

SECTION 2

Introduction

This report represents the results of an interpretive case study conducted from December 2005 to December 2006. Conceptualization of the initial idea, the project purpose, target audiences, and design features evolved over months and included many expert opinions. This narrative report is intended to give readers a deeper understanding of how the National Literacy Secretariat Business and Labour Partnership Program has fostered partnership development since 1988.

What does partnership mean?

Partnership is becoming an ever more present idea as an approach to solving social, cultural and economic issues. It seems that the public and private sectors, business and medicine, education and social services are all contributing to the dialogue about the importance of partnership. However, the actual fostering of partnerships is difficult, especially as it relates to literacy. This topic is seldom discussed among people in government, the funding agencies who encourage partnership development, and the wider literacy community.

There is a tendency to use this term loosely, or to avoid defining it. Partnership represents a significant step beyond cooperation and collaboration but many lack a clear understanding of the partnership development process and its impacts on the community in its broadest sense. Moving away from a more legal or economic notion of partnership, the following quote provided a useful frame of reference for the research project. Poole (1995) defined partnership as:

an association between two or more persons, groups, or organizations who join together to achieve a common goal that neither one alone can

accomplish. This association is characterized by joint membership rights, by democratic participation and by shared responsibility. Each member agrees to contribute to the partnership with the understanding that the possession or enjoyment of the benefits will be shared by all. Partners work hard to strengthen each other and to endure conflict and change, because they recognize that their shared goal extends beyond the reach of any one member. (p.2)

What is interesting about this definition is that it begins to venture into the idea of social partnership. This is an increasingly popular form of collaborative action in which organizations from multiple sectors interact to achieve common goals. It carries the idea of collective strategies, problem-solving networks and tools for action.

The literature abounds with many concepts about partnership as can be seen from our focused review and annotations which are placed at the end of the report as Appendix A. Many of these ideas about partnership principles influenced the project direction and research design and are important to summarize here.

There are many different types of partnership.

1. Partnerships rely more on informal mechanisms and employ unconventional kinds of governance.
2. Leadership is a critical variable in partnership development.
3. Partnerships are characterized by developmental stages, flux, and transformation.
4. Tensions between the formal and informal exist in every partnership relationship.

What was the purpose of this project?

The purpose of this in-depth case study was to document a government initiative through Human Resources and Social Development Canada's (HRSDC) National Literacy Secretariat

called the Business and Labour Partnership Program. The overall intention was to understand the process of partnership development and the strategies that were used to engage business, labour, practitioners, and provincial and territorial governments in adult work-related literacy at a time when no such program model existed. It was also interested in documenting the ideas and approaches that were used as well as the different types of partnerships that developed at a time when most Canadians did not believe that a literacy problem existed. It was felt that this type of information might help demonstrate what a partnership program in real action looked like so that public servants and literacy practitioners could learn from the approach. From an historical point of view, the case study also recorded many of the major events and activities of the partnership program as described by the pioneering people who contributed significantly to Canadian adult work-related literacy.

What was the research design?

For the purpose of the research project, this case study was defined as an empirical inquiry that investigated a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially as the boundaries between the phenomenon and context were not clearly evident (Merriam, 1998). As a qualitative case study, attention was given to three specific features: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. This case study was particularistic because it focused on a particular program that had a type of longevity which allowed for important representations of the partnership phenomenon. It was also descriptive in that it used prose to describe, elicit images, and analyze the different influences of time on the program. This was done instead of reporting findings in numerical data. As well, the case study was heuristic in that, to some degree, previously unknown relationships and variables emerged which led to a re-thinking of the partnership phenomenon. As a result, there is a different understanding of what happened in the program's life.

The overall intent of the case study was interpretive. In other words, the descriptive data was used to illustrate and support some of the key theoretical positions in the literature of partnership

development and program planning in adult education. The model of analysis was deductive in that certain perspectives were chosen that helped explain partnership development and program planning from very different approaches.

Sampling, Instrument Development and Data Collection

“No project is too small if it helps to answer our own questions about how to improve the teaching and learning of literacies, in the workplace as elsewhere” (p. 290).

Belfiore, M.E., Defoe, T.A., Folinsbee, S., Hunter, J. and Jackson, N.S. (2004). *Reading Work: Literacies in the Workplace*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

In conducting this case study research, the single case, the NLS Business and Labour Partnership Program, was considered the most useful and purposeful. The primary instrumentation was semi-structured interview schedules. These interview questions and probes were developed for two groups of participants—business, labour and education interviewees and government interviewees. Questions for the interview schedules were drawn from a thorough literature review which focused on partnership development and program planning as well as a series of meetings with subject matter experts. The schedules were piloted and further revised and appear as Appendix B and Appendix C.

Considerable attention was given to the selection of the key informants. A matrix was constructed with categories and included the stakeholder groups of business, labour, education and government; regional and organizational affiliations such as national, provincial and territorial; program time periods of 1988–1995, 1996–2000, 2001–2006 and gender. Representation across the matrix categories resulted in a final list of 26 participants. (Appendix D).

A consent form for the interviewees was also developed and appears in Appendix E. Input and feedback on all major decisions concerning the project instrumentation and selection of the interviewees were provided by the National Advisory Committee. Data collection was extensive and drew on multiple sources of information—interviews, field notes, archival records and documents that were both print and electronic. Three project team members conducted the face-to-face interviews between May and July throughout the different regions of Canada. Documents were also collected during the interview process.

Data Preparation and Data Analysis

Recorded interviews and field notes were developed into narratives or stories for each key informant. The narratives were then subjected to a data coding process which appears as Appendix F. Four forms of data analysis were employed so as to make a detailed description of the case and its setting (Merriam, 1998). Categorical aggregation was the first technique used which produced a collection of instances and relevant meanings based on the coding scheme. The next procedure was the establishment of patterns and the correspondence between and among categories. For those single instances that did not fit into the patterns or did not help explain the relationship between categories, direct interpretation was used. As a final technique, generalizations from analyzing the data were developed into an implications section. At the preliminary analysis phase, the National Advisory Committee met to provide additional insights and meaning to the data. Finally, through the process of triangulation the different document data sources which appear in Appendix G were used to corroborate the main findings and shed light on certain themes that emerged. A total of 60 documents were used in this process. These documents were sorted into archival records, project reports, and project deliverables and then further categorized into the three program periods.

Who are the audiences for the case study?

One audience comprises program managers and policy analysts in a wide range of federal, provincial, and territorial government departments. This group may also be looking for innovative ways to promote and integrate adult learning, literacy, and essential skills. They may also be looking for models of partnership development. This case study report, or the other products of this project, may be used as tools to advance the merits of literacy partnership development to their senior executives.

A second audience comprises instructors from public and private training ventures whose work is to support the development of partnerships in its most varied form. Using different parts of the

case study report, these trainers may be able to promote the principles behind sound partnership building and to share this knowledge with program managers engaged in partnership development.

A third audience is workplace educators, such as coordinators and administrators working for labour, business, government or community-based agencies who are interested in forging a true partnership in their different milieus. This group of people can use the various sections of the report to enhance their outreach efforts to potential partners in the community and for making workplace literacy in-roads at the local, provincial and territorial, and federal levels. At a more general level, researchers, non-government organizations, and voluntary groups who are interested in community development capacity may benefit from the case study report or the other deliverables.

How is the report organized?

The case study report is organized into seven major sections. In the Executive Summary the key findings are presented along with the major implications of the study for practice, policy and research. The second section introduces the reader to the idea of partnership, the purpose of the project, and the methods used to collect and analyze the information. In the historical chronology, the reader is provided with an account of the political climate in which the NLS Business and Labour Partnership Program developed and traces the three periods of program time. The fourth section presents the key findings which are described around several major themes. This leads into the next section which offers a number of interpretations of the data drawn from the partnership and program planning literature. The sixth section outlines the implications of the case study from the viewpoints of practice, policy, and research. All of the support material that was used for the project is found in Appendices. An annotated bibliography of the literature review that was conducted along with the tools for data collection and analysis, as well as a list of the documents used, are found in this final part.

Terms

Throughout the report, various terms are used. Partner refers to those individuals representing a business, labour, education or government organization that worked with the National Literacy Secretariat on a collaborative basis. Stakeholder is a word used interchangeably with partner and can include other people in the field such as practitioners, researchers, and literacy experts. The word learner, trainee, employee and adult student are those individuals who have benefited from some type of workplace literacy service.