

Co-Production in Education – Shaping a Better Future

1. Introduction

A recently published OECD report (2011) identifies the need to rethink traditional public service delivery. Although co-production is not a new concept, it is evident that private and public sectors are seeing increased involvement by customers in the delivery of services (Pestoff, 2014:384). The reasons for this varies from improving the quality of service delivery to cutting costs and ensuring the user does more for itself. Therefore, coordinated, integrated government is the key to unlocking efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery due to its potential to remove any unnecessary duplication and the improved utilisation of scarce resources (Fraser-Moleketi, 2003).

This paper will be introducing the concept of co-production as is illustrated with the Partners for Possibility program. This program has contributed to the transformation of education in South Africa through its partnership process, which joins business leaders with principals from schools that are classified as under-resourced in South Africa. It engages business leaders by challenging them in a hands-on educational environment with complex needs that require skilled leadership. The paper will provide a brief discussion on the basic theory of co-production and apply this to the discussion on the Partners for Possibility program.

2. Co-production Defined

Due to the increased discussion on co-production in the public sector, a wide range of definitions exist to illustrate the concept of co-production. Bovaird (2014:1) accepts co-production as “the public sector, service users and communities making better use of each other’s assets and resources to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency”

The positioning of co-production can be more clearly illustrated in the following table:

Type of Involvement	Performed by		
	Government Organisation Alone	Government organisation and external party jointly	External party alone
Governance (deciding what to do)	Government Decision	Joint Decision	Private Decision
Production (doing it)	Production by Government Organisation	Co-Production	Private Production/ Self Service

Source: (Alford, 2014).

Co-production refers to the contribution made by the service beneficiary, both public and private sector, within the service delivery process. It does not refer only to self-help by individuals or the self-organising by communities but refers to the contributions of *both* citizens *and* the public sector. Bovaird & Löffler (2011) defines it as “the public sector and citizens making better use of each other’s assets and resources to achieve better outcomes and improved efficiency”. It is thus any active behaviour of anyone who is outside the government agency who is prompted by some action of the agency, is independent or conjoint with agency production. The action taken is also at least partly voluntary and intentionally or unintentionally creates private/ and or public value in terms of outputs or outcomes (Alford, 2003).

To achieve successful collective acts of co-production, it is essential to have formally organised and institutionalised activities whilst working in cooperation with others. These acts are often produced by a smaller group, rather implying collective interaction than collective action. Collective interaction can lead to reciprocity and the development of social capital (Pestoff, 2014).

3. Types of Co-Production

Type	Example
Co-Delivery of Services	
Co-Managing Services	Management of assets by community
Co-Assessment (co-monitoring and co-evaluation) of service	Participatory village appraisals
Co-Performing of Services	Neighbourhood Watch or Meals-on-Wheels
Co-Commissioning of Services	
Co-Planning of Policy	Deliberative participation
Co-design of Services	User consultation
Co-Financing Services	Assistance with fundraising, agreement on tax increases
Co-Prioritisation Services	Community Chests

Source: Adapted from (Bovaird *et al*, 2011).

4. Co-Production: A Customer Focus

As collaboration will be central to the next generation of service delivery, it is essential to change the mindset of service providers. The relationship with customers must be viewed as a partnership that carries through the full service delivery cycle. It is necessary to determine which degree service providers and customers co-produce together, who they are co-producing for and which elements they will be co-producing on (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2014).

Additionally, the relationships within co-production partnerships can thus be viewed in different forms, and can be varied from being “interdependent” (service are unable to be produced without customer input), “complimentary” (customer perform tasks that compliments the activities of the regular service provider) or “supplementary” (customer substitute the regular service providers as they take over tasks usually performed by the service provider (Vennik, 2013).

5. Co-Production: The Barriers

Although research on co-production has found that it provides the opportunity for various benefits, the successful implementation of it may be prevented by numerous limitations. The level and intensity of co-production partnerships varies, as well as the contribution of which groups, who are viewed as disadvantaged, are overlooked. Often these groups potentially possess the resources necessary to achieve the specific goals of these co-production partnerships. Lastly, the establishment of co-production partnerships may be prevented due to the perception that a transition of public services should be authorised and championed by organisational leaders (Boviard & Loeffler, 2014).

6. Co-Production Case Study –Partners for Possibility

6.1 The Context of Education in South Africa

After twenty years of democracy in South Africa the school education system is not producing the results it is expected to deliver. In fact, it is in a crisis and in need of massive support to change the current situation. A clearer picture emerges when the following statistics are considered:

- Only half of the Grade 3 learners in South Africa are literate;
- 50% of the children who start school never finish;
- Only 13% of Grade 9 learners receive a pass mark of 50% in mathematics;
- the World Economic Forum ranks South Africa's maths and science education second last in the world;
- The International Mathematics and Science Study of 2012 ranks South Africa third last for mathematics;
- The International Reading and Literacy Study of 2012 placed South Africa fourth last; and
- 79% of schools have no library (Lovemore, 2013).

Only about 5 000 of 25 000 schools in the country are functioning properly and delivering the expected education outputs (Collins, 2015). These figures paint only part of the picture. Poor school infrastructure, lack of sufficient qualified teachers, particularly in maths and science, weak school leadership, and poor socio-economic

conditions are some of the other factors that contribute to this poor state of education in South Africa.

South Africa's National Development Plan: Vision 2030 aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. Three priorities amongst the diverse goals set in the NDP are:

- Raising employment through faster economic growth.
- Improving the quality of education, skills development and innovation.
- Building the capability of the state to play a developmental, transformative role (NDP Executive Summary, 2012).

Therefore, a well-functioning school system and good quality education results are key to all these priorities.

It is against this background that a unique initiative was started in 2010 to change the situation. **Partners for Possibility** was born in a primary school in Cape Town through the initiative of a concerned citizen to make a difference and a school principal that was committed to transform his school in order to be successful.

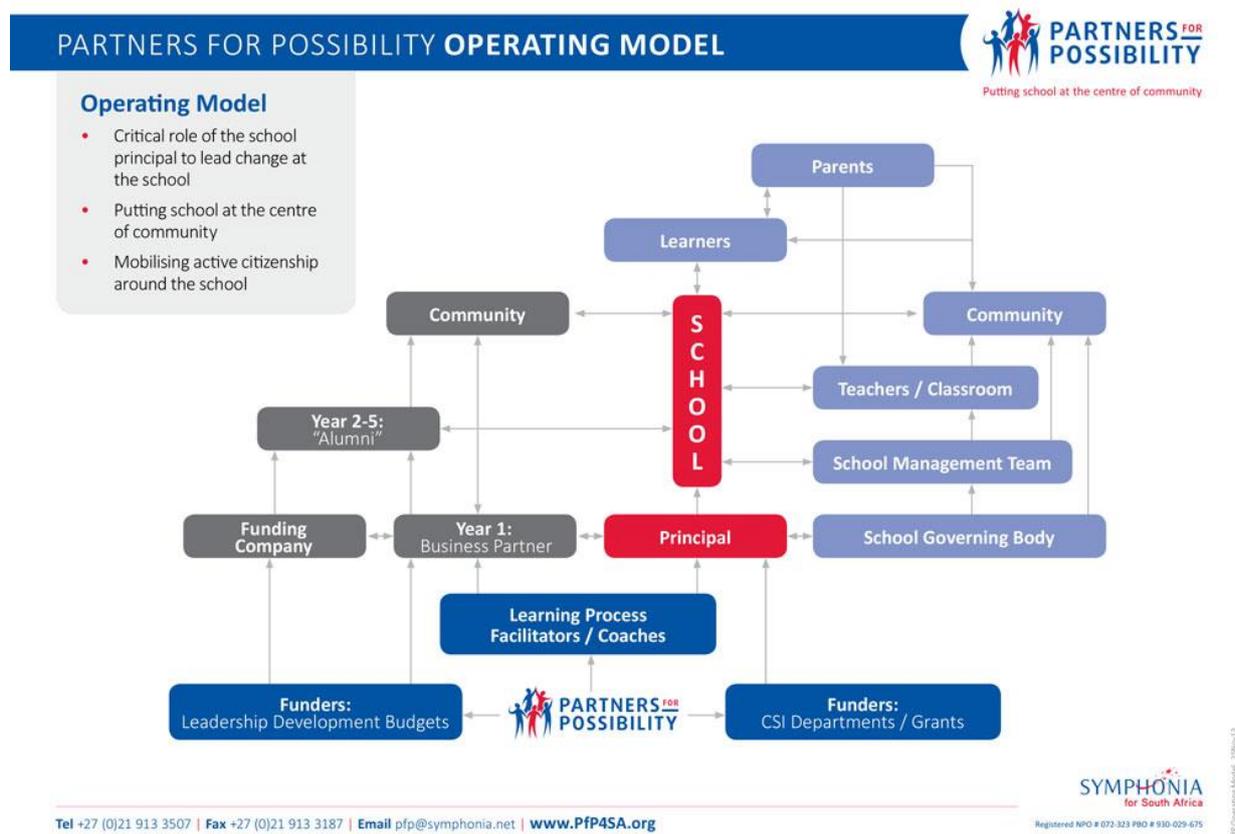
6.2 Partners for Possibility – Where did it Start?

In 2010, Dr Louise Van Rhyn, a business manager who wanted to do something to change the education system, met Mr Ridwan Samodien, principal of Kannemeyer Primary School, one of the many underperforming schools in South Africa. He wanted to change his school to be a successful, winning school with an engaged parent community. Louise and Ridwan started to engage the parents and the community surrounding the school, including the local businesses. They invited the community to an event to discuss the future of the school.

The enthusiastic discussions that took place that day led to a number of initiatives that involved parents, businesses, alumni from the school and the Western Cape Education Department. A partnership was born to co-create and co-deliver education at this school. This was the start of the Partners for Possibility program. Some of the concrete results at the school are:

- A “Community of Committed Parents”, which actively involves the parent community in all the school’s activities;
- A new upgraded computer lab;
- A good science lab;
- A new library;
- A Mass Opportunity and Development in Sport Centre run by the Western Cape Department of Culture and Sport in cooperation with the Education Department; and
- A positive school environment where learners receive good quality education and can achieve good results (Collins, 2015).

Fig. 1 below illustrates the operating model of the Partners for Possibility program.



Source: (Partners for Possibility, 2015).

6.3 Partners for Possibility – The Concept

Partners for Possibility is a co-production in education initiative that focuses on leadership development. It is based on a partnership between business leaders and school principals from under-resourced schools in South Africa. They must commit to a program of a year in which the two leaders work together to make a difference in the school community and positively impact the quality of education at that school. The business leaders, together with the school principals, form a strong team of change agents that impact school education in South Africa in a sustainable way. “Changing one school at a time” is the motto used by Partners for Possibility to move towards transforming the education landscape in South Africa.

The Partners for Possibility program consists of the following:

- “A partnership program between a business leader and a school principal from an under-resourced school for 1 year.
- The partners must complete a tailored leadership development course, which, *inter alia*, includes theoretical courses, experiential learning and action learning.
- Professional coaching by an experienced learning process facilitator.
- The partners are grouped into a Leadership Circle of 8-10 partnerships that acts as a solution incubator.
- The partners in each school design an improvement plan custom-made for their school and which addresses the specific challenges of that school using the tools they get from this program.
- The partners act together in engaging their respective communities to become actively involved in the execution of this plan” (Partners for Possibility, 2015).

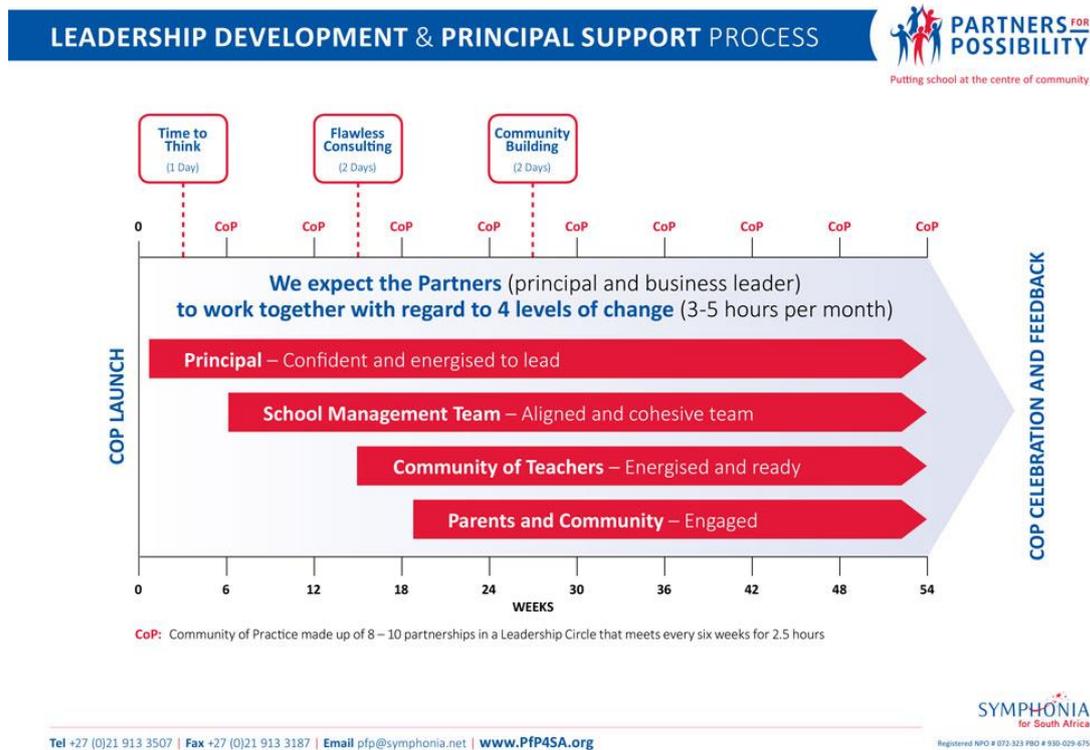
In view of the importance of good school leadership, and the link it has to educational outcomes, this program focuses on school leadership to change the performance of schools. The theory of change, as applied in schools, is based on the idea that school principals must lead the change process in their schools. Principals and business leaders co-operate to effect change in schools at four levels:

- (i) Principal – building confident energetic principals to lead and manage their schools effectively;

- (ii) School management team – the expertise of business leaders is harnessed to develop the school management team into a cohesive unit aligned to the vision created through this initiative;
- (iii) Community of teachers – principals and business leaders work together to re-energize and re-engage the teachers at the participating schools;
- (iv) Community of parents and other citizens around the schools – this program get active support from the parents and other citizens in the local community (Partners for Possibility, 2015).

The underlying theory on which Partners for Possibility is based is rooted in complexity science which is very useful when facilitating large scale change in a complex social system, for example in education in South Africa. In applying this theoretical knowledge to the complex school environment (an important concept, which is considered by Daniel Kim as a key driver for the successful implementation of this initiative) is the core theory of success. This means that the quality of outcome or results depends on the quality of the collective thinking, which is influenced by the quality of relationships between the members of an organisation or partners, in this case (Collins, 2015).

Fig 2 (below) illustrates the process of leadership development and principal support as adopted by Partners for Possibility.



Source: (Partners for Possibility, 2015).

6.4. Partners for Possibility - Who are the Co-Producers?

The core relationship in the Partners for Possibility concept is that between a business leader and a school principal. It could thus be said that they are the essential co-producers of specific education services. This is, however, a simplistic view of this initiative since there are other contributors who are also involved in different ways in this process of co-production. The nature of the contributions also varies and includes expertise, creativity, time and money. While the process starts with the establishment of a partnership between a school principal and a business leader who do not know each other, the process itself produces other participants or additional co-producers, such as the school management team, teachers and the parent community.

The PfP effort by Symphonia is absolutely unique in its ability to bring schools, community and the business sector together as true partners caring for our children. It is based on the gifts and strengths of all parties.

– Peter Block, organizational development, community building and civic engagement expert

Each of these role players makes a commitment to changing the school and improving its outputs on a sustainable basis. School principals and business partners must commit an average of 15 hours a month for one year to this program. The time is allocated to the different elements of the program which is carefully designed to build the partnership in order to effect change in the school.

Principals are carefully selected for inclusion in this program. Some are recommended by the relevant education department and others simply asked to join the program. They have to be committed to lead change in their schools and the program organisers first provide them with a comprehensive amount of information about what is expected of them before they can be officially signed up for the program.

Business leaders are also prepared for their role as partners and co-creators of change in an educational facility where they are faced with a complex social situation over which they have little control, if any. In developing this partnership both principals and business leaders are taken out of their comfort zone and guided to jointly tackle the complex challenges related to under-performing schools.

In addition to their time and expertise business leaders must also make a contribution of R30 000 to the program (Collins, 2015). This is less than the actual cost of running the program, but corporate donations assist to fill the funding gap.

6.5 Partners for Possibility – What Motivates Participation?

In the context of a school education system in crisis and most of the schools underperforming and thus not producing sufficient good quality education results there is enough reason for school principals to participate in a program such as this. Principals, being the leaders in their respective schools and also leaders in the community, are important role players to effect change in society.

Children spend only a small percentage of their time in school. It is therefore important that the parents, family and broader community get involved in any initiative to improve a school and the delivery of education at that school. Successful schools are characterised by strong leadership provided by the principal, commitment by the teaching staff and an engaged parent community. The motivation to succeed in transforming failing or underperforming schools into successful schools entails more than improving the education results. Many of these schools are located in poor economic areas and function in a difficult socio-economic context. Changing the school has a significant impact on changing the community within which it functions. Partners for Possibility has recognised this from the start and is thus also a transformational leadership development initiative.

Business leaders who participate in this program are motivated to make a contribution to improving education, as well as the socio-economic situation in many communities in South Africa. In addition, this program provides them with an opportunity to further develop their own leadership skills and to share their experience in leading change in their own organisations.

The improvement of education is an important building block in the future development of South Africa. A business leader who wants to make an investment in people and contribute to positive change in the country has the motivation to be a partner of a school principal in this program. Here are some of the comments received from business leaders who participates in the program.

“The joint workshops that I participated in, together with the principals, gave us the opportunity to craft a partnership based on mutual respect and a common desire to make a difference in the school system in which we are

working. The paradigm shift from deficit and poverty, to gifts and possibilities allowed us to explore new ways of raising the awareness of educators and children about what could be done together.” [Rama Naidu, Democracy Development Program]

“Working in partnership to solve the challenges galvanises a strong bond between the partners, and they grow to trust each other, learn from each other, and work together to build better school communities. The real benefits are often only realised in year two or three as the school’s performance grows.” [Peter Laburn]

6.6 Partners for Possibility – The Impact of the Initiative

Since its inception in 2010 the Partners for Possibility program has spread throughout South Africa and it continues to grow. The program has reached 200 schools and thus involved 200 principals and 200 business leaders. The impact in the participating schools and the wider community is significant and can be expressed in different ways.

In all the schools the program developed more engaged parents, e.g. the “Community of Committed Parents” at Kannemeyer Primary School, greater teacher involvement and further skills development of teachers, as well as better education results produced by the learners. The first level of impact is in the lives of the partners, i.e. the principals and the business leaders. The testimonies received from all of these participants confirm that the program re-energised them and enabled them to lead change within their respective societies.

Some other improvement initiatives generated through this program are:

- The installation of computer labs in schools and provision of internet access;
- Establishment of school libraries with more than 6 000 books;
- Getting a school bus to transport learners;
- Getting musical instruments for a school;

- Additional literacy and numeracy projects to improve the knowledge of learners;
- Financial literacy training; and
- A mentoring program for grade 11 and 12 learners to prepare them for tertiary studies (Collins, 2015).

Through the development of partnerships within a broader community, further beneficial initiatives are often created, for example assisting children in poor economic areas to broader education opportunities, including the possibility of tertiary education, and improving the extra-curricular opportunities in a school, such as sport, cultural activities, and music tuition. A partnership between two unlikely partners can become an avalanche of opportunities that transform a school and involve a whole community.

Conclusion

Co-production of public services can be shaped in different ways and in different contexts, but it is widely accepted that there is a growing need and a growing interest in co-production of public services. Specific needs in communities or gaps in the scope or quality of public services delivered to those communities often provide fertile ground for co-creation and co-production of public services. School education in South Africa is a case in point where the education system is in a crisis and warrants significant interventions to get it at an acceptable level. It is essential to constantly monitor and evaluate the success of such partnerships and to adapt it to the specific environment in which it occurs.

Partners for Possibility is a unique co-production initiative in school education in South Africa that focuses on leadership development in order to improve education outcomes. It is hugely successful and each partnership between a school principal and a business leaders had created more local partners in the form of the parent communities and sometimes also other local businesses. The impact on the quality of education in the partner schools is already very positive and will reap even more benefits over a longer period of time. Many more schools need this type of support

and could thus benefit from a co-production initiative. This is a winning model that could be exported to other countries where similar needs exist.

References

- Alford, J. 2014. Engaging Public Sector Clients – From Service Delivery to Co-Production. Unpublished paper delivered at University of Copenhagen. 24 April, Copenhagen.
- Bovaird, T. & Löffler, E. 2011. From Engagement to CO-Production: How Users and Communities Contribute to Public Service, in Brandsen, T. & Pestoff, V. (eds.). *New Public Governance, The Third Sector and Co-Production*. London: Routledge.
- Bovaird, T. & Loeffler, E. 2014. User and Community Production of Public Services: What Does the Evidence Tell Us? IIAS study Group on Co-Production, Bergamo, Italy. May 2014.
- Collins, M. 2015. *Partners for Possibility*. Knowres Publishing: Randburg, South Africa.
- Fraser-Moleketi, G. 2003. *South Africa: Managers Urged to Work Towards Integrated Public Service*. [Online]. Available: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200309150127.html> [2015, April 20].
- Lovemore, A. 2013. Our Education System Does Not Work. [Online]. Available: <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/party/our-education-system-doesnt-work--annette-lovemore> [2015, April 7].
- National Development Plan 2030*. 2015. [Online]. Available: <http://www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan-2030> [2015, April 9].
- Partners for Possibility*. 2015. [Online]. Available: www.pfp4sa.org. [2015, April 9].
- Pestoff, V. 2014. Collective Action and the Sustainability of Co-Production. *Public Management Review*, 16(3): 390.
- OECD. 2011. *Together for Better Public Service, Partnering with Citizens and Civil Society*. Paris: OECD.
- Vennik, F. 2013. Using Co-Production for Quality Improvement: The Underlying Assumptions and Mechanisms for the Involvement of Healthcare Users. IRSPM Panel: Co-Production of Public Services and its Assumptions: In Search for Evidence. 10-12 April.