either to enter the workforce, to up-skill, or to change jobs, is steadily increasing. This trend has been accompanied by escalating costs associated with providing high quality