

Final Report

The benefits of school–business relationships

For

**Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations**

Prepared by



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The following ACER staff members have contributed to this report: Michele Lonsdale, Alana Deery, Sharon Clerke, Michelle Anderson, Emma Curtin, Pat Knight and Meredith Bramich.

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Carey Badcock (CEO, Australian Business and Community Network)

Dora Costi (Group General Manager, ThomasAdsett International, Qld)

Liz Furler (CEO, Principals Australia)

Jan Owen (CEO, Foundation for Young Australians)

Nick Mastrocinque (Human Resources Manager, Bianco Construction Supplies, SA)

Nick Kaiser (Water Efficiency Communications Coordinator, Hunter Water Corporation, NSW)

Kate O'Hara (General Manager, Marketing and Public Relations, Hawaiian Property Group)

Nicole Clarke (Sponsorship Coordinator, Hawaiian Property Group)

Grace Suh (Senior Program Manager, IBM's KidSmart Early Learning programme)

Matthew Sparkes Linking Work With Learning (LWWL)

Oonagh Harpur Linking Work With Learning (LWWL)

Lynne Hindmarch (Gregg's Breakfast, UK)

Graeme McKimm (Education Manager, Business in the Community, UK)

Heather Campbell (CEO, Landcare Australia Ltd, NSW)

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Executive Summary

The case for strengthening school–business connections is a compelling one. From sustained partnerships delivering programs and activities over several years to more modest and informal arrangements, linkages between schools and businesses are becoming an increasingly important means of improving educational outcomes.

There is strong evidence to show that students, teachers, parents, business employees, schools as a whole and the wider community can all benefit from school–business partnerships. The most commonly reported benefits for students relate to improved vocational outcomes. For many schools, connections to business are embedded in the curriculum in the form of work experience, which is associated with the development of employability skills, more realistic expectations of work, better decision making about study and career options, and increased employment, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities. Other student benefits reported in the literature are improved learning opportunities, engagement and wellbeing.

Teachers also benefit from the professional learning and training opportunities that come with increased exposure to the world of business. Research shows the benefits of mentoring and leadership role models from business. Schools as a whole can benefit from the human, financial and physical resources contributed by business. They can learn innovative ways of marketing, governance and management. Parents benefit from business-supported initiatives that address the whole family. Communities benefit from the tangible products that are associated with some partnership programs, such as community gardens or environmental programs, and from young people who feel more connected to their communities through their participation in partnership programs.

Businesses also benefit in a range of ways, including professional learning opportunities for employees and the personal satisfaction that comes from seeing students grow in self confidence through a corporate-school buddy scheme. Just as schools can learn from the corporate world, so business employees can gain a better understanding of the nature of schooling and the factors that affect student wellbeing, engagement and attainment.

A strong sense of corporate social responsibility is attractive to potential recruits and conveys a positive message about the company to the community. Through industry–supported workplace programs, businesses can help shape a future workforce of well educated, knowledgeable and skilled employees. Through school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, they can recruit the kinds of workers that best meet their needs.

The case studies included in this report are intended to showcase the rich diversity of relationships that exist and the ways in which school and business partners have gained from these relationships. Overseas examples have been included because of the strength of their evidence base.

On the basis of our review of the information available, ACER recommends that a set of guidelines could be developed to support school–business partners in creating, sustaining, monitoring and evaluating their partnerships. As the Business-School Connections Roundtable consultations make clear, such guidelines should not be prescriptive and would need to be flexible enough for schools and businesses to adapt for their own purposes.

While it is clear from the consultations that schools and business organisations could benefit from more information – for example, around what it means to monitor and evaluate, the kind of data that can be collected, and how this can be used to improve outcomes – it is also clear that partners do not want to be told what to do.

ACER's review shows that while the case for strengthening school–business connections is a strong one, there are still gaps in the evidence base that could be addressed through further research. This research could take the form of building on the databases of partnerships that already exist in Australia, such as the NAB Schools First database of school-community partnerships and, potentially, the Tender Bridge™ relationships between schools and businesses, philanthropic organisations, community groups and/or governments.¹ These rich sources of information could serve as a basis for subsequent research and analysis to identify benefits, lessons to be learned and critical success factors. This would give the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Australian Relations an even stronger evidence base on which to develop policies and programs aimed at strengthening school–business relationships to a point where they are seen as part of the core business of each sector.

¹ The Schools First Awards program, now called the NAB Schools First awards program, is an initiative of two not-for-profit organisations (ACER and the Foundation for Young Australians) and the National Australia Bank. It recognises excellence in school–community partnerships and encourages schools to create partnerships with business and community groups to improve educational outcomes. Twenty per cent of the Schools First Impact Award applications in 2009 had at least one business partner.

ACER's Tender Bridge™ is a national research and development service that concentrates on building capacity in our schools through access to funding bodies and funds, demystifying processes and practices, conducting seminars and providing tailored options of support. The Tender Bridge database includes business, philanthropic and all levels of government. It has subscribers across all school sectors and states/territories. The Tender Bridge activities are underpinned by research, including identifying the needs of both schools and prospective partners and the roles of prospective corporate and philanthropic sectors in school education.

1. Introduction

In January 2011, the Australian Council for Educational Research was contracted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to collate information gleaned from a range of sources and prepare a report that made clear the benefits associated with stronger relationships between schools and businesses. ACER was also asked to assess the existing evidence base in an Australian context and identify ways in which this could be strengthened.

Given the complex demands faced by schools in the twenty-first century, and the limited nature of the resources available to meet these demands, schools and governments are increasingly looking to external partners to support their needs. There has been a shift at the policy level globally towards more inclusive, collaborative and holistic ways of working. As in the area of health, in education there is 'a growing recognition of the need to help schools cope with the complex challenges they face' (Butler *et al*, 2005). 'Schools can't do it alone'; they are increasingly looking to communities to help build capacity and improve educational outcomes (Berg, Melaville & Blank, 2006).

In the United Kingdom, the National Council for Educational Excellence has recommended that employers support the delivery of a new National Framework for business education partnerships 'so that, by 2010, every school and college should have effective relationships with business' (O'Donnell *et al*, p. 113). In late 2010, the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development launched the Business Working with Education Foundation, which is intended to foster business and school partnerships. The establishment of the Business-School Connections Roundtable by the Commonwealth Government is further evidence of high level commitment to facilitating greater business involvement in education.

This report examines the evidence that supports the case for increased school–business connections; the range of benefits for young people, teachers, school communities and business from these connections; and the strengths of, and areas for improvement in, current and emerging research in this area in an Australian context.

The report is based on a brief overview of the international and national literature since 2007, interviews with members of the National Framework and Guiding Principles Working Group established by the Business-School Connections Roundtable, and a selection of case studies. The case studies include interviews with business representatives and information gathered by email from overseas school and business partners.

Definitions

There is considerable variation in the kinds of connections or linkages established between schools and businesses. These can range from a one-off financial contribution or a sponsorship to a partnership nurtured over several years. While 'relationship' carries a stronger sense of mutual benefit than does a 'connection', a 'partnership' implies a more formalised relationship with governance arrangements in place. In this report, while both 'relationships' and 'partnerships' have been used to describe the nature of the links created between schools and business, 'partnerships' is preferred because of the stronger connotations of sustainability associated with partnering.

Clarity around the nature of the school–business connection is important because the origins of a relationship can have significant implications in terms of partner expectations, obligations, and roles and responsibilities.

In this report, a business is assumed to be an organisation engaged in commercially viable and profitable work. It excludes not-for-profit organisations and philanthropic foundations. This is sometimes a grey area. Many companies set up foundations. Businesses can ‘extend their work by making grants to the not-for-profit sector’ (Brown, 2010, p. 88), which includes schools, and by providing their staff as volunteers.

In the report we refer to ‘school–business’ rather than ‘business–school’ relationships or partnerships because improving educational outcomes is at the heart of these connections. The focus is not on school-based commercial activities but on relationships and partnerships that are primarily aimed at improving educational outcomes. For the purposes of this report, school-based commercial activities are defined as ‘business practices in schools which implicitly or explicitly advertise or market products to [students], test products on children, or promote a company, its agenda or viewpoint on particular issues’ (Raine, cited in Sukarieh and Tannock, 2009, p. 769) and are beyond the scope of this review.

2. Methodology

Document analysis

ACER searched several online databases to identify relevant studies conducted in the past five years. Search terms included combinations of ‘school’, ‘education’, ‘academic’ and ‘business’, ‘industry’ ‘corporate’, ‘relationship’ and ‘partnership’. A preliminary search was undertaken of a number of relevant websites, including the UK-based Education and Employers Taskforce, Business in the Community, Institute for Education Business Excellence, HTI (Heads, Teachers and Industry) and other organisations that appeared to be relevant for case studies and evidence of benefits.

Around 42 articles were identified as being potentially relevant, excluding case study material, with 13 articles offering useful insights. The PhillipsKPA report (2010a), ACER reports (2008; 2010a; 2010b) and documents associated with the work of the Business–School Connections Roundtable, including the summary of the national consultations (PhillipsKPA, 2010b) were also incorporated into the general pool of information collected.

Articles were excluded from this review if they

- merely provided statements about the desirability of schools leveraging partnerships with other organisations rather than offering evidence of positive benefits
- provided theoretical explorations of concepts (such as ‘boundary work’ in school-based training for industry) rather than evidence of tangible outcomes
- focused on public–private finance (outside the scope of this review)
- focused on practical ways in which businesses could help schools rather than on the benefits of this support
- provided accounts of school-based commercialism or business propositions rather than educationally-oriented relationships.

Consultations

Working Group members were interviewed to find out more about:

- the benefits for schools from developing stronger relationships with businesses
- the benefits for businesses from developing stronger relationships with schools
- the obstacles to schools and businesses developing stronger relationships with each other
- ways in which these obstacles could be overcome
- critical success factors in creating and maintaining successful school–business relationships
- potential case studies of these successful relationships.

The interviews with Working Group members were conducted by phone and were guided by a set of questions around each of the above dot points. Information was also sought by phone and email as part of the case study data collection.

Case studies

In selecting suitable examples of good practice, ACER drew on three main sources:

- existing case studies captured in the NAB Schools First Awards database
- examples of current partnership practices involving businesses in ACER's Tender Bridge database
- examples from the national and international literature.

For each case study, ACER contacted at least one key representative from the business partner. In the case of overseas partnership programs, the relevant contact people were emailed and asked to identify any evaluations that might have been done and to respond to a set of questions (outlined in Attachment A). The NAB Schools First examples are taken from the information provided by Impact award winning applications in 2009 and 2010, supplemented by phone interviews with business partners. The Tender Bridge™ cases were written on the basis of an extended interview with one or two key staff involved in the funding of schools from a business organisation, supplemented by information gathered from websites and associated documents of the businesses.

3. Benefits

This section of the report summarises the available information about the benefits that school–business relationships can bring to a range of stakeholder groups.

Students

Students benefit from school–business relationships in three main ways relating to:

- vocational skills, knowledge and understanding
- academic or learning outcomes
- health and wellbeing.

Vocational

The most consistently reported benefits to students arising from a school's engagement with business are increased vocational knowledge, employability skills and career awareness. School–business partnerships provide students with insights into the business world (Arlow, 2011) and increase their knowledge of particular industries (CBI, 2010). Work placement helps students

identify the types of careers that would suit them best and to make informed subject choices (PhillipsKPA, 2010a; IEBC, 2011; Mann *et al*, 2010; ACER, 2010a).

Work experience activities have been found to enhance career aspirations in general (IEBC, 2011; KPMG, 2010; Business-School Connections Roundtable, 2010). Young people appreciate the knowledge and guidance that experienced employees share with them and often feel more inspired to succeed (CBI, 2010). Employer engagement can nurture the interest of pupils in specific careers which they might not otherwise have considered (Mann *et al*, 2010).

A major benefit to be gained by students through work experience is improved work readiness (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008; PhillipsKPA, 2010a; BSC Roundtable, 2010; Carter *et al*, 2009; CCIQ, 2010). Businesses partnering with schools contribute to better vocational outcomes for students, including better access to training, industry-based expertise, recognised qualifications, better knowledge of occupational health and safety issues, and improved employability skills (ACER, 2010a). Practical experience helps young people develop skills in teamwork, enterprise, communication and problem solving (IEBC, 2011; EdComs, 2007). When asked to think about the types of skills they had gained from employer engagement activities, 60 per cent of young people in a survey in the United Kingdom ranked working in teams as a benefit; other benefits included personal presentation and problem-solving. Only 16 per cent felt they had not learned anything from taking part in these activities (YouGov, 2010). Employers also recognise the value of work experience in helping to highlight the skills necessary for the workplace (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, 2007).

Numerous studies have found that school-based involvement with employers is a means of securing access to desirable paid employment (see, for example, Mann *et al*, 2010). Providing students with opportunities to engage with business assists with young people's transition to employment after high school (Carter *et al*, 2009). The research undertaken to inform the work of the Business-School Connections Roundtable identified a wide range of benefits from school-employer engagement, including transition-to-work or further education, opportunities for casual employment or recruitment following school (BSC Roundtable, 2010).

Engagement with business can also increase young people's income when they commence work. A 2008 evaluation by MDRC of the US Career Academies program concludes that systematic engagement with employers over the final two years of schooling produces 'substantial and sustained improvements in postsecondary labor market prospects'. In fact, 'the magnitude of the impacts on monthly earnings for young men exceed differences in earnings that have been found in other research comparing young workers who have two years of community college with those who have only a high school diploma' (cited in Mann *et al*, 2010, p. 26-27). Similarly, Air UK (2008) reported higher rates of enrolment and continuity in post-secondary education, sustained higher levels of employment, and higher hourly wage rates.

The contribution of school-business relationships to improving vocational outcomes for students cannot be overestimated. It is reported consistently in the literature, was recognised in the consultations for this report and its outcomes are more apparent than some of the other benefits experienced by students from school-business programs. Work experience in particular offers a tangible way of embedding school-partnerships into the curriculum.

Rio Tinto and Western Cape College, Queensland

Gregory Maher, Principal Advisor – Communities, Rio Tinto, in a 2010 speech describing the successful relationship between Rio Tinto and Western Cape College, highlighted several ways in which local students, the school and the mining company had benefited from their collaboration.

Partnership activities include:

- Site visits, career talks, Rio Tinto delivering specialist lessons to students
- Active promotion of Indigenous role models
- Work readiness programs, including recognition of prior learning (eg communication, teamwork, problem solving)
- School-based trainee programs
- Priority for Western Cape College students in apprenticeships
- Strengthened linkages and knowledge between the school and mining company
- Support for the school's Indigenous students in boarding schools and university
- Clearly defined school-to-apprenticeship pathways
- Promoting awareness of the breadth of careers in the company and identifying career pathways which enable supported university education
- Sharing resources, including cross-cultural awareness programs and safety programs

Work awareness and career advice sessions have helped bring about a better understanding of the range of jobs at the mining company, the skills and knowledge needed to access these, and the skills needed to prepare for the recruitment process. In 2005, Rio Tinto had six Indigenous employees; in 2010, they had 150. In the past three years, the company has had 20 school-based trainees. (Taken from a speech delivered by Gregory Maher at a 'Transitioning Indigenous students into employment', workshop organised by Dare to Lead, 21 April 2010.)

Academic and learning outcomes

A literature review of business involvement in education (Air UK, 2008) found that a clear majority of school leaders believe that their engagement with business helps to improve students' attainment levels, with 75 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that their partnerships had a positive effect on attainment. However, 'there have been few studies that provide us with evidence of a measurable improvement in grades or other measures of student attainment' (AIR UK, 2008). KPMG (2010) also noted that while many schools use satisfaction surveys with their children, very few schools are able to measure the impact that the partnership has on pupil performance (KPMG, 2010).

While there is still little evidence to show a direct causal link between school–business relationships and improved student performance, schools reported a range of academic-related benefits in their applications for a NAB Schools First Impact Award in 2009. These benefits are a product of school–community partnerships, which includes business, rather than from business partners directly, and were measured in various ways. Reported benefits included:

- the emergence of a new culture of academic excellence in the school
- deeper understanding of particular subjects
- improved musical, carpentry, photography and other skills
- greater cultural awareness and empathy
- improved literacy, numeracy, communication or ICT skills
- greater awareness of ecology
- enhanced critical and analytical skills
- better integration of theory and practice in subjects
- better appreciation of the needs of particular groups, such as the elderly.

ACER (2010b) found that some partnerships stimulated interest in science and mathematics and strengthened student awareness of the relevance of their studies to their lives beyond school.

PhillipsKPA (2010a) noted two case studies where school–business relationships were found to have contributed to improvement in test scores. The Australian research undertaken to inform the work of the Business–School Connections Roundtable is said to have identified a range of benefits relating to learning outcomes, including enhanced skills development in areas such as literacy, numeracy, ICT, science, and academic results (BSC Roundtable, 2010).

Business engagement in schools can potentially help raise achievement by making clear the relevance of the skills and knowledge learnt at school to the workplace and by ensuring more young people leave the education system with the skills needed for success in their vocational choices (CBI, 2010, p. 5; IEBE, 2011). PhillipsKPA (2010a) found that students benefited from business engagement with schools by becoming more focused on their studies. Interviews conducted by KPMG with schools suggest that employer involvement adds relevance to academic work; provides a fresh and different perspective; and increases motivation in students who can see the post-school possibilities and understand better the importance of their school work (KPMG, 2010).

Lower drop-out rates, improved attendance, increased academic course taking, and an increased likelihood of graduating on time have all been reported as benefits for students (Kemple and Snipes, 2000; cited in Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). There is strong evidence to show that employer engagement can make learning more enjoyable and interesting for young people (Mann *et al*, 2010). A 2008 IEBE-led survey of young people who had recently completed a work placement showed that 49 per cent found it ‘very enjoyable’ with a further 31 per cent agreeing their experience had been ‘mostly enjoyable’. Evidence shows ‘that young people, and their parents, value, and want more of, educational experiences which engage employers because their involvement brings a new perspective to learning, creating relevance for pupils through real life connections’ (Mann *et al*, 2010, pp. 6-7).

While it is difficult to show a clear link between school–business relationships and improved student attainment, there is evidence of improved student outcomes in areas that have an impact on attainment, such as engagement in learning.

Health and wellbeing

Schools seeking to improve social and emotional wellbeing reported that their partnership programs (with both community and business partners) had helped bring about:

- improved student relationships with peers and family
- greater self-esteem, confidence, and self-awareness
- higher aspirations for the future
- improved goal setting, teamwork and conflict resolution skills
- enhanced leadership skills
- a greater ability to learn independently
- healthier lifestyle habits
- greater respect for past generations
- a more positive outlook on life
- increased awareness of the work of community groups (ACER, 2010).

In addition, partnerships between schools and businesses can result in fitter, healthier children across all levels of ability (PhillipsKPA, 2010a).

Schools

There is evidence to show that schools as a whole have much to gain from collaboration with business organisations.

Revenue and resources

Schools benefit through increased revenue from business ventures, including the acquisition of smart technology that can engage students (PhillipsKPA, 2010a). Blechen (2010) describes the benefits that have come from using state-of-the-art video technology equipment provided by Panasonic as part of its Panasonic Kids Witness News program. Students have used the equipment to create films and teachers have been able to enrich their teaching of a range of subjects. Schools benefit from increased access to external resources, such as scientific equipment (BSC Roundtable, 2010) and from improved physical infrastructure, which has flow-on effects to students, staff and families (ACER, 2011b). Schools also benefit from the provision of software and professional development support, public relations opportunities and contact with other state schools and education professionals, both nationally and internationally (PhillipsKPA, 2010a).

The PhillipsKPA literature review (2010a) notes that the most commonly cited benefit for schools is the potential to develop new income streams, which enable them to ‘optimise’ their limited resources. New sources of funding and resources create possibilities for schools, including more sustainable ways of operating, leadership role models, and innovative strategies for management, governance and marketing (BSC Roundtable, 2010; PhillipsKPA, 2010a).

Governance

Academic research by the University of Bath highlights the importance of skills developed in the workplace to effective school governance, which in turn relates to school performance (Mann *et al*, 2010).

Curriculum

The literature suggests that school–business partnerships and relationships can lead to improved curriculum design with greater alignment between practical and theoretical work (PhillipsKPA, 2010a; BSC Roundtable, 2010). Links with employers can bring the curriculum to life, ‘showing how knowledge is used in the wider world’ (IEBE, 2011, p. 5).

Improved profile in the community

Schools report that the programs developed with business and community partners have enhanced the profile and reputation of the school within the local community (PhillipsKPA, 2010a; ACER, 2010a, 2010b; BSC Roundtable, 2010). PhillipsKPA (2010a) notes that because these benefits are often indirect and incidental, they can be underrated: ‘As schools become more actively engaged with high profile business operations, particularly local employers, they have the potential to deepen school ties with the community while improving public awareness of the school. Indeed, it is felt that effective partnerships are likely to enhance the reputation of the school as a leading partner in the community which in turn increases the social capital and capability of the community’ (PhillipsKPA, 2010a).

Teachers/staff

The main way in which teachers and other staff benefit from their school’s involvement with business is through professional development and training, including being given the opportunity to gain industry experience and exposure to different management and leadership practices (BSC Roundtable, 2010; PhillipsKPA, 2010a). Employers help teachers keep their subject knowledge up to date, for example, through professional development placements (IEBE, 2011; Mann *et al*, 2010). There is also a growing interest in working with employers to support the development of staff and the wider leadership of the school. Mentoring arrangements can enrich teachers’ and principals’ leadership skills (Mann *et al*, 2010).

Parents/families

Parents appear to gain most benefit from partnerships that focus on the whole family. Through the partners’ expertise and contacts, families gain access to a range of services, including parenting support and counselling. ACER research into the impact of school-community partnerships (2010a) found that some families benefited from the introduction of a breakfast program, homework tutors, healthy garden initiatives and parental participation in a homework club with their children.

Under The Greggs Breakfast Program in the United Kingdom, children in participating primary schools in the North East, Yorkshire and the Midlands, receive nutritious breakfasts before school. Greggs, a retailer specialising in sandwiches, savouries and other bakery items, provides free bread from local shops and cash for the purchase of other food and one-off items, such as a toaster or plates. The schools recruit the volunteers to run the club. The Greggs model shows the benefits that can accrue to parents when a school is involved in a partnership with business. Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers interviewed as part of a 2001 evaluation of the program, nominated the increased involvement of parents with their school was one of the highlights of the program (Priest, 2001).

Community

Local communities benefit from tangible products, such as community gardens, an Internet café, food for families in need, income for community projects or financial and in-kind support in times of hardship (ACER, 2010a). Some partnerships between schools and business groups in the Schools First Awards program led to new possibilities for work and economic ventures (ACER, 2010a). Other partnerships reported a better understanding of young people's needs and a greater sense of bonding as a community through collaborative projects.

Strong school–businesses relationships can help shape career and vocational education programs, which in turn can produce skilled workers who are able to contribute to the nation's economic prosperity and global competitiveness (Hyslop, 2009; Hay & Kapitzke, 2008). The wider community is reported to benefit through the jobs created by school–industry collaboration, and the notion of responsible citizenship it encourages (Hay & Kapitzke, 2009).

PhillipsKPA (2010a) found that school–business relationships added value to the growth of local industry and supported the development of a literate workforce. CCIQ (2010) reported the reduced impact of future skills shortages because of the opportunity for business to influence the skills and knowledge of the future workforce, 'cultivating a reliable source of better-trained and better-motivated employees' (p. 2).

Another benefit reported for the wider community from these partnerships is a reduction in unemployment rates, which in turn has flow-on effects. The direct economic cost of youth unemployment is substantial (The Prince's Trust, 2007). Prolonged periods of unemployment can seriously affect the lives of young people in terms of health, crime and strained social cohesion (CBI, 2010). The Business Council of Australia reports that lack of employment 'is the single greatest predictor that an individual will be in the poorest 20 per cent of Australia's population' and is 'highly correlated with a myriad of significant social detriments including depression, abuse and crime' (Business Council of Australia, 2007, p. 4). Supporting successful student transitions to work or study 'is a prerequisite for increasing our productivity levels in a 21st century economy' (The Smith Family, 2010).

The global community also benefits from partnership programs aimed at improving the health of the planet. Some projects can lead to a strong sense of pride in what had been achieved, such as in environmental programs that had led to more sustainable practices in a locality (ACER, 2010a).

These partnerships are often cross-sectoral, with community, business and local government working together to improve the environment.

Through the Community Funding Program, kids and their parents grow to understand who we are and what we do, and become advocates for important environmental and water conservation issues to help protect and sustain the environment for our community now and into the future.

Source: Nick Kaiser, Water Efficiency Communications Coordinator, Hunter Water Corporation, ACER interview, February 2011.

Business partner/employer

There is strong evidence to show how businesses can benefit from establishing relationships with schools.

Recruitment

Recruitment opportunities and a better community image are the key benefits reported by employers engaging with schools (YouGov, 2010). Establishing a strong vocationally-based connection with schools means that businesses can get in early in terms of their workforce requirements and ensure that future employees have the skills required by industry:

Business needs to help the education sector understand what candidates need to demonstrate, so potential candidates are prepared and if this starts early in education we will not need to take remedial action in terms of lack of basic skills or turn people down. (You Gov, 2010)

Other benefits to business include access to a larger pool of skilled employees with transferable skills and a positive attitude to learning (CBI, 2010; CCIQ, 2010) and access to potential recruits in areas of skill shortages (ACER, 2010a). Another advantage of the exposure that comes from partnering with schools in work-related activities is that the employer becomes identified as an employer of choice (KPMG, 2010; CCIQ, 2010). Partnering with schools to improve educational outcomes for students demonstrates corporate social responsibility, which in turn enables companies to attract and retain the best employees (PhillipsKPA, 2010a; 2010b). Research also shows organisations wanting to be involved with schools in order to help the development of the national skills base (IEBE, 2008).

Staff development

Employees benefit from the professional development opportunities that can come from developing relationships with schools through volunteer activity (PhillipsKPA, 2010a; ACER, 2010a). They can improve communication skills and teamwork and try new approaches (KPMG, 2010). The Australia Business in the Community Network (ABCN) found that business mentors participating in the ABCN GOALS program believed that the mentoring program had assisted their coaching and listening skills and had 'changed their perceptions in some way' (ABCN, 2009). An evaluation of the GOALS program, found that over 95 per cent of mentors' managers 'felt that participation on the program had been beneficial for their employees and increased their engagement at work' (ABCN, 2009).

Feedback from one of the mentors indicates the potential value of the program to employees:

My initial expectations were that this would be an interesting program to participate in and hopefully I can make a positive difference to a student's life. I did not expect that I would personally get so much out of the program and give myself the opportunity to reflect on my life and goals (ABCN, 2010).

Feedback from another ABCN program suggested that participation 'keeps you in touch with reality and the issues confronting young people' (ABCN, 2010). This is consistent with other findings that working with young people enables partner organisations to develop a better understanding of 'at risk' youth in the local community, not only of their needs but also of their capabilities and potential (ACER, 2010a). Business partners gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the challenges faced by students, their families and communities (PhillipsKPA, 2010a).

Staff morale

Reported benefits include improved staff morale, motivation, self-esteem, job satisfaction and commitment to the company (PhillipsKPA, 2010b; Mann *et al*, 2010). Seeing students develop in confidence over time is a source of personal satisfaction for mentors (ABCN, 2010; ACER, 2010a). The most commonly reported benefit by businesses was the opportunity to contribute to the development of young people (BSC Roundtable Discussion paper, 2010). Partners also reported a sense of satisfaction from contributing to positive outcomes for the wider community (ACER, 2010a).

Reputational benefits

Various studies highlight the importance of community profile, promotional opportunities, and being seen to be socially responsible corporations (IEBE, 2008; KPMG, 2010; Hann, 2008; PhillipsKPA, 2010a; CCIQ, 2010). Such partnerships create a positive image of the business in the school and community. ACER (2010a) found that businesses benefited from positive local media attention and public acknowledgement of the work they were doing with schools and young people. School–community partnerships helped bring about a higher profile for the partners and enabled both businesses and community groups to extend their reach to others in the community.

Some studies highlighted the financial impact of business involvement with schools. For example, partnerships potentially could increase company revenue through stronger support from customers, suppliers, shareholders and other stakeholders (PhillipsKPA, 2010).

4. Case Studies

Examples of successful school–business relationships

The case studies have been sourced from national and international literature, consultations, NAB Schools First Awards database of school-community partnership applications and Tender Bridge™ database of supporters of educational projects from philanthropy, government (all levels), business and not-for-profit sectors. The case studies needed to meet four criteria:

- The main purpose of the relationship is to improve educational outcomes for young people.
- The relationship is of mutual benefit to both school and business.
- There has been a positive impact on students.
- There is sound evidence of this impact (or the potential for this as the relationship evolves).

The following case studies have been included. They represent a rich and diverse range of examples and showcase the many ways in which business can contribute to improving educational outcomes.

1. Brisbane State High School, QLD (Schools First database)
2. Gymea Technology High School, NSW (Schools First database)
3. Windsor Gardens Vocational College, SA (Schools First database)
4. Hunter Water Corporation, NSW (Tender Bridge)
5. The Hawaiian Alive Program (WA) (Tender Bridge)
6. Landcare Australia Ltd, NSW (Tender Bridge)
7. Time to Read, UK
8. IBM's KidSmart Early Learning Program, International
9. Linking Work With Learning (LWWL), UK
10. Gregg's Breakfast, UK

ACER developed a template to enable consistent reporting of these case studies. See Attachment A.

Brisbane State High School (QLD)

Background

ThomasAdsett is an internationally renowned architectural firm. Their offices all have world class staff sharing resources, knowledge and expertise through the use of the latest technology and software programs. The firm has been involved in health, aged care, retail and community-based projects and is expanding in the area of environmentally sustainable buildings. The company's development in terms of technology and proficiency in their field prompted the school to seek an ongoing partnership that would expose students to field-based learning.

The relationship was established in 2007 and arose out of a concern from Dora Costi, a past student at the school and now Group General Member of ThomasAdsett, about the outdated software being used in schools and that graduates in associated industries were entering the workforce without the necessary skills. There had been growth in the building industry in Queensland and few people had the required skills and schools and universities were using outdated drawing tools (software). BSHS is a high achieving school with students going on to study architecture or related areas. ThomasAdsett has a strong relationship with QUT but realised that the connection needed to be made with schools.

Key features

ThomasAdsett provides students and teachers with an opportunity to interact with professionals working in the architectural field and has been instrumental in assisting the school to acquire relevant licences and training. The company provides professional expertise and support for various projects. Students are achieving accreditation in the senior years and many students are gaining part time employment following their work placements and entry into university. The partnership is upskilling students and providing them with the latest in technology.

The partners that form the Industry and Mentoring Alliances provide mentoring in the workplace for both staff and students. This is a critical part of the relationship – teachers are trained as well and there was the need to professionally develop teachers to give them the skills to teach the subject. Students are provided with real-work experience.

Challenges

The biggest challenge has been the logistical one of scheduling to accommodate both the staff at ThomasAdsett and BSHS. The partnership has the enthusiastic support of the Board of Directors students, teachers and ThomasAdsett employees, who have worked closely together to make the program happen.

Impact

The relationship with ThomasAdsett has provided state-of-the-art learning for students in the school, enhanced the self-esteem of students who are seen as emergent colleagues, and encouraged self-learning. Students have learnt to work within a multidisciplinary team. They recognise both the value of developing good working relationships with the wider community and the relevance of their learning to the world of work. The partners report that there has been a notable enhancement in student performance and development of learning techniques. Students have been able to integrate theory with practice in an atmosphere of collegial co-operation.

ThomasAdsett benefits from having access to a larger number of students with appropriate skills, the promotion of their businesses in the community through the students and the school, the development of positive relationships with the school and community, and sharing of skills and expertise with schools. Students with abilities are in the market and/or working with ThomasAdsett. The awarding of a ThomasAdsett prize and internship to a student each year has created motivation and dedication in students and a greater collaboration between the two organisations. Through this partnership, ThomasAdsett has contributed to an increase in the number of students entering this area of industry.

Teachers act as mentors to students and are trained in the use of up-to-date software. The school has been recognised by the Queensland Studies Authority for the work the students have produced, which has been identified as being of a very high quality. Student enrolments have also increased.

Gymea Technology High School (NSW)

Background

Gloria Jeans Coffee was invited to partner with Gymea Technology High School in 2008 through the Adopt-a-School program. Nina's Chocolates already had a long history of supporting the Business Services students in the school and have continued this support with a training café. Many students had expressed a desire to obtain part time work in the local area and cafes in the area wanted experienced staff on a casual basis to service local and visiting customers. The partners collaborated and a plan was put in place to convert a store room in the school into a training café.

There was a skills shortage in the hospitality industry and a high demand for more staff in local cafes as an increasing number of visitors come to the area. There was also strong support from the community for students to obtain part-time work and a high number of Indigenous students without the skills to obtain part-time employment. The local school had students with special needs who required training in a safe environment and the three partners got together and the Coffee School was created.

Key features

Gloria Jeans provides ongoing training and support for school staff both on their premises and on the school premises, ongoing training and advice for students participating in the project, advice on setting up and sustaining the training café and prizes for fundraising events. Nina's Chocolates provides advice and training on running a small business, prizes for fundraising events and onsite visits on their premises.

The café has grown into a 'virtual business' involving Vocational Education and Training (VET) students from Hospitality, Business Services and IT. Students are achieving accreditation in the VET (Hospitality) course, gaining apprenticeships and/or employment following their work placements and being provided with employable skills to take to the workforce.

Impact

The business partners have access to a larger number of students with appropriate skills, can promote their businesses in the community through the students and the school, are building positive relationships with the school and the community, share skills and expertise with schools, and are provided with a selection of potential employees with already developed skills and experiences.

Students are able to complete a Barista's course, gain skills associated with working in a café, gain offers of employment or apprenticeships, access training courses, such as Year 11 and 12 Hospitality, Business Services and IT, and gain much needed skills and experience to help them attain casual, part-time or full-time work in the local community. Indigenous students are trained and take skills back to their communities in remote areas of NSW.

Gloria Jeans has also provided in-store training for VET Hospitality, Business Services and IT teachers and the Senior Administrative Manager. The school has gained recognition for its quality delivery,

has become a school of choice for students, industry and community partners and is now a hub for the vocational certificate delivery in the area. Students, staff and parents are proud of the school and its achievements with many external students now joining the school to undertake courses on a fee for service basis. The local community contributed to the physical setting up of the café and has benefited from the services it provides.

Student engagement is high and the Coffee School has been acknowledged by the NSW Minister for Education as being an outstanding example of how co-operation between schools and their local communities on vocational education projects can really pay off to the benefit of students.

Windsor Gardens Vocational College (SA)

Background

Bianco Construction Supplies has been in operation since 1977 and in partnership with Windsor Gardens since 2003. The school now has 104 partnerships with Bianco Construction Supplies being the main partner. The school's partnerships are structured into four distinct groups, with three being focused on the business partners. *Industry alliances* help the school with their learning programs. They verify courses meet industry requirements. They also support the school's liaison with the appropriate training boards and provide annual student awards. *Mentoring alliances* provide students and staff with work placements and mentoring. *Industry sponsors* donate money or goods and support the school's enterprising projects. *Community Partners* assist and mentor students, showing students how to take charge of their futures. Students volunteer in their community organisations.

The school had identified several issues mainly around engagement, retention and post-school outcomes. It was felt the curriculum was too narrow and that students could not see the connection between learning and their future. Students wanted more 'hands on' delivery.

It was suggested that strong connections with local industries would provide the school with real knowledge and skills and competencies that employers were seeking in future employees.

Key features

Bianco provided the school with a burnt out shell of a transportable building on the Bianco worksite. It was the task of the students to rebuild the transportable. The company contributed material when the construction students rebuilt a local pre-school's playground. Different workers from the company contributed time and worked alongside the students and the teacher throughout the project to rebuild the transportable. Each division of Bianco provides specific expertise, from office work to metal fabrication. Bianco has also sponsored some activities at the school – sports events.

Challenges

Finding time has not always been easy. Bianco staff have not always been able to attend certain events. Both the school and Bianco have worked together to suit each other's timetables.

Impact

The relationship with Bianco and others has transformed not only educational delivery but the whole ethos of the school. The partnerships were fundamental to the school's success. Destination data for students shows that since 2001, the number of students gaining employment has doubled and the number of students continuing on to tertiary study has increased from 13.2% in 2001 to 29.7% in 2008. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many students were introduced to experiences and opportunities through the partnership program and have achieved success.

The business partners, including Bianco, have access to a larger number of students with appropriate trade skills. Businesses have gained from being promoted in the community through the students

and the school. The projects have helped build positive relationships between the school and the community.

Students are achieving dual accreditation, gaining apprenticeships and/or employment following their work placements and gaining valuable insights from the partners. They can see the relevance of their learning, establish concrete goals for themselves and gain tangible benefits of offers of employment or apprenticeships.

Similarly, staff develop further skills that are directly related to the learning and training programs provided by industry and evaluate programs to ensure that students are effectively prepared for their future. The school has gained recognition for its quality delivery. Students, staff and parents are proud of the school and its achievements. It has become a school of choice for students, industry and community partners and a hub for the vocational certificate delivery in the area. The partners report that young people in the community are more focused and staying at school, there is less unemployment in the community and a strong connection has developed across many industries, the school and local community.

Hunter Water Corporation

Background

Hunter Water Corporation is a state-owned corporation providing water and wastewater services for over half a million people in the lower Hunter region. Hunter Water's total assets are valued at around \$2.2 billion. Their core business is to treat and deliver drinking water to their customers and then transport, treat and dispose of the region's wastewater.

Key features

The Hunter Water *Community Funding Program* invests in opportunities that reflect the Corporation's vision, mission and corporate objectives. Businesses and other community groups can apply for funding during a designated funding round. There is no set upper dollar limit to the grant or sponsorship provided. Outside of the funding round, a discretionary amount of funds is also made available with an upper limit of \$2,000 for these applications.

In seeking to forge relationships with schools, Hunter Water is motivated by several considerations, including a desire to engage with its community, raise awareness about water conservation issues and support the creation of a healthy and sustainable environment.

It is mainly through corporate sponsorship and community grants that Hunter Water is able to develop its school-business relationships. One such example involves a relationship between Hunter Water, Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and schools through the CMA's Waterwatch Program.

Box 1: Waterwatch Program

Hunter Water provides financial and staff expertise and administrative infrastructure support to the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA's NSW Waterwatch Program. This enables Waterwatch staff to go into 115 primary schools and teach students and staff about their local catchment area. CMA staff, teachers and students engage in experiential learning activities, such as surveying the bug-life in the local area. *It's a great way to educate kids about how people might be impacting on the environment.* The program is free for participating schools.

A key focus of the program is to get students to apply what they have learned to the production of a community brochure. Hunter Water sponsors Hunter-Central Rivers CMA to run a brochure competition with Year 3 – Year 6 students in the participating schools. Following a lesson about caring for their catchment, students have around six weeks to do further research to produce their own educational brochure, which is judged by CMA and Hunter Water representatives. A shortlist of five brochures from each school is selected and out of these a winner and runner-up is chosen. A prize-giving ceremony is held at each school, generally as part of an existing allocated assembly time. For example, in the Maitland area, a member of Hunter Water, the CMA and a local councillor attended the ceremony at each school. The ceremony is another short opportunity to raise awareness and reinforce key environmental messages covered in the previous activities with the students.

Other examples of projects and types of support (e.g. the purchasing of equipment) through Hunter Water's Community Funding Program are outlined in Box 2.

Box 2: Other examples of school-focused sponsored projects

Wetlands Environmental Education

The school education program at the Hunter Wetlands Centre caters for day visits from schools at all levels of schooling and reflects the NSW Department of Education Environmental Education Policy for Schools requirements. Hunter Water specifically sponsors the Hunter Envirothon Challenge, which is an annual state-wide environmental event that requires children to work through a series of activities related to an environmental scenario.

Rathmines Primary School

This community grant will enable Rathmines Primary School to purchase two rainwater storage tanks within the school grounds to ensure a reliable, renewable source of water for an organic vegetable garden. The purchase of the rainwater tanks and establishment of the vegetable gardens will help to foster an interest in sustainability among the students.

Source: Hunter Water Corporation website (<http://www.hunterwater.com.au/2860.aspx>)

Separate from the Community Funding Program, Hunter Water's water efficiency team operates a Schools Leak Detection Program. Established around nine months ago, this helps schools save money and reduces water waste. The program involves the installation of a 'smart meter' used by Hunter Water to monitor unusual water usage (for example, out of school hours). Through the program, one school was found to be losing 17,000 litres/day of water from an underground leak. Specialist detection of the leak by Hunter Water was done at no cost to the school.

Impact

The Community Funding Program engages with students directly and via community organisations to raise awareness and understanding of environmental and water conservation issues. Student outcomes include increased engagement with environmental issues; positive behavioural shifts when considering their environment (such as not littering) and an increased sense of community as students work together for conservation purposes. Parents benefit from students coming home and sharing what they have learnt about environmental management and the community benefits from having a healthier and more sustainable environment in which people can live and work. Hunter Water benefits from a higher community profile, implementing its core business (conserving water and protecting the environment) and from a more effective use of skills, knowledge, expertise and resources. The partnerships are successful because of the clear lines of communication between the partners and their alignment of mission and values.

The Hawaiian Alive Program (WA)

Background

Hawaiian Property Group is a property-based business which sponsors 16 WA-based organisations and not-for-profit companies that enter into partnerships with schools. In return, Hawaiian enters into a formal partnership that includes sponsored organisations 'giving back' to schools via the Hawaiian Alive Program. This accountability to Hawaiian is an explicit part of the sponsorship criteria.

The Hawaiian Alive Program began in 2007 and reflects the importance Hawaiian places on strengthening and engaging with communities. A series of events and observations by Hawaiian staff also added to the impetus to do something. These included feedback from shopping centre managers and their interaction with local schools; ad hoc relationships with schools within the communities that Hawaiian serves, feedback from sponsor partners about their own school relationship programs; Hawaiian's access, through their sponsor partners, to free tickets to shows and sporting events. It also included focus groups with schools in 2007 and 2010 about their issues and needs.

Kate O'Hara, Hawaiian's General Manager Marketing and Public Relations, explained:

The Hawaiian Alive Program was a way of forming a structured partnership between our sponsored groups and schools. From our liaison with schools, teachers and school principals were telling us that they were offering a decreasing number of excursions due to perceived risk implications and budget problems. We found that for many schools, the 'activity' was not the barrier to participation; it was the transfer to and from activities that created problems.

We bring together a diversity of opportunities. We then facilitate a school's access to a supplementary activity that they really want to do but can't without support. Some Hawaiian Alive benefits include lunches, goodie-bags and organise the travel. We believe enrichment of curriculum should be available to all kids.

The Hawaiian Alive Program allows primary and secondary schools in any sector to access a range of activities and experiences that would otherwise be out of their reach. The program also facilitates professional learning opportunities for teachers. The program is driven and fuelled by Hawaiian's sponsorship arrangements with other organisations and not-for-profits. Twelve month agreements between the sponsorship partner and Hawaiian are drawn up each year with clearly defined benefits they must deliver for The Hawaiian Alive program. The agreement includes a checklist of activities or experiences that the sponsor group proposes to offer to schools.

The sponsor offerings form an annual program that Hawaiian shares with schools via its promotional material and e-newsletter. Word of mouth is another effective strategy, with a number of teachers referring their colleagues to the program. Teachers register online via the Hawaiian website and go into a database to receive e-newsletters. If an activity is a good fit with something a class is focusing on, Hawaiian find teachers are very interested to register their school's interest. Hawaiian selects, at

random, 'winners' at which point they liaise with the sponsor partner and successful school or schools.

Key features

Hawaiian's contribution to schools (alone or in joint-venture with other organisations) includes providing resources (such as materials, gift vouchers, food, travel, funding); skills and professional training (including teacher professional learning through one or more of Hawaiian's joint-venture partnerships); creative opportunities (such as excursions within the arts/culture arena, exhibitions within their retail property catchment areas); health and fitness support (for example, their Youth in Focus sponsorship includes workshops for students on addressing depression); and staff expertise (such as design/display of artwork).

Challenges

The main difficulties associated with implementation of the partnership program were its reach and the constraints of teachers' timetables. There is also wariness among schools initially, as Nicole Clarke explained:

Sometimes there can be scepticism about why we are doing what we are doing. Some teachers even now will still say 'Why is this being done?' They cannot believe there is something being offered to them for free. It is common for companies to have 'corporate social responsibility' written into their mission. But for us, being a family company and attuned to community, it is just second nature for us. But I can see how such scepticism about the motives of a business can occur.

Impact

No specific feedback is requested by Hawaiian from schools about whether or not the Alive Program has contributed to improving student outcomes. Instead, feedback is sought about how the school found out about the Alive Program; whether the activity went well; and what doing the activity meant to the school. A typical feedback response from a school will include thank you letters from the students, which Hawaiian shares with the sponsor, and a note from the teacher saying the activity has 'added to and enhanced the curriculum'. In terms of student outcomes, Nicole Clarke sees Hawaiian's role as providing 'the experience that goes with what students are learning about in school'.

Hawaiian has benefited from their relationships with schools in several ways. The company has lived out the Hawaiian ethos of supporting and engaging with communities. It has created a strong brand awareness and association of, and preference for, Hawaiian properties. It has educated young people and diversified and expanded the opportunities (through Hawaiian's sponsor partners) that students might consider in the future (such as going into music, dance or opera). The program has provided sponsor partners with the opportunity to offer their own programs and added further weight to a sponsor partner's communication about who they are and what they do.

School staff benefit from being able to access small professional learning forums. For example, a number of the sponsor programs, such as The Black Swan State Theatre Company, offer personal development workshops. Schools benefit from an enriched curriculum.

Through the Alive Program, schools with limited funding or opportunity can now do something that is a bit different to their normal teaching and learning program. In this way, the activities and experiences through the Alive Program add to the curriculum (Nicole Clarke, Sponsorship Coordinator Hawaiian).

The Alive Program is one way that Hawaiian and their sponsored organisations keep connected to their communities. This connection is the life-blood of their commercial enterprises, products and services; which in turn provides the continuation of a vibrant, dynamic and diversified commercial and community environment for children, young people and their families.

The program is successful mainly because the application and process is easy for sponsor groups and schools, there is a diversity of offerings to choose from, and sponsor groups can come up with their own suggestions for what they can offer to schools.

Landcare Australia Ltd

Background

Landcare Australia Limited (LAL) has two core objectives: to raise corporate sponsorship for the Landcare and Coastcare movements; and community awareness of the programs and brands. This not-for-profit company was formed 21 years ago to promote and sponsor Australia's landcare movement. In total, some 6,000 community groups make up a network of landcarers, coastcarers and community environmental volunteer members. Landcare Australia Limited raises funds to help land care groups carry out environmental work, such as sustainable agriculture initiatives, riparian and habitat restoration and junior landcare programs. It assists businesses to work with local communities on environmental and sustainable agriculture repair projects, providing corporate funds, staff and in-kind resources, raises sponsorship from the corporate sector, runs campaigns such as National Landcare Week, Coastcare Week and the National Landcare Awards, as well as other media campaigns for the movement and provides support services to the Landcare, Coastcare and Junior Landcare groups through websites, e-newsletters and other forums.

Landcare Australia receives funds from governments, corporate organisations and private donations. It brokers corporate partnerships on behalf of different communities and groups, including schools.

Coles Junior Landcare School Garden Grant

The Coles Junior Landcare School Garden Grant, a Landcare Australia program, has been in operation since 2008. With its focus on learning about the environment through outdoor learning, the grant is one way in which Coles can connect with local communities.

Landcare's Coles business partner offers a competitive grant for which all schools, kindergartens, day-care centres and youth groups in Australia are eligible. Successful applicants have access to resources to help them create gardens in their grounds or community and tools for the promotion of their project to a wider audience; money (up to \$1,000) for the purchasing of tools, plants, sleepers; and materials (a media kit to assist with the promotion and celebration of their grant and its use within their community). The grant cannot be used to fund teacher replacement or professional learning.

Impact

Students are exposed to every aspect of project work, including lessons around team work and organisational abilities. Their learning is directly connected to horticulture and issues of environmental sustainability, but students are also exposed to important cultural interactions, including with their local Indigenous community. Teachers have been able to connect the garden with other elements of the curriculum. Students have demonstrated an increased willingness to try new fruits, vegetables and herbs grown in their gardens.

Box 1: Examples of primary and secondary Coles Junior Landcare School Garden Projects

Ballina High School Native and Bush Tucker Garden – NSW

Ballina High School on New South Wales' north coast received a grant to contribute to the development of their bush tucker garden, which transformed a previously unused part of the school grounds into two gardens, a rainforest and coastal heath garden.

The rainforest garden is protected from the sun and wind, and is populated with trees native to the rainforest in their local area. The coastal heath is designed to re-create the more exposed, drier shoreline environment.

The project has included over 80 native species, with approximately 70 per cent traditional bush tucker plants, selected in consultation with the local elders who provided advice on which species to plant according to habitat and purpose. The bush tucker plants serve a number of specific educational purposes from culinary and traditional medicinal to environmental studies.

A major tree planting ceremony was held where the elders, students and their family members participated in a mass planting exercise to complete the garden.

The students are involved in every aspect of the garden from the initial design and creation to ongoing care and maintenance. In the process, they have benefited from studying the progress of the plants and habitats, seed propagation, native bee farming and from understanding and connecting with local Indigenous culture.

Leopold Primary School Vegie Patch and Plant Farm – Vic

Leopold Primary School received a grant to develop a school vegetable patch and plant farm. Their project aims to build students' knowledge of environmental sustainability and increase native flora and fauna at the school.

The project has engaged the school' 'Green Team' in mulching, weeding, planting native species, learning to use water saving devices and techniques in the gardens and in sustainable garden maintenance. The school has also introduced 'real life learning' into their environmental science, numeracy and literacy lessons.

The gardens have provided an opportunity for the community, teachers and students to work together, growing seedlings and plants for the gardens, the school grounds and local community.

Source: Coles Website, Sustainability

(www.coles.com.au/About-Coles/Sustainability.aspx#Coles_School_Garden_Grants)

Benefits

Landcare Australia benefits from supporting the local community around Coles stores and helping improve the environment; the opportunity to develop a closer relationship between a particular store, the families and schools; and the increased profile that Coles receives through its association with the Landcare Australia 'brand'.

An acquittal report is required at the completion of a funded project. Within these reports, Heather Campbell, CEO of Landcare Australia, noted that teachers make a point of sharing with Landcare and Coles

just how engaged the kids were and what they learned from doing the project. They share that it gave the kids the opportunity to really 'roll up their sleeves', all the while learning about growing and caring for plants and the environment.

The level of parental engagement and benefit depends on the individual school. Many of the grant applications, for example, are written by parents. One parent commented:

This was a fantastic project that supported learning within our school. The garden beds look terrific and as a parent I can see the links to the sustainability focus of the school.

Parents are often involved in developing the garden and constructing garden beds so the program provides an opportunity for parents to connect with other parents within the school community and contribute to the school outside of working hours. Community engagement is a central aspect of the program ethos.

Heather Campbell suggested three key factors that help make the Coles Junior Landcare School Garden Program successful:

- Having a regular grants program – this helps schools and other eligible groups get into a rhythm.
- The processes associated with the grant make it simple for schools to apply, report and understand what the grant is about/trying to achieve (this last point is also important for the business partner who may not be familiar with the ‘jargon’ used in education).
- The businesses recognise that they too get a lot from the partnership (such as exposure, new relationships, the satisfaction of knowing they are positively contributing to environmental sustainability).

Challenges

One of the main challenges has been balancing business and school expectations. This means being respectful of each partner, communicating any changes in a timely manner, and having realistic expectations.

Time to Read

Background

The partner organisations are members of the business-led charity Business in the Community.² Time to Read currently involves more than 1,000 children in 130 primary schools and 500 volunteers from 120 companies. The program was initiated in 1999.

Time to Read is a mentoring programme that links business volunteers with local primary schools. The programme is aimed at promoting fluency, comprehension and an enjoyment of reading in children. The need was identified through many different sources of research, including the National Literacy Trust (2009).

Key features

The business partners provide mentoring in the form of literacy buddy programs. Time to Read volunteers are recruited from within the company, with each committing to spend one hour each week during term time working on a one-to-one basis with primary-school-aged children. Volunteers read together with children from a set of reading resources. Volunteers are security checked, trained by Business in the Community's Education Team and supported by the Literacy Coordinators from the Education and Library Boards. During recruitment, volunteers are encouraged to commit to a three year involvement.

Challenges

As the number of participating schools and volunteers increases, 'the main challenge has been the ability to be able to fill vacancies that occur as quickly as possible and replace volunteers who leave the program' (Graeme McKimm, Education Manager, Business in the Community).

Impact

This program has been evaluated on a number of occasions and has been found to be very effective, contributing to real and measurable improvements in the reading skills of children taking part in the program, increased enjoyment of reading and greater confidence in reading (Miller, *et al*, 2011). Other reported benefits include an improved ability to interact with adults and higher aspirations for the future.

The volunteer program has been an important support for teachers and within classes. Schools have benefited from the ongoing involvement and support from the companies who provide the Time to Read volunteers. Time to Read is a mutually beneficial partnership between the business sector and the education system. Business volunteers have been very positive about their experience, with some describing it as a highlight of their working week. Many expressed their commitment to helping children and sharing their love of reading (Arlow, 2009).

Staff volunteering as Time to Readers get a great deal of satisfaction from this work, from building strong supportive relationships with 'their' children and 'their' school –

² Business in the Community is a unique movement in the United Kingdom and Ireland of over 700 member companies. More than 230 of these are in Northern Ireland. Its purpose is to inspire, challenge, engage and support business in improving its positive impact on society.

a strong sense of achievement over time which translates to their own workplace and their appreciation of being allowed by company management to participate in this volunteering during working hours (Graeme McKimm, Education Manager, Business in the Community).

This program is exemplary for the evidence base it continues to gather. So far, Time to Read has been evaluated by Deloitte & Touche (2006); PricewaterhouseCoopers (2006); Atlantic Philanthropies (2006); Business in the Community (2008); and the Centre for Effective Education at Queen's University, Belfast (2009; 2011). All confirm the effectiveness of this partnership between schools and businesses in improving outcomes for students.

IBM's KidSmart Early Learning Program

Background

IBM's KidSmart Early Learning Program began in 1999 and reflects a growing awareness of the importance of technological literacy and creativity in the earliest years of a child's education (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2004). The program was designed to help bridge the 'digital divide' in terms of children's access to Information Technology (IT) and their acquisition of IT skills, and to help improve overall student achievement.

Key features

IBM has donated over 45,000 KidSmart Learning Centres to disadvantaged communities in 60 countries across the world (including Australia) and has trained more than 100,000 teachers through partnerships between IBM and education departments. The program has served more than 10 million students. The KidSmart Early Learning Centre consists of an IBM desktop computer which is specifically designed for children aged three to six. Educational software from Riverdeep is installed in most national languages and a website provides advice for early education teachers and the parents of young children on the appropriate use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) to support child development. IBM implements KidSmart in partnership with early learning organisations, usually Ministries of Education or leading professional bodies, who provide high quality training for teachers, participate in the selection of schools and contribute to program evaluation.

Impact

Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford (2004) were commissioned by IBM to conduct a two year international study of the program's effectiveness. The study found that the program had led to significant curriculum development and substantial improvements in teaching and learning using ICT within a year. In the UK, national baseline data shows that the KidSmart program is meeting the needs of those most disadvantaged and this also applies to Spain.

The early childhood teachers involved in the KidSmart program have developed a better understanding of the nature of ICT and greater confidence in using it. There are encouraging indications that KidSmart increases parental involvement with their child's pre-school and participation in their learning.

Linking Work With Learning

Background

Linking Work With Learning (LWWL) is a partnership between Linklaters, The Learning Trust (LEA), the schools and the Inspire! not-for-profit company. Linklaters is a law firm that specialises in advising companies, financial institutions and governments on challenging transactions. The Learning Trust is responsible for the education service in Hackney, including schools, day nurseries and adult education. Inspire! is an Education Business Partnership, an independent charity supporting the education, training and development of young people by forming mutually beneficial partnerships between businesses and schools. The program was officially launched in 2007.

Key features

The program seeks to improve vocational opportunities and skills. In primary and secondary schools there are literacy and employability strands. The latter involves mentoring schemes and work experience for senior students. A range of professional development opportunities are provided for teachers through LWWL. These include diploma development and the use of debating as a classroom tool.

Impact

An independent evaluation by the University of Warwick shows that participation in LWWL enhanced curriculum provision and improved specific skills development and increased knowledge and understanding, including a noticeable increase in the expected level of maths and English in the past three years for students in one school. For example, of the children surveyed about their involvement in LWWL, 70 per cent said it had 'definitely or strongly helped' them to improve their interpersonal skills.³

Most employees engaged in volunteering through LWWL reported increased job satisfaction and commitment to their company. LWWL has been used repeatedly to demonstrate excellence in corporate engagement in education.

³ See http://www.bitc.org.uk/resources/case_studies/afe_2474_1.html (accessed 12 February 2011).

Gregg's Breakfast

Background

Greggs PLC is a leading retailer in the United Kingdom specialising in sandwiches, savouries and other bakery products, with a particular focus on takeaway food and catering. Greggs first became involved in assisting schools to run breakfast clubs in 1999 when their Group Managing Director attended a Business in the Community visit to a primary school. The director was so impressed with the impact that the existing Breakfast Club was having on the school and its community that he decided to research the area with a view to helping other primary schools to do the same.

The program is evidence-based. Research into the effects of school-based breakfast schemes indicates the positive benefits from starting the day with a healthy breakfast, such as improvements in cognitive abilities, emotional well-being, attendance and health, and better behaviour and greater interest in school (Priest, 2001). Murphy *et al* (1998) found that children that started eating significantly more breakfast were doing better at school and feeling less anxious, depressed or liable to be described by their teachers as hyperactive. Similar findings have been reported by other researchers, notably Smith (1998), who reported that individuals who consumed a cereal breakfast each day were less depressed, less emotionally distressed and had a lower level of perceived stress than those who did not eat breakfast each day.

Key features

The basic model for support is the same for all schools. Greggs provide free bread from their local shops, cash for the purchase of other food and financial help for one-off items such as toasters, kettles, and plates. The schools provide the accommodation and recruit the volunteers to run the club. The use of the volunteers is a unique aspect of the Greggs model. Schools are mainly selected because they are in socially deprived areas and do not qualify for Breakfast Club funding from any other source.

Challenges

Coe (2000) evaluated four schools that were part of the Greggs Assisted Breakfast Club and found accommodation for the Club had been a problem in some cases. A number of people reported having had to overcome some opposition to the idea of the Breakfast Club. Two of the teachers mentioned some wariness on the part of their teaching colleagues when the idea was first raised. One felt this took the form of outright opposition on the grounds that providing breakfast should not be part of the job of a teacher (Coe, 2000). However, all stressed the need to get the whole school onside. The success of the program depends very much on participants' good-will and commitment to the scheme (Coe, 2000).

Impact

The program has brought social and academic benefits to schools. Students have socialised better with each other. In some cases, attitudes towards school and relationships with teachers have improved. Attendance at the Breakfast Club has been associated with improved behaviour in class, better attendance, greater concentration and improved punctuality (Priest, 2001). Making new friends and socialising with other pupils was identified as a major benefit of the Breakfast Club.

The volunteers have experienced a great sense of achievement from participating in the Breakfast Club. A notable positive benefit was the increased involvement of parents with the school. The parent volunteers help embed the program in the community and thus help its sustainability (Priest, 2001). The Breakfast Club was seen as an important mechanism for helping to improve the attitude of the pupils toward school:

The Breakfast Club has made the kids more interested in school. I think they appreciate the extra support they get. They're also more aware of what's going on in school. It's like coming to the Breakfast Club makes them more interested and so they get more involved in other things (Priest, 2010).

5. Strengthening the evidence base

Given that the concept of business involvement in education, particularly in non-vocational ways, is a relatively new area of policy making for governments, the evidence base is still being developed. It is gradually being built up as education, business, community groups and governments increasingly recognise the benefits that can come from collaborative approaches to improving educational outcomes. While the case studies from overseas show that evaluation is being carried out in some partnerships, the majority of partnerships identified through the national and international literature and the consultations have not been formally evaluated.

Measuring the impact of any program on students is difficult due to the number of variables that can affect a student's performance. This is acknowledged in the Business-School Connections Roundtable discussion paper and confirmed in the national consultations associated with the paper and Phillips KPA reports. Rather than seeking to establish a direct causal link, it is perhaps more useful to identify how the school-business relationships *contribute to* improved outcomes.

The information reviewed suggests that, currently, there is a no consistent or common approach to measuring the impact of school-business relationships of educational outcomes. While the summary paper of the national consultations (PhillipsKPA (2010b) identifies several different tools that are currently being used to evaluate partnership activities and programs, it also shows a range of views regarding what and how to measure.

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence available to show that school-business relationships/partnerships are making positive contributions to educational outcomes. There is also evidence to show that the business partners gain from these relationships. What is missing, however, is evidence that has been collected in a systematic way to show the impact of these relationships. In particular, there is little evidence to show a strong connection between these partnerships and improved academic attainment.

This was evident in the search for overseas examples of good practice undertaken as part of this review. ACER identified 20 examples of what seemed to be promising relationships. On closer investigation, we found that:

- There was either no evaluation or the evaluation was outdated – done in the early stages of the project with no subsequent reviews.

- Some evaluations are not robust. Much of the ‘evidence’ offered in support of the claims about how effective a particular partnership program or relationship is anecdotal.

On the basis of our literature search and consultations – and consistent with the findings of earlier work by ACER and more recent work by PhillipsKPA – ACER recommends that serious consideration be given to the following:

- Developing a set of guidelines to help school–business partners monitor and evaluate their partnerships. This would include information about what it means to monitor and evaluation, why monitoring and evaluation are important; the kind of data that can be collected; what constitutes sound evidence and how it can be used to improve outcomes and contribute to a strong evidence base. Such guidelines would not be prescriptive but able to be adapted by schools and businesses to sit their particular needs and circumstances.
- There are still gaps in the evidence base that could be addressed through further research. This research could take the form of building on the databases of partnerships that already exist in Australia, such as the NAB Schools First database of school–community partnerships and, potentially, the Tender Bridge™ relationships between schools and businesses, philanthropic organisations, community groups and/or governments. These rich sources of information could serve as a basis for subsequent research and analysis to identify benefits, lessons to be learned and critical success factors.
- Existing school–business partnerships could be encouraged to collect data, regularly review their progress and share their success stories and lessons learned with other schools and businesses. Collecting and disseminating a broad range of examples of good practice could help school–business relationships create sustainable, productive programs that improve educational outcomes.

As the Business–School Connections Roundtable discussion paper notes, not all schools necessarily want to develop relationships with business and this needs to be respected. Those that do, however, need to be supported. Good practice needs to be shared. The benefits to all stakeholder groups need to be disseminated to these groups. Schools and businesses could benefit from guidelines around creating, developing and sustaining relationships that are designed to improve educational outcomes, particularly for young people.

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Attachment A: Template for the case studies

1. Background/context
 - a. How and why was the
 - b. How and why was it set up? What was the identified need?

2. Key features
 - a. Nature of the business partner contribution
 - i. Resources (eg equipment, facilities, funding)
 - ii. Skills, professional training (eg specific program delivery, industry placement, grant writing)
 - iii. Vocational opportunities (eg work experience; certification, learning new skills)
 - iv. Creative opportunities (eg musical productions or exhibitions)
 - v. Health and fitness (eg first aid, anti-drugs, anti-bullying, organising camps and field trips; sports training)
 - vi. Environmental (market garden, local , school, global)
 - vii. Particular expertise (eg counselling, working with 'at risk' students, financial planning)
 - viii. Mentoring (eg literacy buddy programs, adult mentors for students)
 - ix. Other?
 - b. What were some of the difficulties involved in planning, implementing and sustaining the partnership program?
 - c. How were these difficulties addressed or overcome?

3. Impact
 - a. How has the relationship/partnership improved student outcomes?
 - b. What are the benefits (both intended and unintended) for the
 - i. Business partner
 - ii. Students
 - iii. Teachers, staff
 - iv. Schools
 - v. Parents
 - vi. Community
 - c. What are the factors that allowed this partnership program to be so successful?

4. Evidence
 - a. How do the partners know the program has been successful?