

Paper#: K078

THE IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING OF AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTOR.

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ABSTRACT

This research has taken an innovative approach to examining why Australian governments provide funding to non-government schools and by extension to the Not-for-profit (NFP) sector generally. Theories from sociology and the NFP literature provide a satisfying rationale for government funding of NFP organisations and the discharge of public accountability.

Using publicly available documentation and literature, the history of government funding of non-government, NFP schools in Australia is analysed. The analysis identifies that Social Origins Theory provides a comprehensive explanation for government funding of non-government schools and has the potential to be used more widely in the NFP sector. In particular this research has demonstrated the utility of Social Origins Theory to enable the wider NFP sector and the electorate to better understand the funding relationship between government and NFP organisations. This will contribute to NFP sustainability as they better and more efficiently target and structure funding applications.

Further, this paper investigates the use of Social Origins Theory to assess governments' public accountability for the funding of NFP organisations. The theory provides a powerful foundation for governments to discharge public accountability for their funding of NFP organisations. By teasing out the underlying rationale for why NFPs are publicly funded, this research has emphasised the relational nature of public accountability allowing governments to demonstrate more directly the link between policy decisions and expenditure. In doing so, it has identified a mechanism for discharging policy accountability for the expenditure of public funds outside of traditional financial reporting.

Keywords: public accountability, government funding, Not-for-profit, sustainability