

This article was downloaded by: [UVA Univeriteitsbibliotheek], [Antoni Verger]
On: 01 October 2011, At: 00:22
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered
office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Education Policy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and
subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tedp20>

Framing and selling global education policy: the promotion of public-private partnerships for education in low- income contexts

Antoni Verger ^a

^a Department of Sociology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona,
Barcelona, Spain

Available online: 30 Sep 2011

To cite this article: Antoni Verger (2011): Framing and selling global education policy: the promotion of public-private partnerships for education in low-income contexts, Journal of Education Policy, DOI:10.1080/02680939.2011.623242

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2011.623242>



PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Framing and selling global education policy: the promotion of public–private partnerships for education in low-income contexts

Antoni Verger*

Department of Sociology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

(Received 14 December 2010; final version received 10 September 2011)

Public–private partnerships in education (ePPP) are acquiring increasing centrality in the agendas of international organizations and development agencies dealing with educational affairs. They are designed as an opportunity to correct inefficiencies in the public delivery of education and to mobilize new resources to increase the access to and cost-effectiveness of education in low-income contexts. This article explores the emergence of ePPP as a ‘programmable idea’ and, in particular, the semiotic strategies by means of which this idea has been located in the global education agenda and promoted internationally among practice communities by a network of policy entrepreneurs. The analysis is supported by extensive fieldwork and by a new approach to the analysis of the framing and mobilization of new policy ideas, which incorporates literature on agenda setting, policy entrepreneurs, and policy frame analysis. The approach reveals the complex way in which policy ideas, political actors, institutions, and material factors interact to strategically put forward new policy alternatives in developing contexts.

Keywords: globalization; frames; policy entrepreneurs; international organizations; public–private partnerships; educational change

Introduction

After gaining independence, former colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were eager to nationalize education and build new public education systems. The construction of public education systems was considered a political strategy with many virtues, since it was expected to make a significant contribution to the legitimization, nation building, modernization, and economic development of the young nation states (Williams 1997). To a great extent, public education became the crown jewel of the new independent nations and the private sector was perceived as an impediment to building public education systems. Thus, a sort of zero-sum between the public and the private categories prevailed in the education policy discourse.

However, with the passage of time, the situation changed significantly. In the 1980s and 1990s, education privatization policies of a very different nature were adopted in many low-income countries. Very often, these policies were introduced as aid conditionality and, in this way, were perceived as an external imposition by international financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In other cases, privatization happened by default and, specifically, as a result of the state’s inability to respond to the education demand in a

*Email: antoni.verger@uab.cat

context of structural adjustment. Some privatization policies, such as the introduction of school fees, had negative effects on the expansion of education, and affected especially the poorest (Colclough 1996).

The international aid community learned many lessons from the structural adjustment period and, currently, does not openly support radical privatization policies in education and other social services. However, at the same time, many donors consider that the public sector cannot face the challenge of education expansion by itself and are exploring new ways of providing education in which public and private actors can collaborate. They argue that governments should perceive private providers as a potential partner rather than as a threat to the state. For this reason, the discourse on partnerships between the public and the private sectors has intensified in recent years. In particular, the so-called public–private partnerships in education (ePPP) have become a new programmatic idea, i.e. a technical idea that provides the interpretation of a policy problem and prescribes a precise course of action to solve it (Campbell 1998), that has acquired enormous centrality in the agendas of the most important multilateral, regional, and bilateral aid agencies specializing in education including the WB, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

This article analyzes the emergence, dissemination, and framing of the idea of public–private partnerships (PPPs) in the field of education. In particular, it examines the reasons, agents, and processes through which ePPP are incorporated into the global education agenda, and the way in which this programmatic idea is framed and disseminated among practice communities, especially in low-income contexts.

To discuss these issues, the article is structured in three main sections. In the first section, a theoretical and methodological framework aimed at studying the construction and mobilization of global education policy ideas is developed. This framework, which integrates literature on agenda setting, policy entrepreneurs, and policy frame analysis, reveals the complex way in which programmatic ideas, political actors, institutions, and material factors interact to strategically put forward policy alternatives in developing contexts. The methods of the article are also presented in this section. In the second section, the emergence of the ePPP program is contextualized and the way it has been theorized, framed, and mobilized, and by whom, is explored. The third and last section reflects on the ideational and constitutive power of the ePPP idea. Policy frame and semiotic analysis techniques are used to analyze, among other properties, the resonance, consistency, and clarity of ePPP and, therefore, the potential of the program to be adopted by practice communities.

The article shows that the ePPP idea has been formulated and disseminated by a transnational policy network of education experts, which is not especially wide, but is strategically placed in influential international organizations. It also shows that the ePPP discourse is very sound in the current political and ideational context, but has important framing limitations that may inhibit its selection and retention in national education systems.

The construction and mobilization of global programmatic ideas: a semiotic approach

Programmatic ideas are technical ideas that provide the interpretation of a policy problem and its causes and prescribe a precise course of policy action to solve the problem.

They also provide critical tools that can be used by policy-makers to de-legitimize alternative interpretations, approaches, or solutions (Blyth 1997; Campbell 1998).

The study of the emergence of new programmatic ideas is important due to the constitutive powers of these ideas, and their capacity to last in time. When programmatic ideas are adopted and implemented in particular territories, they act like cognitive locks that restrict decision-makers to certain intellectual paths, reduce uncertainty among policy-makers, and constitute broad cognitive constraints on the range of solutions that they perceive and deem to be useful for solving problems. The influence of programs, once institutionalized, also lasts in time due to reasons not directly related to the quality of the ideas behind them, but because they generate constituents which defend them if alternatives are suggested (Campbell 2004).

However, before implementation and institutionalization occur, programmatic ideas need to penetrate policy agendas and be selected by particular practice communities. The study of the emergence and dissemination of programmatic ideas requires the adoption of a multi-scalar approach to the policy process due to the fact that, in the globalization era, agenda setting happens more frequently at the supra-national scale, whereas final decisions regarding the adoption and translation of new agendas in particular contexts are usually taken at the national or subnational scale (Dale 1999; Rhoten 2000).

The penetration and impact of new programmatic ideas is contingent on the presence of – and affinity between – a range of factors of a very different nature. The framework presented herein focuses on *semiotic* factors, which refer to the production of intersubjective meaning about policies, to the properties of the ideas behind the policies in question, but also to the strategic action of the political actors proposing and mobilizing these ideas. In political analysis literature, the political actors advocating for the advance of new programmatic ideas are usually known as policy entrepreneurs. Policy entrepreneurs encourage practice communities to pay attention to certain problems, to promote particular policy prescriptions and to link elements from separate policy streams such as political events, problems, and solutions (Kingdon 2002). Among other functions, policy entrepreneurs contribute to building the causal beliefs that constitute the cognitive basis of programmatic ideas, packaging the programmatic ideas in a way that makes them appealing to a range of audiences, disseminating these new ideas among practice communities and pushing for them to be implemented in particular contexts.

Policy entrepreneurs are usually based in a range of knowledge-based organizations, such as international organizations, think tanks, universities, or big consultancy firms, which are located at the interstices of business, governments, and academia (Horne 2002). In the institutional contexts where entrepreneurs operate, there are strong material and normative incentives to promote policy innovation to address new, but also old problems. However, policy entrepreneurs do not necessarily build new ideas or policy solutions from scratch. They often innovate by doing some type of bricolage with existing practices, by transposing a practice from one field to another (for instance, from the health to the education sector), or by translating an international policy idea to another context (Boxenbaum and Battilana 2005).

Theorizing, framing, and mobilizing policy ideas

In order to be appealing to policy-makers and other audiences, programmatic ideas need to be consistently theorized, but also strategically framed and mobilized. At

the *theoretical* level, the causal beliefs that constitute new programs need to be coherent, solid, and convincing (Benford and Snow 2000; Kingdon 2002). They also need to be empirically credible and well worked out at both the diagnosis and prognosis levels. The diagnostic dimension of programs consists of the interpretation of problems and their causes. To be more effective, a good diagnosis requires the construction of ‘causal stories,’ i.e. explanatory frames that move situations away from the realm of fate and introduce human agency in the interpretation of social problems (Stone 1989).

The prognosis dimension of programs contains the policy prescriptions that should contribute to solving the diagnosed problem(s). Policy prescriptions, as occurs with the problem stream, need to be consistent and empirically credible. At the core of the prognosis dimension, a more or less explicit basic theory about how the program works can be identified. This theory refers to the way in which the new policy strategy will influence the actions of agents and will, ultimately, achieve their expected outcomes. This theory, ideally, should be contingent on the specificities of the locality and the subjects involved in the implementation of the program. Thus, policy prescriptions, beyond blueprinted solutions, should first and foremost inform policy-makers about the necessary conditions (contextual, material, regulatory, etc.) under which a certain policy mechanism would trigger certain effects (Pawson and Tilley 1997). This is certainly the most challenging aspect for policy entrepreneurs who aspire to prescribe global education policies aimed at fitting in a broad range of time–place situations. Finally, it should be acknowledged that causal stories and the formulation of policy prescriptions, as well as being consistent by themselves, need to be consistently and coherently connected among them (Gasper 1996; Stone 1989).

Once programmatic ideas are theorized, policy entrepreneurs *frame* them in order to generate public support. Frames are not strictly speaking policy ideas, but ‘a discourse that helps political actors to sell policy choices to the public’ (Béland 2005, 11). At the framing level, programmatic ideas have more chances of being considered by practice communities if the policy ideas they contain are clear, concise, and easily understandable (Gasper 1996). If we take into account the fact that regulators and policy-makers are usually risk-adverse, new ideas must be framed in a way that makes them familiar, feasible, and perceived as a superior policy solution. For the purpose of familiarity, policy entrepreneurs may work on recombining new ideas with already tested practices (Boxenbaum and Battilana 2005). The mechanisms of bricolage, transposition, and translation described earlier may be activated for this purpose. In terms of feasibility, new policy ideas are most likely to be taken up if they are perceived as technically workable, and fit within budgetary and administrative constraints (Kingdon 2002).

Policy entrepreneurs also need to frame their ideas in a way that is sound within the broader ideational environment. This implies making programmatic ideas echo within the policy paradigm and the public sentiments that prevail in society at the time they are formulated (Campbell 2004; Hay 2002). To this end, policy entrepreneurs strategically frame and reframe issues and construct convincing arguments in order to make them normatively and theoretically acceptable for the relevant constituencies in the field in which they aim to provoke policy innovation or policy change (Mintrom 1997). However, in order to sell their ideas and frame them in a more convincing way, policy entrepreneurs may on occasion need to, more or less explicitly, simplify reality and resort to different types of logical fallacy (fallacies of ambiguity, fallacies of unwarranted inferences, etc.), pitfalls, or argumentative shortcuts (Gasper 1996).

In terms of *mobilization*, new programmatic ideas are launched and disseminated through highly distributed policy briefs, position papers, reports, and advisory memos, and in public and private events (seminars, workshops, report launches, etc.) that are usually well attended by national political leaders and policy-makers (Ball and Exley 2010). In these and other domains, policy entrepreneurs strongly advocate for their proposals and are enthusiastic about them. In Mintrom's (1997, 45) words, they need to say something like 'I've seen the future and it works.' However, at the same time, the audience will attribute more authority to their views if they present their ideas and themselves as neutral and impersonal (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). Being perceived as apolitical technocrats, for instance, by using scientific argumentation, is essential for the credibility of policy entrepreneurs. In this way, science, although law as well, is an institution to which policy entrepreneurs usually turn in order to frame programs and related causal stories and to sell a particular vision of reality, while portraying themselves as simply describing it (Stone 1989).

The mobilization of policy discourses is important because very often, beyond their argumentation strengths, they maintain their credibility through their repetition. Another element that contributes to the credibility of policy ideas is the prestige and interpersonal skills of the people backing them (Ball 2007; Fairclough 2000). This is why, usually, the most successful policy entrepreneurs are based in institutions that have a certain authority and credibility, and are located at the interstices of a range of influential social and policy networks (Béland 2005; Campbell 2004).

It should be acknowledged that the equilibrium between theorization, framing, and mobilization is a necessary condition for new programmatic ideas to acquire political centrality. For instance, a programmatic idea can be very solid theoretically, but framed in a way that is not appealing to practitioners. On other occasions, a program may be well constructed and adequately framed, but not enough resources are invested in its political mobilization. In both cases, the chances of the program penetrating policy agendas or provoking policy change would be restricted.

The framework presented here considers semiosis as the entry point to understanding policy change. However, it also acknowledges the importance of nonsemiotic factors (material, power relations) and structurally inscribed selectivities (historical, institutional, or legal) that may privilege or discriminate against certain ideas, actors, and strategies over others (Robertson 2008). For instance, policy-makers are more likely to consider a new policy alternative if the sector in which they intervene experiences a crisis, or when the policies being implemented do not fulfill the expectations that society has pinned on them (Walsh 2000). In this sense, periods of crisis typically lead to cognitive and strategic disorientation and, consequently, encourage policy innovation and variation in policy practices (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008).

Methods

In the following sections, we apply this semiotic approach to a study on the promotion of the ePPPs programmatic idea. The case study is based on the triangulation of three main methods. Firstly, a 'document analysis' of the main reports on ePPP (see Table 1) is carried out to understand the way this idea has been constructed, both in terms of definition of problems and prescribed solutions, by their main theorizers.

Secondly, interviews were conducted with 10 proponents of the ePPP idea, who are located in the WB, the International Finance Corporation (IFC),¹ the World Economic Forum, UNESCO, The Centre for British Teachers (CfBT),² and the ADB. The main

Table 1. Corpus of documents on ePPP (chronological order).

Organization	Year	Title	Authors
ADB and WB	2000	<i>The New Social Policy Agenda in Asia</i>	Y. Wang (ed.)
IFC	2001	<i>Handbook on PPPs and Education</i>	N. LaRocque, J. Tooley and M. Latham
CfBT	2008	<i>Toolkit on PPPs and Education</i>	M. Latham
CfBT	2008	<i>PPPs in Basic Education. An International Review</i>	N. LaRocque
WB and IFC	2008	<i>The Evolving Regulatory Context for Private Education in Emerging Economies</i>	J. Fielden and N. LaRocque
IFC-Edinvest	2009	<i>ePPP</i>	M. Latham
WB	2009	<i>The Role and Impact of PPPs in Education</i>	H. Patrinos, F. Barrera-Osorio and J. Guáqueta
UNICEF and ADB	2011	<i>NonState Providers and ePPP for the Poor</i>	N. LaRocque

aim of the interviews was to ask these actors about the specific model of ePPP they are promoting and to make them reflect on the challenges for their implementation in low-income contexts. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees have been withheld from this text by mutual agreement.

Lastly, observation was carried out in international events where the ePPP proposal was presented to practice communities. In this case, the interaction and discussion between the ePPP entrepreneurs and the practitioner community was the focus of the observation. The events in question were the following: International Seminar ‘Public Private Partnerships for Education: New Actors and Modes of Education Governance in a Globalized World’ (Amsterdam, January 2009); presentation of the WB report *The Role and Impact of PPPs in Education* at a WB book launch (Washington, DC, April 2009); 2nd National Consultative Meet on PPPs in Education (IL&FS, Delhi, November 2009); and Seminar ‘Challenges of Financing Basic Education: Revisiting Solutions Involving the Private Sector’ (IIEP-Paris, September 2010). All data were retrieved between January 2009 and September 2010.

Partnerships for education: context and content

PPPs are a form of relational contracting between the public and the private sector for the organization and delivery of services that involve risk sharing and mutual learning between the parties involved (Glendinning, Powell, and Rummery 2002; Rosenau 2000). PPPs have attracted much attention from policy-makers and public administration scholars since the 1980s and have been promoted by international organizations such as the WB and the OECD (Seddon, Billett, and Clemans 2004; Wettenhall 2003). They have been traditionally implemented in a range of sectors such as energy, construction, and water supply. More recently, this managerial practice has also become popular in the educational field.

The core of the network of education experts that has been responsible for the transposition of the ePPP idea to the education for development domain is located at the interstices of a range of international organizations such as the WB, the ADB, the IFC, and the CfBT. In the 1990s, representatives of these organizations

came together in the World Bank Economics of Education Thematic Group and opened a research and deliberation line on private and alternative forms of education provision.³ They started considering partnerships in education as an evolution of the privatization agenda. As one of its members explains:

I think originally we started to think about PPPs in education and the role of the private sector as part of the privatization agenda . . . which was also unfortunate because we aren't thinking about privatization as a goal, the goal would be improved outcomes, and if getting the private sector involved would be useful then it's useful. Also we weren't thinking of privatizing, but rather partnering, so I guess it kind of transferred from the privatization agenda to the partnership agenda, which we think is more appropriate. But I think it's quite recent that we've been using this [partnership] term . . . (Interview ePPP expert 02)

This network of education experts is behind the most well known publications, policy-briefs and toolkits on ePPP. The highly disseminated WB report *The Role and Impact of PPPs in Education*, released in 2009, has become the pinnacle of the series of publications they are responsible for (see Table 1).⁴ The network is also behind the organization and development of a range of events (conferences, courses, seminars), mostly held in the WB headquarters, where the ePPP idea has been discussed among policy-makers, donor agencies, international organization staff, and scholars (see Box 1). The network is quite narrow in scope, but very cohesive. As observed in the publications and events identified, their members write and speak at each other's initiatives (publications, seminars, courses, etc.) and quote and refer to each other's work.

They have pursued their idea with tenacity for more than a decade and they consider that they are starting to reap the rewards of their efforts. For instance, some international organizations, non-governmental organization (NGO) and important education players, such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), that initially rejected their ideas are now embracing the ePPP discourse (Interview ePPP expert 05). And, as proudly stated by one of its promoters, currently 'partnering in education is a global phenomenon (. . .) the level of interest in it is exponential' (Interview ePPP expert 07). In the following section, how they have theorized and framed the ePPP programmatic idea is developed.⁵

Events on ePPP (chronological order).

Public Private Partnerships in Education, Washington, DC, 11 April 2002
Mobilizing the Private Sector for Public Education, Harvard University, 5–6 October 2005
Private Financing & Public-Private Partnerships in Education, Video Conference, 22 May 2006
Public-Private Partnerships in Education, Washington, DC, 7–8 June 2007
Public-Private Partnerships for ICT in Education and Contracting for Improved Service Delivery, Washington, DC, 13 May 2008
IFC's International Forum on Private Education. Investing In The Future: Innovation in Private Education, Washington, DC, 14–16 May 2008
Innovation in Partnerships: Private Initiatives and Public Policy in Education, Washington, DC, 21–24 September 2009

The ePPP programmatic idea

ePPP are defined as contractual relations between the government and private providers to acquire education services of a defined quantity and quality at an agreed price for a specified period (CfBT 2008; WB 2009). ePPP, like any other programmatic idea, can be dissected in dimensions such as problems to be addressed, policy stream of solutions and supportive arguments for policy-makers.

Education problems

Many international organizations support the introduction of partnerships in education systems due to their potential capacity to address a range of education problems that are common in developing contexts. The first problem is *education access*. The ePPP promoters consider that governments need to take the private sector more seriously if they want to meet the Millennium Development and the Education For All (EFA) goals, but also new challenges such as the increasing demand in higher education levels (IFC 2001). As stated by one interviewee ‘it’s clear to me that governments aren’t going to be able to continue to build schools or universities or colleges or technical and vocational education centers to meet the demand that’s in place’ (Interview ePPP expert 07).

Those promoting ePPP also point out the fact that the education expansion objective is not sufficient, and that low levels of *learning outcomes* need to be urgently addressed as well. However, this second problem arises within a context of budgetary constraints, which is another reason why governments need to think about more cost-effective and alternative solutions to conventional public provision in which the private sector plays a major role (CfBT 2008; IFC 2001).

A third problem that, in fact, crosscuts the above-mentioned problems is the lack of *competition and incentives* existing in conventional education systems. The ePPP discourse blames governments again for this problem and, specifically, problematizes the ‘quasi-monopolistic’ role of the state when it comes to education provision. The fact that governments run schools directly undermines open competition between providers and makes it more difficult for education entrepreneurs to emerge (CfBT 2008).

To conclude, the core education problems that the ePPP proponents identify are not only problems *in* public education systems, but mainly problems *regarding* the public education system. Consequently, they advocate for drastic changes in the way governments operate in the educational domain and for the governments to provide more political, economic, and legal support to the private sector in education.

Policy principles and tools

ePPP can cover different areas of collaboration between the private and the public sectors, and a broad range of activities: from the building of schools (similar to what the UK Public Finance Initiatives establish) to the delivery of noncore services (books, school transport, meals). However, the emphasis of the ePPP program is on the delivery of core education services (i.e. management of the schools, teaching, etc.) (WB 2009).

ePPP involve a *contract* between the public and the private sector, which needs to be formalized and based on performance outcomes. In terms of the delivery of core education services, the private sector can be contracted under the following

formats: delivery of education (a la charter schools), private operation of public schools (contract schools), and education vouchers (IFC 2001). However, the limits to what forms of engagement with the private sector can be categorized (or not) as an ePPP are not always clear. Rather, the documents analyzed consider that there is a continuum of ePPP models, which go from low to high partnerships. Actually, this continuum is framed in an evolutionary way, departing from a ‘nascent’ stage, in which private schools exist, but do not necessarily interact with the state, and reaching an ‘integral’ stage in which 100% of education is provided by the private sector under a voucher framework (see Figure 1).

As will be developed below, school choice is outlined as the preferred policy principle, and vouchers and other pro-competition interventions as the corresponding policy tools in partnerships frameworks. However, the ePPP program also considers other policy tools and ideas, some of them being very similar to those included in other programs such as education decentralization, ‘contracting education services,’ or School-Based Management (SBM). Similarly to SBM, ePPP promoters push for the devolution of as many education management activities as possible at the school level. In particular, they place a substantial emphasis on giving schools the capacity to manage teachers’ labor and to make schools and teachers more accountable and responsive to the community and family demands (CfBT 2008; IFC 2001).

Indeed, teachers – and teachers unions in particular – are usually seen as a major constraint for the introduction of competition dynamics in education and advancing partnerships. Teachers usually aim to protect the public service employment system, which is perceived as inaccurate due to its lack of incentives and high costs (IFC 2001; WB 2009). To overcome this, the ePPP promoters do not aim to reform the public employment system, but to bypass it. In particular, they propose to generate a parallel system in which the contractor would be allowed to hire cheaper and nonunionized labor, reward teachers according to their performance, or fire them if they underperform (CfBT 2008; WB 2009). One of the interviewees made this point clear:

The real impact comes when you get the problem, which is the terrible, terrible teachers, terrible incentive structures; the teachers themselves may not be terrible but the incentive structures are horrible to do a good job. When you get rid of all of that and bring the private guys in they’re on the line for delivering good education. And that’s kind of in our opinion the real core of this. (Interview ePPP expert 04)

At the implementation level, the ePPP tools and procedures are very detailed. First, the creation of a quality education assurance agency is suggested. Among other functions, this agency should specify *what* are the outcomes that schools should

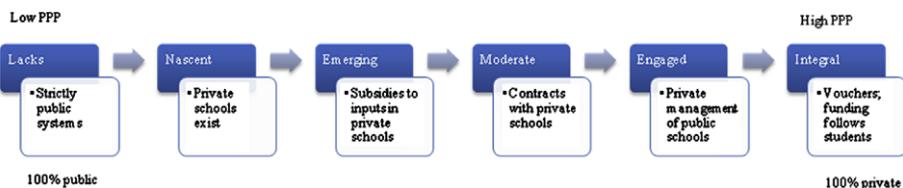


Figure 1. The ePPP continuum. Adapted from WB (2009, 16).

achieve, and elaborate the corresponding performance indicators, but without prescribing *how* they should be achieved.⁶ In parallel, a partnerships-contracting agency should be formed. This agency would be in charge of managing the dialog between the private and the public sector and of creating a system of incentives for the agents involved in the partnership, in particular the service providers. Afterwards, a bidding process for private providers must be organized. This process should be open, transparent, and competitive; and the entry requirements for the private providers should be clear. Once the ePPP is at work, providers may receive higher or lower payments according to their performance. If they underperform, they can be punished with the termination of the contract (CfBT 2008; IFC 2001; WB 2009).

The ePPP proponents also expect the state to modify its organizational culture by learning from the private sector at the managerial level. In particular, they consider that public sector organizations should take advantage of their participation in partnership frameworks to learn from the organizational culture and values of the private sector, such as flexibility, openness to societal demands, incentives for innovation, and efficiency.

Despite how it may appear, the ePPP proponents do not mask an antistate discourse or, at least, do not endeavor to challenge the state authority in education, but they require the redefinition of the state functions in education. According to them, and paraphrasing Osborne and Gaebler (1993), the role of the state should focus on ‘steering’ rather than on ‘rowing’ educational services. One of the interviewees expressed it in simpler terms: ‘That’s the foundation for ePPPs, public sector financing, private sector delivery. That’s all it says’ (Interview ePPP expert 05). By getting rid of ‘nitty-gritty responsibilities,’ as another interviewee qualified direct education provision, the state could focus on the strategic control, funding, and planning of the education system.

Arguments

Programmatic ideas also provide critical tools, in terms of ideas and arguments that can be used by policy-makers to legitimize policy changes and, at the same time, de-legitimize alternative solutions or critiques from potential opponents. The ePPP proposal faces the opposition from those who ‘still tend to view that education is a public good’ or those who ‘for ideological reasons’ say ‘I don’t like the private sector, we’re not going to do this stuff’ (Interviews ePPP experts 05 and 07). ePPP supporters aim to overcome these ‘prejudices’ by providing evidence-based arguments and opening as scientific as possible a debate on the pros and cons of the proposal. Thus, the ePPP discourse is rich in arguments about the benefits of involving the private sector in public education. There are two different sets of ideas being used to support the program, one being theoretical and the other more empirical in nature.

The *theoretical ideas* behind the program are based on economic theory. Following economic theory, ePPP proponents predict that partnerships will unchain a complex set of interconnected events that contribute to raising the levels of competition within the education system and, consequently, the quality of education. Figure 2 reflects the expected ‘education production chain’ under ePPP frameworks. The chart shows, in a visual way, the program ontology of ePPP, i.e. the way policy tools and the actions of the subjects within the education system are causally

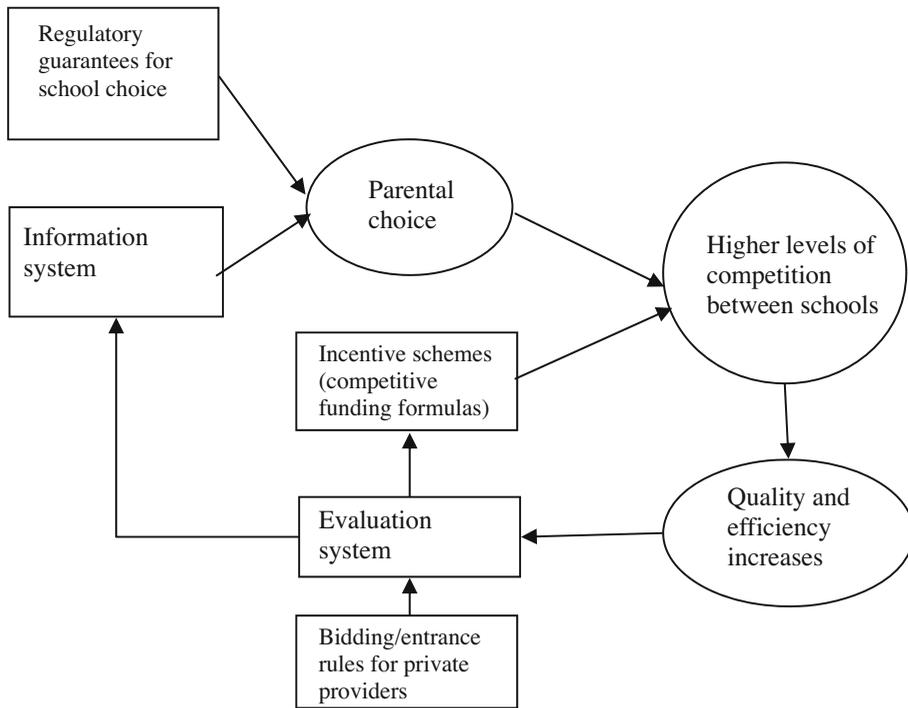


Figure 2. The ePPP production chain.

connected (the square boxes contain the main state policies under partnerships, and the circles refer to the expected behavior of families and schools).

As can be observed, the central mechanism in the theory of action behind partnerships is that of school choice. School choice, according to its advocates, can contribute to breaking with an excessively centralized education system by giving more freedom and power to families when it comes to choosing the school for their children. As most consumers do in market situations, parents are expected to maximize their benefit by choosing the best school available. At the same time, school choice and exit become effective political tools for families to express their levels of (dis)satisfaction with the existing schools. In this way, school choice becomes a de facto quality control and accountability mechanism, and schools feel more competitive pressure to produce a better quality service (WB 2009).

A second set of arguments to support ePPP is based on *empirical evidence* coming from impact evaluations and quantitative studies (many of them using regression analysis techniques). Of the analyzed documents, the WB (2009) is the most complete in this respect since it reviews 22 academic studies and 92 practical experiences. Learning outcomes, measured by standardized tests scores, are usually the dependent variable in these studies. Most studies reviewed by ePPP proponents show that raising the role of private provision and the implementation of vouchers systems contribute, more or less modestly, to improvements in students' results (WB 2009). The most cited piece of research is Wößmann (2006), which based on Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data shows that, in OECD countries, education systems with high levels of public funding and high levels of

private provision are those that perform better. Qualitative studies and experiences in countries such as Chile, The Netherlands, or Pakistan are also reviewed to highlight a range of successful practices on private sector engagement for the delivery of public education.

Semiotic analysis of the ePPP program

The ePPP programmatic idea has been enthusiastically mobilized by a number of international players. Among them, the WB support is especially relevant since, in the last decades, it has become a sort of intellectual leader within the international development community (Miller-Adams 1999). However, for new global policies to have an impact, apart from being supported by powerful organizations, they also need to consist of powerful ideas. According to the previously presented semiotic approach, they need to fulfill a set of internal conditions such as resonance, familiarity, innovation, clarity, feasibility, and consistency. In this section, we analyze the framing of the ePPP idea in relation to each of these dimensions, with a focus on the way they resonate within practice communities.

Frame resonance

Currently, ePPP have had a very significant impact within the international development discourse for a number of reasons. First, ePPP have appeared at a critical juncture in which the international community is concerned with how far away from achieving the EFA goals it is and with the growing constraints in aid for education as a consequence of the global financial crisis. The feeling of urgency is greater than ever in a high number of low-income countries and new policy solutions, such as those proposed under the ePPP program, are welcomed by many (Observation ePPPs Seminar, Delhi 2009).

Secondly, the ePPP program fits within the managerial discourses that predominate today in the education for development field and, particularly, in the context of the so-called Post-Washington Consensus (PWC). The PWC, which does not alter the core macro-economic prescriptions of the Washington Consensus, seeks to broaden the understanding of development by introducing a new focus on governance and participation of the private sector. It encourages governments to explore nonbureaucratic ways of coordinating economic and social activities and to create an environment conducive to the private sector acquiring a more dynamic role in economic and societal development (Van Waeyenberge 2006). Within this development paradigm, managerial proposals that involve the state partnering with the private sector, as well as rethinking the role of the state in the provision of public goods are very sound.

Thirdly, in many countries, the partnership discourse engages better with the dominant public sentiments on education than the privatization one. Privatization policies have lost their appeal and legitimacy in many developing contexts after the excesses of the structural adjustment period. In fact, as the ePPP proponents themselves acknowledge, privatization and contracting out, as well, are expressions that have become pejorative and generate opposition quickly (IFC 2001). In contrast, expressions such as PPPs invite more people and organizations to join the debate and enable private organizations to get a market share over public service provision with more ease (Hodge and Greve 2010; Linder 1999; Savas 2000; Teisman and Klijn 2002). Actually, the 'partnership' concept is very appealing and seductive by

itself; many education stakeholders associate it with values such as policy dialog, participation and democracy (Cardini 2006). As one presenter in one of the seminars on ePPP said, ‘partnerships is a lovely word, working in partnerships is a beautiful objective. So, who can be against it?’ (Observation ePPPs Seminar, Paris 2010).

Familiarity and innovation

New policy programs are more likely to be acceptable to policy-makers when a balance between familiarity and innovation is met. On the one hand, new policies need to contain elements that sound familiar to the adopters, but on the other hand should provide a new solution to prevailing problems. Convincing policy ideas are unlikely to be brand new and usually contain already existing ideas. This is, for two main reasons, the case of ePPP.

Firstly, ePPP are constructed as the transposition of a practice that has been already implemented in other policy sectors for decades. So, many policy-makers, regulators, and international aid workers in the educational field have heard before about PPPs in relation to areas such as transport, energy, housing, etc.

Secondly, ePPP are, to a great extent, the result of the recombination of very familiar policy ideas in the education field such as school choice/vouchers, SBM, or decentralization. In this sense, ePPP do not represent a rupture with previous educational debates, such as the privatization debate. In fact, as we observed in various events, a number of policy-makers problematized the fact that they did not perceive many differences between ‘partnerships’ and traditional privatization. Being aware of this ‘confusion,’ ePPP theorizers try to disassociate their ideas from previous programs and, specifically, from conventional privatization. They normally do it by saying that, in contrast to privatization, in partnership frameworks, the state is the ‘ultimately responsible agent for the service being delivered’ and ‘keeps its regulatory powers’ (Interview ePPP expert 01).

However, it should be acknowledged that the privatization debate on social public services, due to their social returns, rarely considers privatization in absolute terms and in all the associated policy areas. Education privatization has almost never resulted in a complete transference of education provision, funding, and ownership from the public to the private sector. Rather, it has meant the establishment of public–private mixes that are actually similar to those solutions presented in the ePPP program. Moreover, the fact that, under partnerships, the state keeps its regulatory power does not automatically make them different from privatization. In fact, privatization does not necessarily go together with deregulation, but with regulatory changes that contribute to more private sector involvement in certain policy areas. As Wettenhall and Thynne (1999, 159) stated ‘only the naïve believed they could privatize and deregulate at the same time.’

In short, the magnetism of the partnerships concept, together with all the institutional diffusion backing the program, creates the illusion of an education policy innovation. However, the specific policies behind ePPP still sound *too* similar to previous education practices and, specifically, to the privatization agenda. This fact, apart from undermining the novelty factor, makes some policy-makers skeptical of ePPP because, as Teisman and Klijn (2002, 197) observed, they may think that PPPs are a new ‘language game’ to put forward traditional contracting-out and privatization policies.

Clarity

In relation to the clarity premise (i.e. new policy ideas need to be clearly formulated to be taken out by policy-makers), frame analysis shows lights and shadows. On the one hand, the ePPP program is consistent in terms of diagnosis and prognosis since the policy solutions formulated are coherent with the problems and the causes of the problems identified. However, on the other hand, the scope of the policy stream and the definition of ePPP itself are not as well worked out. The program covers too many areas of collaboration between the public and the private sectors to the extent that it seems that any kind of public–private mixing, as far as it takes place under a contractual form, can be considered an ePPP. The fact that the ePPP program merges many policy ideas together that do not always fit in a single and coherent policy stream is something that often confuses policy-makers and, consequently, undermines the focus of the debates on the topic. In most of the events observed, and as even acknowledged in some interviews, policy-makers mix up ePPP with conventional contracting out policies and, especially, with the ‘multi-stakeholders partnerships’ proposed by the World Economic Forum (which is a type of partnership of a very different nature to the more operational one discussed in this article).

Another aspect that is not clearly defined in the ePPP program, and that also raises the concerns of a group of policy-makers, is the role of the for-profit sector in partnerships frameworks. The nature of for-profit private schools is very different to that of non-for-profit private schools (such as those run by religious groups, community organizations, or NGOs) (Fennell 2007). In the interviews, the ePPP experts affirm that they are aware of this difference, but, at the prognostic level, they refer to the ‘private sector’ as a monolithic category.⁷ Therefore, the particularities of partnering with the for-profit sector are not specified. This irresolution can be problematic at the moment of building partnerships due to, for instance, the limitations of the for-profit sector to provide services to the vulnerable population and to deliver public goods in a nondiscriminatory way (Ball 2007; Rosenau 2000).

However, in strategic terms, ambiguity in the partnership discourse is not necessarily an inherent weakness. Actually, playing with ambiguity is a common semiotic strategy adopted by political actors to put forward their policy preferences. According to Klijn (2010, 70) ambiguity is an asset when it comes to motivating different actors to adopt PPPs since ‘the more you specify the partnership construction beforehand, the more likely it is that disagreement will arise.’ In any case, ambiguity may prove to be an effective strategy at the moment of setting the agenda, but may be problematic when implementing policies (i.e. at the time the policy idea needs to be translated into specific policy measures). A lack of clarity also negatively affects, as observed, the quality of the policy debate on partnerships and makes it difficult to reach conclusions.

Feasibility

Apart from being clearly formulated, new policy ideas also need to be perceived as technically feasible. In this respect, our semiotic analysis shows that the ePPP proposal also has pros and cons, although the balance falls on the side of the cons. On the pros side, the analyzed documentation details the regulatory conditions that will contribute to partnerships having the expected effects. Most countries that have the required legal expertise can effectively implement the necessary regulatory

changes that ePPP require. However, on the other side, the implementation of partnership models, particularly those involving competitive funding formulas (a la vouchers), requires such a level of human and material resources that can hardly be met in many developing contexts. Probably, one of the most important pitfalls in the ePPP program construction is that it expects governments to be technically and economically able to deploy a very complex set of support services and procedures (including bidding, quality assurance, student transportation, public information, or disputes settlement).⁸ Furthermore, if the for-profit sector is to be included in partnerships, the incentives that the state should provide to them to reach the neediest population could make its implementation even more costly.

Paradoxically, despite the fact that budgetary constraints are basic aspects of the ePPP justification, one of the main barriers for its implementation could be found in its high cost. The point here is that the main source of cost saving under ePPP would come from a more intensive exploitation of teachers' labor. It should be acknowledged that teachers' salaries account for the bulk of recurrent expenditure, especially in less developed countries (Lewin 2007). Thus, by bypassing the public employment regulations and through the payment of much lower salaries for teachers, ePPP could drastically reduce public expenditure on education.⁹ The WB (2009, 11) is quite open about this idea when it says that 'in those countries where public sector staff is paid high wages as a result of belonging to strong unions, there is a cost saving associated with the contractor being able to hire nonunionized labor.'

The latter raises a second feasibility problem for the implementation of ePPP, which is that of the political opposition of teachers. Despite teachers being strategic allies to achieve the EFA goals (UNESCO 2005), the ePPP proponents usually perceive them, and specifically teacher unions, as a major constraint to advancing partnerships (Interviews ePPP expert 04 and 05, WB 2009). Teacher organizations are a powerful constituency in most countries and without them it would be difficult to implement the deep reforms that the partnerships' idea involves.¹⁰ Public management scholars usually perceive PPPs as a corporatist development strategy that aims to bring together three nonstate constituencies such as the private sector, labor, and civil society, in governance activities (Mitchell-Weaver and Manning 1991). However, the proponents of partnerships in the educational field tend to privilege the private sector as the key partner, while excluding the two other constituencies, especially labor.¹¹

Another feasibility issue is related to the fact that the ePPP discourse is deeply critical of the public sector's capacity to run public services. The ePPP proponents emphasize the qualities of the private sector (efficiency, competition, outputs-oriented culture, and so on), but neglect the qualities or potential qualities of the public sector. They insinuate that the private sector should be teaching government actors how they should proceed in the education business. In this sense, the ePPP program resembles more a uni-directional mentoring relationship (from the private to the public) that undermines the *mutual learning* principle, which is an important policy principle usually highlighted in the literature on partnerships (Linder 1999; Wettenhall 2003; Woods and Woods 2004).¹² For dissemination purposes, this is problematic in the sense that, the audience that should take the program out and implement it may feel attacked. As observed in some of the events, particularly in that organized by UNESCO-IIEP in September 2010, this is something from the ePPP rhetoric that dislikes education ministry representatives. In fact, some of the ministry representatives that attended this event complained by email afterwards to the organizers because they

invited an excessive number of speakers with a pro-market bias and with a discourse that they felt scorned the public sector (Interview ePPP expert 09).

A final element affecting the feasibility of ePPP, but also its consistency, is related to the *risk sharing* principle. Risk sharing means that both the private and the public parties need to face risks, principally capital risks, when working together under partnership frameworks (Thomson, Goodwin, and Yescombe 2005). Similarly to mutual learning, this is a policy principle very much present in the PPPs generalist literature. However, the education narrative on partnerships barely develops how this principle should be translated into concrete procedures and rules. In fact, in the way ePPP are defined, most of the capital investment risk falls on the public sector side. As the WB (2009, 35) admits, 'risk-sharing plays a minimal role' in operational ePPP such as those including the private management of schools, vouchers, and/or subsidies.

Empirical credibility

Finally, new ideas need to contain convincing and consistent cause and effect arguments in order to have a greater impact. The ePPP proposal looks sophisticated in this respect. Most of the literature and interviews analyzed show the benefits of partnerships for education using scientific and technical arguments. The scientific style seems far from the moral or principle-based discourse that dominates the education privatization debate (see Levin 2002). However, the arguments used to prove ePPP benefits in a causal way, have some methodological and analytical limitations.

Firstly, as the analyzed documents themselves warn, the evidence on the topic is not conclusive and, despite there being a high number of studies on the topic, only a few of them yield robust conclusions (WB 2009). Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that the methodological strategies that are usually deployed to evaluate the impact of education quasi-markets (including voucher schemes and school competition interventions) are not robust enough, or do not have data of enough quality, which is something that leads to contradictory results and, therefore, to endless debates on the costs/benefits of this kind of policy (Klees 2008).¹³ On many occasions, the research cited in the ePPP reports is based on bi-variable regression analysis that attributes too much explanatory weight to the intervention variable (such as choice, competition or contracting-out policies), when other variables affecting schools' performance, usually of a qualitative nature, such as the collective identity of teachers, the peer effect among students, or local social norms affecting education choices, and experiences of children and their families are usually omitted (see Fennell and Arnot 2008; Hanushek et al. 2003; Jaimovich 2012).

Secondly, the expected benefits of ePPP are based on unwarranted inferences and rationalistic assumptions (such as those of 'perfect information' or 'benefits maximization') that may be challenged by the prevailing conditions in most developing contexts. Empirical studies show that, although the right to choose, and even information on the quality of schools are given to families, many of them, above all those affected by poverty, will not exercise this right as the ePPP model would expect (i.e. choosing the highest quality school). Rather than on school quality, families may choose a school based on criteria such as proximity, social relations, religion preferences, or discipline in class (Härmä 2009; Nieuwenhuys 1993). Moreover, in poor, rural, or unpopulated areas, families may not have enough accessible providers to choose properly. Facing this constraint would require, for

instance, an expensive and complex system of information and transport that, among other effects, would undermine the cost-saving potential of partnership frameworks.

Thirdly, ePPP stipulate that those schools that underperform will be expelled from the partnership framework and will be replaced by others. But, again, many governments from low-income countries may not have this option because the private education offer in their country is insufficient or does not reach minimum quality standards. Thus, based on economic theory, ePPP proponents claim that partnerships in education should work, but, as Lewin (2007) warns, they are too often inspired by experiences and models coming from well-developed, professionalized, regulated, and partly marketed education systems that may not be transferable to partly developed, poorly professionalized, largely unregulated systems such as those existing in most low-income countries.¹⁴

Last but not least, the ePPP proponents use evidence selectively to highlight the benefits of quasi-markets in education. Some of the documents analyzed repeat insistently the same ideas about the potential benefits of partnerships¹⁵ and refer to the research of related scholars, whereas they misrepresent and omit important pieces of research pointing at the neutral or even negative effects they can have, above all in terms of education inequalities, such as Braun, Jenkins, and Grigg (2006), Easterly (2001), Gibbons, Machin, and Silva (2008), Levin (1999), Lubien-ski (2003), Whitty and Power (2000), etc.¹⁶ On occasion, critical authors are quoted in the ePPP documents. However, the essential arguments of these scholars are usually misrepresented or their work is simply used to provide background data.¹⁷ In contrast, the ideas of like-minded scholars, such as Hoxby, Hanushek, and Wößmann are more properly developed.

This type of argumentative shortcut and selection bias can be explained by the aspiration of policy entrepreneurs to convince their audience about their preferences. However, in the case of the ePPP promotion, the fact that, first, evidence is inconclusive, second, most evidence comes from a reality the conditions of which are far from being met in many low-income countries and, third, arguments are based upon a biased selection of the evidence may undermine the chances of partnerships being seen as a superior policy option.

Conclusions

PPPs for education are a bricolage between new policy ideas and a number of managerial practices previously debated and implemented in the educational field, such as SBM, contracting education services, and school choice. Partnerships in education are being promoted as a cost-effective and fast solution to bring 'Education for All' to developing contexts. However, the ambition of ePPP goes beyond introducing a new policy solution, of a technical nature, in a number of countries. ePPP should be also understood as a political project that aims to alter the current paradigm of education reform in low-income contexts. On the one hand, this programmatic idea generates a new interpretation schema on what the new role of the state in education should be, and why and how governments should engage with the private sector to provide educational goods. On the other hand, it attempts to move the focus of education reform further away from an inputs rationale to a reform agenda with outputs, governance, and managerial solutions at its core.

The ePPP programmatic idea has been formulated and disseminated by a transnational policy network of education experts, which is not especially wide, but is

strategically placed in influential international organizations. The policy entrepreneurs involved in this network share a similar meaning system on the relationship between education and privatization and agree on the importance of promoting private sector development in education. Using Mundy's (2002) terms, they consider that bringing the private sector into education is, rather than unfortunately necessary, inherently desirable. Despite their ideological preferences, the members of this network advocate for the advance of ePPP mostly through a scientific and technical style.

The ePPP discourse resonates very positively in the current political and ideational context and has, what Linder (1999) calls, an accommodationist effect (i.e. a range of political ideologies that fit at ease with the 'partnerships' frame). This is something that, definitely, has contributed to the ePPP discourse gaining centrality within the global education domain. However, ePPP have some weaknesses when it comes to a range of frame dimensions such as clarity, feasibility, and empirical credibility. In relation to the latter, the arguments supporting the ePPP advance are very selective and misrepresent an important part of the evidence on the topics of school choice, competition, and other quasi-markets in education. Even then, they cannot present conclusive evidences on the superiority of ePPP over other forms of educational delivery. Policy entrepreneurs would like to say 'partnerships work,' but they cannot do so in a very convincing way. In this sense, they seem to be trapped between two semiotic orders: the scientific one, governed by rigor, and the political one, ruled by incentives to innovate and to spread new policy ideas internationally.

The above-mentioned aspects may inhibit the selection and retention of ePPP in particular contexts. Policy-makers may be reluctant to adopt a practice that does not come with sufficient guarantees of success and the implementation of which may turn out to be technically complex and too costly. However, the education crises and the low learning outcomes experienced in many countries (which predisposes policy-makers to find new policy solutions), together with the dissemination machinery and the loans from the international organizations backing the proposal, could make up for the ideational weaknesses of the proposal.

The scope of this case study has been restricted to the agenda-setting and dissemination moments of the policy process. To have a more complete picture of the implications and impact of the ePPP idea, more research is needed. Future research, on the one hand, should analyze the processes of selection and retention of ePPP in particular territories and among specific practice communities such as ministries of education and international aid agencies. On the other hand, new research should analyze the implementation and the effects of ePPP in developing countries and, in particular, in the schooling experience of the most vulnerable population. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, variables such as local social norms, school segregation, or the educational strategies and preferences of different social groups, which are factors usually omitted by the ePPP epistemic community, could be incorporated in the analytical models to more accurately evaluate the effects of partnerships on school achievement and equity.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the two anonymous referees and to the IS Academie 'Education and Development' reading-group (H.K. Altinyelken, M.L.B. Chelpi, D.B. Edwards, R. Huijsmans, T.A. Lopes-Cardozo, M. Poppema, I.M. Soeterik, S. VanderKaaij) for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper, and to Ruarri Rogan for his dedication and interest in assisting this research.

Notes

1. The IFC is the agency of the WB group specialized in lending to the private sector.
2. CfBT is a UK charity that provides a wide range of educational services internationally, including school inspection, teacher training, and curriculum design.
3. James Tooley was initially part of this network. However, he became a very 'uncomfortable ally' due to the radical nature of his proposals (Tooley has a libertarian and anti-state approach to education), but also due to the perceived lack of rigor of the data sources he uses to build his arguments (Interview ePPP expert 03). As a consequence, he became gradually displaced from the ePPP network.
4. The media impact of the report can be consulted on <http://go.worldbank.org/B5NIV-IGXN0> (accessed 7 July 2010).
5. It should be acknowledged that other international actors, such as UNESCO (including IIEP-UNESCO) and the World Economic Forum have been theorizing and promoting partnerships with the private sector for education purposes, but from a very different perspective. They focus on the so-called Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships, which conceive the private sector as a philanthropic funder of education, rather than as a school services provider (Draxler 2008).
6. Decisions about staffing, curriculum, didactics, etc. should be taken by the schools in the exercise of their autonomy (CfBT 2008; IFC 2001).
7. Some of them even affirm, 'if it's religious schools or nonprofit or private for-profit schools serving people I don't care. If somebody can come in and do the job then I'm pretty agnostic about it' (Interview ePPP expert 05).
8. See a similar critique of the vouchers schemes in Levin (1999).
9. For instance, in countries such as India, contract teachers receive salaries that, in some cases, are as low as 10% of those of state-school teachers (Srivastava 2006).
10. The ePPP promoters are aware of this so-called 'political economy problem' and suggest that, to prevent opposition, policy-makers should consult with education stakeholders when designing partnerships (Interview ePPP expert 05). They also suggest that it may be 'useful for policymakers to recruit leading figures in the politics and business communities who understand the potential benefits of PPPs and can use their influence to help to overcome any resistance' (WB 2009, 5).
11. More recently, CfBT has been working on a 'three legs' partnership model that includes government, private sector, and civil society. They claim the importance of the latter (Interview ePPP expert 03), but still exclude organized labor from the model.
12. Mutual learning means that the different parties involved in partnerships should adopt values, norms, and perspectives from each other. For instance, planning skills and an *a priori* commitment with social cohesion and democracy are some of the values that the public sector could transmit to the private one in the context of partnerships (Linder 1999; Rosenau 2000).
13. In the US context, methodological issues around education quasi-markets studies have even raised heated debates. See Hernandez (2005).
14. The Netherlands case is revealing in this respect. It is spotlighted to show that high levels of private provision, school choice, and autonomy correlate with high levels of students' performance. Apart from being successful in academic terms, the Dutch system is also considered 'cost effective, yielding good results at relatively low cost' (WB 2009, 8). This argument, however, misrepresents the importance of the extraordinary amount of resources that the Dutch government invests in education – 5350 per student per year at primary education, and 7110 at secondary level (Ministry of Education – The Netherlands, 2009), which is far from being invested in the territories where the WB intervenes.
15. In WB (2009), a similar set of benefits is exposed six times. Moreover, a very different emphasis is given to the potential costs or negative effects of ePPP that, when mentioned, are immediately followed by recommendations on how to ameliorate them. In fact, instead of using the concept 'costs' (as the antonym of benefits), the ePPP literature usually uses softer language such as 'concerns' or 'challenges.'
16. See UNESCO (2009) and Waslander, Pater, and Weide (2010) for two quite comprehensive literature reviews on education markets.
17. This can be observed, for instance, in the way scholars such as Molnar or Hatcher are quoted in WB (2009).

Notes on contributor

Antoni Verger is a 'Ramon y Cajal' researcher at the Department of Sociology of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and a research fellow at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) of the University of Amsterdam. His PhD research on the international liberalization of higher education has been published in the book *'WTO/GATS and the global politics of higher education'* (Routledge 2010). His main areas of expertise are, on the one hand, global education policy and international development, with a focus on the role of international organizations and transnational civil society networks and, on the other hand, education privatization and quasi-markets in education. He has published extensively on these topics in international journals such as *Comparative Education Review*, *Globalization Societies and Education*, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *Revista de Educació*, and *Journal of Education Policy*.

References

- Ball, S.J. 2007. *Education plc: Understanding private sector participation in public sector education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ball, S.J., and S. Exley. 2010. Making policy with 'good ideas': Policy networks and the 'intellectuals' of New Labour. *Journal of Education Policy* 25, no. 2: 151–69.
- Barnett, M., and M. Finnemore. 2004. *Rules for the World: International organizations in global politics*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Béland, D. 2005. Ideas and social policy: An institutionalist perspective. *Social Policy & Administration* 39, no. 1: 1–18.
- Benford, R.D., and D.A. Snow. 2000. Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–39.
- Blyth, M.M. 1997. 'Any more bright ideas?' The ideational turn of comparative political economy. *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 2: 229–50.
- Boxenbaum, E., and J. Battilana. 2005. Importation as innovation: Transposing managerial practices across fields. *Strategic Organization* 3, no. 4: 355–83.
- Braun, H., F. Jenkins, and W. Grigg. 2006. *Comparing private schools and public schools using hierarchical linear modeling*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Campbell, J.L. 1998. Institutional analysis and the role of ideas in political economy. *Theory and Society* 27, no. 3: 377–409.
- Campbell, J.L. 2004. *Institutional change and globalization*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cardini, A. 2006. An analysis of the rhetoric and practice of educational partnerships in the UK: An arena of complexities, tensions and power. *Journal of Education Policy* 21, no. 4: 393–415.
- CfBT. 2008. *PPPs in basic education. An international review*. London: CfBT.
- Colclough, C. 1996. Education and the market: Which parts of the neoliberal solution are correct? *World Development* 24, no. 4: 589–610.
- Dale, R. 1999. Specifying globalisation effects on national policy: Focus on the mechanisms. *Journal of Education Policy* 14, no. 1: 1–17.
- Draxler, A. 2008. *New partnerships for EFA: Building on experience*. Paris: UNESCO-IIEP and World Economic Forum.
- Easterly, W. 2001. The middle class consensus and economic development. *Journal of Economic Growth* 6, no. 4: 317–35.
- Fairclough, N. 2000. *New labour, new language?*. London: Routledge.
- Fennell, S. 2007. Tilting at windmills: Public–private partnerships in Indian education today. *RECOUP Working Paper* 5: 1–18.
- Fennell, S., and M. Arnot. 2008. Decentering hegemonic gender theory: The implications for educational research. *Compare* 38, no. 5: 525–38.
- Gasper, D. 1996. Analysing policy arguments. *The European Journal of Development Research* 8, no. 1: 36–62.
- Gibbons, S., S. Machin, and O. Silva. 2008. Competition, choice and pupil achievement. *Journal of the European Economic Association* 6, no. 4: 912–47.
- Glendinning, C., M.A. Powell, and K. Rummery. 2002. *Partnerships, new labour and the governance of welfare*. Bristol: Policy Press.

- Hanushek, E., A.J.F. Kain, J.M. Markman, and S.G. Rivkin. 2003. Does peer ability affect student achievement? *Journal of Applied Econometrics* 18, no. 5: 527–44.
- Härmä, J. 2009. Can choice promote education for all? Evidence from growth in private primary schooling in India. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 39, no. 2: 151–65.
- Hay, C. 2002. *Political analysis. A critical introduction*. New York, NY: Palgrave.
- Hernandez, J.C. 2005. Star ec prof caught in academic feud. *The Harvard Crimson*. <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2005/7/8/star-ec-prof-caught-in-academic/>.
- Hodge, G., and C. Greve. 2010. Public–private partnerships: Governance scheme or language game? *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 69, no. 1: S8–S22.
- Horne, J.R. 2002. *A social laboratory for modern France: The Musée social & the rise of the welfare state*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- IFC. 2001. Handbook on PPPs and education. <http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/edinvest.nsf/Content/PublicPrivatePartnerships>.
- Jaimovich, A. 2012. The role of central management structures in PPPs. The case of Fe y Alegria schools in Peru. In *Public private partnerships and the global governance of education*, ed. S. Robertson, A. Verger, K. Mundy, and F. Mensahy. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Jessop, B., and S. Oosterlynck. 2008. Cultural political economy: On making the cultural turn without falling into soft economic sociology. *Geoforum* 39, no. 3: 1155–69.
- Kingdon, J.W. 2002. *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Klees, S.J. 2008. Reflections on theory, method, and practice in comparative and international education. *Comparative Education Review* 52, no. 3: 301–28.
- Klijn, E.H. 2010. PPPs: Deciphering meanings, message and phenomenon. In *International handbook on public–private partnerships*, ed. G.A. Hodge, C. Greve, and A.E. Boardman, 68–80. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Levin, H.M. 1999. The public–private nexus in education. *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 1: 124–37.
- Levin, H.M. 2002. A comprehensive framework for evaluating educational vouchers. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 24, no. 3: 159–74.
- Lewin, K.M. 2007. The limits to growth of non-government: Private schooling in sub Saharan Africa. In *Private schooling in less economically developed countries: Asian and African perspectives*, ed. P. Srivastava and G. Walford, 41–65. Oxford: Symposium.
- Linder, S.H. 1999. Coming to terms with the public–private partnership: A grammar of multiple meanings. *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 1: 35–51.
- Lubienski, C. 2003. Innovation in education markets: Theory and evidence on the impact of competition and choice in charter schools. *American Educational Research Journal* 40, no. 2: 395–443.
- Miller-Adams, M. 1999. *The World Bank: New agendas in a changing world*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ministry of Education – The Netherlands. 2009. *Education, culture and science: Key figures 2004–2008*. Den Haag: Ministry of Education.
- Mintrom, M. 1997. The state-local nexus in policy innovation diffusion: The case of school choice. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 27, no. 3: 41–60.
- Mitchell-Weaver, C., and B. Manning. 1991. Public–private partnerships in third world development: A conceptual overview. *Studies in Comparative International Development* 26, no. 4: 45–67.
- Mundy, K.E. 2002. Retrospect and prospect: Education in a reforming World Bank. *International Journal of Educational Development* 22, no. 5: 483–508.
- Nieuwenhuys, O. 1993. To read and not to eat: South Indian children between secondary school and work. *Childhood* 1, no. 2: 100–9.
- Osborne, D., and T. Gaebler. 1993. *Reinventing government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector*. New York, NY: Plume.
- Pawson, R., and N. Tilley. 1997. *Realistic evaluation*. London: Sage.
- Rhoten, D. 2000. Education decentralization in Argentina: A ‘global–local conditions of possibility’ approach to state, market, and society change. *Journal of Education Policy* 15, no. 6: 593–619.

- Robertson, S. 2008. Embracing the global: Crisis and the creation of a new semiotic order to secure Europe's knowledge-based economy. In *Education and the knowledge-based economy in Europe*, ed. R. Jessop, N. Fairclough, and R. Wodak, 8http://dx.doi.org/9–108. Rotterdam: Sense.
- Rosenau, P.V. 2000. *Public–private policy partnerships*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Savas, E.S. 2000. *Privatization and public–private partnerships*. New York, NY: Chatham House.
- Seddon, T., S. Billett, and A. Clemans. 2004. Politics of social partnerships: A framework for theorizing. *Journal of Education Policy* 19, no. 2: 123–42.
- Srivastava, P. 2006. Why is schooling failing in the 'new' India? http://www.open2.net/society/international_development/india_failing_schooling.html.
- Stone, D.A. 1989. Causal stories and the formation of policy agendas. *Political Science Quarterly* 104, no. 2: 281–300.
- Teisman, G.R., and E.H. Klijn. 2002. Partnership arrangements: Governmental rhetoric or governance scheme? *Public Administration Review* 62, no. 2: 197–205.
- Thomson, C., J. Goodwin, and E.R. Yescombe. 2005. *Evaluation of PPP projects financed by the EIB*. Luxemburg: European Investment Bank.
- UNESCO. 2005. *EFA global monitoring report 2005. Education for All: The quality imperative*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. 2009. *EFA global monitoring report 2009 overcoming inequality: Why governance matters*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Van Waeyenberge, E. 2006. From Washington to post-Washington consensus. In *The new development economics: After the Washington consensus*, ed. B. Fine, 21–46. London: Zed Books.
- Walsh, J.I. 2000. When do ideas matter? Explaining the successes and failures of Thatcherite ideas. *Comparative Political Studies* 33, no. 4: 483–516.
- Waslander, S., C. Pater, and M. Weide. 2010. Markets in education: An analytical review of empirical research on market mechanisms in education. *OECD Education Working Paper* 52: 1–92.
- WB. 2009. *The role and impact of PPPs in education*. Washington, DC: The World Bank Group.
- Wettenhall, R. 2003. The rhetoric and reality of public–private partnerships. *Public Organization Review* 3, no. 1: 77–107.
- Wettenhall, R., and I. Thynne. 1999. Emerging patterns of governance: Synergy, partnerships and the public–private mix. *Asian Journal of Public Administration* 21, no. 2: 157–78.
- Whitty, G., and S. Power. 2000. Marketization and privatization in mass education systems. *International Journal of Educational Development* 20, no. 2: 93–107.
- Williams, J.H. 1997. The diffusion of the modern school. In *International handbook of education and development: Preparing schools students and nations for the twenty-first century*, ed. W.K. Cummings and N.F. McGinn, 63–86. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Wößmann, L. 2006. Public–private partnership and schooling outcomes across countries. CESifo Working Paper Series, 1662. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=889519>.
- Woods, P.A., and G.J. Woods. 2004. Modernizing leadership through private participation: A marriage of inconvenience with public ethos? *Journal of Education Policy* 19, no. 6: 643–72.