

## Re-visioning from the inside: getting under the skin of the World Bank's Education Sector Strategy.

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### Abstract

This paper uses the device of imagining Education personnel at the World Bank engaging in study and discussion that causes them to rethink their 1999 Education Sector Strategy document. The Bank's educators discuss issues that lead them to see that the World Bank's assumptions of human capital theory are deficient. Having studied the severe limitations in the effectiveness of the education reforms of several countries, they admit not only that the education model being promoted by the Bank is flawed, but also that its preferred paradigm of modernist development is unsustainable. Thanks to the program of study and reflection, Bank educators decide to meet the challenge of reinventing themselves as educators collaborating with their national clients in developing new paradigms in which both creative education and sustainable development can flourish.

### Keywords:

Educational dysfunctionality; Subordinate literacies; Powerful literacies; Planetism; Education rethinking; World Bank education strategies.

The World Bank's 1999 Education Sector Strategy gives a situation analysis of the context of education in a changing world, and what it sees as the global priorities for education. It sets out a vision as to how quality in education for all through what it calls 'systemic reform' could be achieved. The goals and the thinking of the 1999 Education Sector Strategy can be briefly summarised as follows:

1. Investment in the education of human 'capital' will bring returns in the form of economic growth, 'development' and social cohesion.
2. This investment in human 'capital' will take the form of improving the current formal education system.
3. This education system must be expanded, so that all can have access to it from early childhood (increased early interventions) to adulthood, and across genders and culturally diverse groups. The emphasis is on expanding basic, non-formal education for the poorest.
4. The education system must be improved in terms of quality
5. New partnerships are to be forged between education stakeholders - governments, parents, communities, non-government organisations, financial foundations, and teachers and their organisations.
6. Other social requirements, such as student health and good governance, must be attended to as well as education.

On the surface, it seems to be commonsense to place priorities in funding and development on basic education for the poorest, early interventions in the area of early childhood education and health programs, innovative delivery especially through information technology, and system reform including standards, curriculum, assessment, governance and seeking additional sources of financing. These might all be satisfactory strategies by themselves, but they are problematic when considered in the context of the reality of the impoverished countries that turn to the World Bank for education loans. They are such a small part of the picture of education and development, and so selective, that the sequence of recommendations is arguably simplistic –that is, it projects a misleading surface gloss, ignoring the murky problems below. It is not enough to assert that the education system must be expanded, without an analysis of the model of education that is to be expanded, the assumptions behind expanding it, the model of development to which it is required to contribute, and the implications of such development for the planet. The focus of the World Bank's education strategy on goals divorced from their ideological

assumptions gives a distorted understanding of global educational problems and possibilities. This essay will explore a different way of understanding the global education picture by using a scenario of the future.

### **1. A new director of Education at the World Bank.**

We are leaping three years ahead of the present, to the year 2004. In this future scenario, there is a new director of the World Bank education sector. She encourages her staff to develop alternative understandings of the strategies needed to change and improve education, and to work in new ways to support this process. She is a multilingual African-Brazilian woman, appointed in 2001. The new director of education is supported in her drive for change by new senior leadership at the World Bank, including several African women. With their socially committed, activist backgrounds, the new leaders have been able to promote the implementation of new programs in the World Bank. Through these programs the World Bank, with its US\$30 billion a year development assistance budget, has been more effectively than in the past helping the poorest people on earth. One prominent official stands by the assertion that she made in 2000, that 'The World Bank is a global institution owned by all of us. Unless we dismantle it, we have to engage with it...If we... engage with it with an eye to making it work better, we can do a lot more good than demonstrating in the streets for those people who are struggling on the margins of life, who have no hope of getting on top of all their problems, such as HIV/AIDS, the digital divide, etc, etc,' (Mayne 2000: 31). Within the Bank, there have always been some dissenting voices critiquing narrow neo-liberal assumptions, and these now lend their support to the Bank's new, more effective development programs.

In this climate of change, the Bank's conventional approach to education, embodied in the education Sector Strategy of 1999, clearly had to be rethought. Between 2002-2005, the staff in the Education section of the World Bank, many of whom had done their degrees in neo-classical / neo-liberal economics at the famous Friedman-Rostow University in Chicago, are now willing to study differently in order to prepare themselves for their role as technical advisers to governments in the countries which seek education loans. The new director of Education made a point of employing women and men from a range of developing countries to join the Bank Education staff, and this is a source of much creative rethinking. In the professional development process that she sets up, collaborative, group-organised study is key, as is the absorption of ideas from diverse views including those of socially critical, ecology-oriented scholars from both 'North' and 'South'. It is now over five years since the Education Sector Strategy was published, and with reorganisatio at the Bank, the new staff in the education sector are applying their new ideas to reviewing, rethinking and rewriting it.

First, the study groups took a critical look at the basic philosophical assumption of the 1999 document, that of human capital theory. Next they debated the document's ideas about the nature and powers of literacy, and from there went on to discuss the inherent weaknesses of the system of education inherited from 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, implanted around the world by colonial regimes, and minimally modified by decolonising states. Then, they considered an alternative role for Bank education sector staff. In the past, despite wanting to help countries to improve their education arrangements, all their advice had been inadequate to prevent the entrenchment of dysfunctionality in the system. Their critique is part of a process of re-visioning the educational role of the World Bank. Arrived at after much discussion, it elaborated the following ideas.

### **2. Debunking claims for 'human capital'**

Discussion at first clung to the idea that there was no alternative to human capital theory. It seemed as clear as day that countries needed to achieve the highest possible degree of literacy and universal schooling in order to 'succeed' in a globalising economy. Obviously, argued the Bank educators, the ills and disparities of society can be remedied by an increased investment in education as a means of improving the quality of 'human capital'. Who could doubt that the gap between rich and poor countries and people can be substantially diminished by well-planned educational programs? The words of the 1999 document expressed their faith: "It has long been self-evident that education, in addition to its immediate

benefits, is also a form of investment, building people's capacity to be more productive, earn more, and enjoy a higher quality of life. The rise of human capital theory since the 1960s, and its widespread acceptance now after thorough debate, has provided conceptual underpinnings and statistical evidence' (p. 6). Holding fast to these assumptions, they were initially dismissive of scholarly critiques such as those by Maglen (1990), Jones (1992: 237-238), Arnove (1997) Coraggio (1994), Watson (1996), Samoff (2000), Welch (2000) and others.

After a lot of reading and debate, however, the study groups came to see the validity of such critiques. They acknowledge the point that the human capital model of the labour force is based on incorrect assumptions of deficits. The model assumes that some individuals or social subgroups persistently occupy the lower rungs of the occupational ladder because they suffer from some psychological or skill deficit - that they are 'culturally deprived' or 'socially disadvantaged'. It rests on the belief 'that the root of problems of maldistribution of resources and statuses lies within the individual, not the social structure, and can best be remedied by prescribing more education as cure for the deficit' (Bock and Papagiannis 1983:8-9). This preoccupation with person-centred variables lead to a 'blaming the victim' bias which has several functions. It displaces blame for the society's prior political and technological failures onto the poor. It reinforces social myths about people's degree of control over their own fate. It leads to a focus on individual countries rather than on the international system, in efforts to understand and tackle the problems of poverty. It encourages and justifies continued studies of the poor, their presumed learning deficiencies and compensatory strategies to tackle these, rather than of the powerful and influential, and of the way in which the privileged use elite authority and power to keep education for the poor in a subordinate role (Bock and Papagiannis 1983: Connell 1994).

In their new-century study groups, Bank educators learnt to see how education and socio-economic conditions are dialectically interlinked. They reached the conclusion that, even if impoverished countries were to improve their education systems in the way that the document advocates, this would not necessarily lead to 'more productive economies, more cohesive societies, more effective participation in collective affairs, and ultimately healthier and happier populations' (World Bank 1999:29). What it is more likely to do in the current context is to prepare workers for fitting easily as low-paid, expendable cogs in the wheels of a globalising capitalist economy based on contradictions that continue to impoverish many of the workers themselves (Sivanandan 1989). The Bank's traditional emphasis on expanding the primary school education of human capital rested on the assumption 'that the main resource of a developing country will be its cheap and flexible labour pool, producing goods and services for export (Coraggio, 1994, p. 168).

Bank educators realised that admitting the flaws in human capital theory does not, as many of them had feared, reject the argument that education can bring many benefits. What it does is to refuse to mislead people and feed false hopes by making sweeping and unproven correlations between a particular model of formal education and particular benefits. Moving away from adherence to human capital theory committed Bank educators to seeking for a more realistic and contextual appreciation of how labour markets work, how employment is structured, how jobs are created, and the ways in which education can contribute to the economic growth process. This research would be the foundation for reshaping education strategy. Influential in their rethinking were studies that showed that economic improvements in countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea were a result of a combination of factors such as active state planning along with entrepreneurship and massive financial assistance from Western countries, along with expanded and improved education (see McAfee 1991, pp. 147-156). Economic development is more likely to stimulate widespread literacy and higher levels of education rather than vice-versa. They were also impressed by the arguments of Maglen (1990, p. 292) who pointed to detailed country studies which showed that productivity gains associated with education are to do with the quality of the grounding workers have in maths, science and language, combined with the extent and thoroughness of the on-the-job training they are subsequently given. Such research suggests that education investment should seek to build up the quality of the core curriculum and to support good programs of vocational training.

The Bank study groups gain a new understanding of the contradictions, problems and complexities of the current globalising economy. They see that it is simply not enough for the 1999 document to insert a few throwaway lines to the effect that recent events such as the East Asian economic crisis show that ‘sustainable development requires many things in addition to strong economic performance’ (p. 6). They see the necessity, vividly expressed by Comaroff and Comaroff (2000), of interrogating the contradictions of neo-conservative, ‘millennial capitalism’ which presents itself as a gospel of salvation, invested with the capacity to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered (p. 292). This capitalism “appears both to include and to marginalize in unanticipated ways; to produce desire and expectation on a global scale... yet to decrease the certainty of work or the security of persons; to magnify class differences but to undercut class consciousness; above all, to offer up vast, almost instantaneous riches to those who master its spectral technologies – and simultaneously, to threaten the very existence of those who do not” (p.298).

Bank educators also read material which made the case more starkly, implying that the globalisation of neo-liberal capitalism is at the stage of needing concerted challenges from civic and consumer groups, rather than just interrogation. Their attention was drawn to the United Nation’s Human Development Report with its stinging indictment of the negative impact of economic globalization on the well-being of many of the world’s peoples (Shalom, 1999). The report points out that the gap between rich and poor has today ‘reached grotesque proportions’. In 1960, the countries with the wealthiest fifth of the world’s people had per capita incomes 30 times that of the poorest fifth. By 1990 this had doubled to 60 times that of the poorest fifth, and by 1995, 74 times. More than 80 countries have per capita incomes lower than a decade or more ago. These disparities translate into facts: that “in developing countries nearly 1.3 billion people do not have access to clean water, one in seven children of primary school age is out of school, 840 million people are malnourished, and an estimated 1.3 billion people live on incomes of less than \$1 a day. Even in the industrialized countries globalization has taken a grim toll. One person in eight suffers from either long-term unemployment, illiteracy, a life-expectancy of less than 60 years, or an income below the national poverty line” (Shalom 1999:1). As Michel Chossudovsky puts it, ‘the late 20<sup>th</sup> century will go down in World history as a period of global impoverishment marked by the collapse of productive systems in the developing World, the demise of national institutions and the disintegration of health and educational programs’. And this occurred in spite of the large post World War 2 expansion of education that the Bank itself has highlighted (World Bank 1999, p. 11).

After their study of the world economic system, some members of the Bank study groups reached the conclusion that it might well be thought of as a cruel hoax to assure Bank clients that progress will be assured if only they improve their weak national education systems in the Western way. They come to realise that one of their major incorrect assumptions had been that people are poor because they lack education. They were now able to see that this was a blaming the victim stance – instead, they realised, people lack education because they are kept in an impoverished position. The study groups also came to realise that economic growth in the current world system is not necessarily a self-evident good (Mies and Shiva 1993, Rowe and Silverstein 1999) as much development thinking would have it. They gained a new respect for the movements of people in impoverished countries struggling to protect their traditional environments from the ravages of the global market economy. Realising that neo-liberal development is not the answer to poverty and inequality, Bank educators are now willing to explore the conviction of many in the ‘Third World’ that this kind of development ‘is merely the latest incarnation of the five-hundred-year legacy of European colonialism’, intensifying toxic hazards, sweatshop industries, environmental destruction, malnutrition and social decay. Not only does it assault people’s health and well-being; more importantly, as India’s Vandana Shiva points out, it ‘systematically degrades the knowledge, skills and cultural practices that have made it possible for people to thrive completely outside of a commercial context for thousands of years’ (Norberg-Hodge 1996, Tokar, 2000). The institutions of Western-style schooling are all too often complicit in the degradation rather than the enhancement of local culture (Aikman 1999).

There is agreement that what World Bank Education Section should be advocating is a completely different approach – starting, for example, with Bank clients being assisted to undertake a systematic study of the dysfunctionality of the traditional Western education system, its demonstrable inability to prepare majorities adequately to deal with globalisation. Where might this lead the Bank’s nation-state clients? Perhaps it will contribute to a national process of designing education systems in a new way that can help people fight the negatives of economic globalization and forge a sustainable way of life.

### **3. Debunking overblown claims for literacy-and-education**

The Bank study groups come to the new understanding that it is simplistic to argue, as they did in the 1999 document, that ‘advances in literacy and other learning may well have done more to improve the human condition than any other public policy’ (p. 17). The groups realize that something called ‘literacy and learning’ does not necessarily empower people. They learn that the standard picture of literacy-as-empowerment is not only simplistic, but is seen as dangerously misguided by scholars who have analysed literacy within its socio-historical context in specific countries (for example Graff 1987, Gee 1988). These scholars seek both to take away the ‘crutch’ that enables us to lean on the powerful and redeeming effects of literacy, and to reconceptualize the role of literacy and education in history and society. Gee (1988) demonstrates from the European experience that literacy and education neither necessarily follow, nor necessarily stimulate, economic development. As with the history of literacy everywhere, people were taught to ‘see’ meanings from the perspective of an authoritative institution. The way in which literacy has been used has been to solidify the social hierarchy, empower elites, and ensure that people lower in the hierarchy accept the values, norms and beliefs of the elites, even when it is not in their interest to do so. In educational institutions in the USA, as elsewhere, ‘(T)wo quite different sorts of literacy are being taught, one stressing thinking for oneself, suitable to higher positions in the social hierarchy, and the other stressing deference, suitable for lower positions’ Gee (1988: 204-205).

Economic development is more likely to stimulate widespread literacy and higher levels of education rather than vice versa. If economic development is thwarted by the injustices of the kind of global and national capitalism which maintains neo-colonial structures, then educational modernization and expansion cannot be expected to be the main instrument for developing the economy. *In a crisis-ridden, decaying economy, improved education will probably result in the twin problems of educated unemployment and a brain drain* (see Dale 1989, Ramphal Report 1993: 238-239). This is not to say that universal literacy and higher levels of education are not important goals. Rather, it is to stress that literacy and increased education cannot be seen as the panacea that will lead impoverished countries and societies into Western-style ‘progress’. The fact is that neo-colonial economies are so deeply distorted and constrained by the injustices of international capitalism – deepened by the contradictions of globalization - as well as by internal inefficiencies, that it would take much more than higher levels of literacy and education to tackle economic problems.

It was a big learning curve for the Bank study groups to realise, further, that all is not well with the Western-style education system that developing countries inherited from their colonial eras. Expanding and improving this system may not be the answer to problems in the way that Bank staff used to take for granted. The trouble is that efforts to reform education systems, even the efforts supported by the World Bank, tend not to get to the heart of deeper problems which include: (i) the stratification of school-based literacy through a curriculum and examination system that serves to perpetuate social inequality (ii) the failure of the average school curriculum to combine general and vocational studies in such a way as to prepare students for the tasks of holistic and sustainable social and economic development, and (iii) the failure of most education systems to help teachers utilise the best of pedagogical and technological possibilities to improve the educational experience. The study groups come to understand how the education system is stratified in terms of the literacies that are provided for clients. This is a key step in helping them to reconceptualise their inadequate ideas of the meaning of ‘quality’ in education.

The Bank study groups learn not to assume that literacy is a unitary skill of reading and writing, which by itself can empower people. Instead, they understand it as a set of discourses and competencies applied to tasks in a given culture. People are initiated into these discourses in different ways according to their socio-economic and cultural status. These literacies / discourses can be usefully conceptualized in at least four domains – epistemic (the literacies of formal academic knowledge with a mastery of written texts), technical (procedural knowledge in areas of practical action), humanist (the literacies of constructing positive self and cultural knowledge), and public (the ability to participate in and contribute significantly to the public, political sphere). Literacies are practised along a continuum that ranges from basic, to dominant, to critical and powerful. Education systems inculcate these, and perhaps other literacy domains, into citizens along lines deeply stratified by social class, gender and ethnicity. ‘Through schooling, people are placed on a certain track or channel in the education hierarchy. Some are initiated by their education and upbringing into the content and techniques of dominant literacy in each domain, and this is used to justify their continuance in the elite educational channel (lined by the best schools and colleges) and their socioeconomic dominance and political power. Other are denied this initiation. Instead, they are shunted into the less adequate, often grossly under-resourced and neglected education channels that provide subordinate literacies, which are then penalized as being of inferior worth and status in the society.... When a political process is serious about putting in place change with equity, it has to learn how to change the stratified nature of these literacies’ (Hickling-Hudson 1999:235-236).

Changing the stratified nature of the literacies taught through education is the nub of the problem. This obviously cannot be done by expanding and making more efficient the existing model of schooling, when so many problems are inherent in it. At least one of the Bank’s study groups draws up a diagram something like this to show that sweeping changes are needed throughout the school system rather than in expanding it in all its manifest dysfunctionality.

#### **4. Educational reform – what criteria for quality?**

These exercises in analysing the weaknesses of the Western education model, including recognising the tendency for so many US schools to be places of suffering and alienation for many students (Gillespie 1999), suggest to Bank study groups that serious barriers to change lie in the nature of the current education system, and in its current context. In their discussions, they found that it was difficult even to define how quality should look in an education system in an impoverished country, let alone how it could be implemented. They found that their 1999 definition of improving quality (‘detectable gains in the knowledge, skills and values acquired by students’ (p.7), and their assumptions about what would lead to educational quality (pp.29-35) were inadequate, because the question of equity was not addressed. The 1999 document singled out the following areas as being likely to have a big impact on the quality of teaching and learning: expanding early childhood education, decentralizing school governance, using new technologies and upgrading the school curriculum, especially for girls and for the poorest. But is spelt out no way of determining that the upgraded and decentralized product and its delivery through new technologies was as good as the education being received by students in the country’s traditionally best, elite schools.

Not to specify what the vision of quality was in these strategies emptied the word ‘quality’ of meaning. The 1999 document implied neither quality in the sense of equity, nor quality in the sense of equality (see Farrell 2000, pp. 158 – 159). It implied, instead, a restricted idea of quality as the improvement of the existing system, an expansion of education for the poor, making it somewhat better than previously. The Bank study groups in our future scenario pondered over several case studies of the problematic goals and processes of reaching for quality and equality through attempts at school improvement such as those discussed by the authors in Welch (2000). This helps them to see the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of achieving even modest goals of reaching educational quality in the current educational model, and in the context of the current global economy. For example:

- Burkina Faso had made real efforts to improve levels of literacy and upgrade classroom processes for the poorest. Despite efforts to mass-produce cheap instructional materials for both teachers and pupils, the devaluation of the local currency further impoverished families to the point where few could afford to buy the textbooks for their children. By the mid 1990s, basic instructional material was still absent from most classrooms, the curriculum still failed to relate to the lived experiences of the majority of children, and students were showing lower levels of achievement than were found in 1991. In such a context, 'schools often succeed in little more than producing unemployed and poorly adapted young people.... For this to change, it has been estimated that an increase of non-salary expenses of somewhere between 40 and 3000 times the rate spent in many Third World contexts needs to occur..' (Welch 2000: 7).
- In Nicaragua, the UNO (the post-Sandinista government) defined 'basic education' as the first four years of schooling, compared to the nine years in the Sandinista definition. Although the UNO stated that literacy and adult education were to be priorities, its actions fell far short of its rhetoric. 'In a country where unofficial estimates of illiteracy run over 35 percent, and there are over 700,000 illiterates....the current budget for literacy efforts is just under US \$5,000. In 1992, the MED (Ministry of Education) planned to reach no more than 15,000 to 25,000 adults with literacy instruction and another 10,000 with postliteracy courses' (Arnove 2000: 50.)
- In Jamaica, the improvement of selected disadvantaged schools (the 'Strengthening of Secondary Schools Project', financed by World Bank loans) is a pilot project, with no guarantee that financially strapped governments now or in the future will be able to expand it with equity to the entire school system. The project abolished the high school Common Entrance exam (copied from the old 'Eleven-Plus' in Britain), and replaced it with new tests assessing a greatly improved curriculum. But this has not stemmed the ability of the educational system to select out an elite minority – about 25 percent - for the best secondary schools (see Hickling-Hudson 2000 a:180) and to relegate the rest to schools to which no politician or professional would send their children.

The point is that cases like these show that current strategies, even if they improve education compared to what has gone before, will not necessarily lead to educational efficiency, and do not establish anything like educational equity. Improving education in the way the World Bank advocates is token, and will almost certainly not bring about the amazing outcomes of 'greater economic competitiveness, lower poverty and inequality, stronger democratic institutions, and greater social stability' (World Bank, 1999: 33-34) so often flagged in the 1999 document.

Eventually the Bank educators in their study groups reached agreement on three sets of criteria to determine the extent of quality in the education system. One set of criteria was that the strategies suggested by the 1999 document would demonstrate quality to the extent to which they could demonstrate equity. This means showing that the 'literacies' being provided at whatever level and in whatever aspect of the system were *not of a subordinate type*, but as valuable, as dominant and as powerful as the literacies being taught to elites. The second cluster of criteria was that that schools would demonstrate quality to the extent to which they could help students develop their 'multiple intelligences' along lines advocated by Gardner (1983), their 'multiliteracies' (Cope and Kalantzis 2000) and their 'planetism' (Ellyard 1999) to suit new conditions of learning in the global age. The third criterion was that schools would show that they were successfully combining general, technological and vocational studies for all students. All of this would, of course, necessitate a complete restructuring of the curriculum along lines suggested in Table 1 (below), and of teacher education. It would mean not talking about quality education only in terms of strategies and institutions, but additionally, in terms of values, culture and substance. Quality would integrally involve equity, in its definition. No longer would it be posed as dichotomously different, with quality on the one hand and equity/equality on the other.

TABLE 1

**Changes needed in the education system**

TRADITION	CHANGES NEEDED
The age-graded structure of schooling and lock-stepped curriculum constrains learning within 'average' levels	Use media, information technology and the fine arts creatively to get rid of rigidity. Move towards multi-age groupings according to interest and competence.
The 'high stakes', selective and essayist examination system puts many students at a disadvantage which follows them throughout their schooling	Provide more places to lower the exam stakes. Provide more varied assessment (for example by portfolio, media, performance, quiz shows, workplace performance, inventions etc) to develop creativity.
A hierarchy of school types (ranging from elite to impoverished) disadvantages the majority	Make it a priority to equalise budgetary allocations and to mix different social groupings. Perhaps establish uniquely excellent programs & teachers in formerly poor schools?
Competitiveness which benefits only a minority	Use assessment to build in collaboration and teamwork in solving local and global problems.
A hierarchical administrative system deprives schools of the energy and synergy of team work.	Mandate participatory decision-making and team work
The division of knowledge into separate 'disciplines' discourages essential links between subjects	Reorganise curriculum around a model of multiple intelligences (see Howard Gardner, 1983).
Access, and curricular and pedagogical practices, are still gendered	Encourage boys and girls to develop their talents in a non-gendered way
An almost exclusive emphasis on Anglo-European knowledge, a lack of respect for non-European perspectives, a lack of 'futures' thinking across the curriculum	Promote multicultural and global perspectives, postcolonial and planetist understandings, and futures studies.

Sources: Hickling-Hudson (1999 b), Hickling-Hudson (2000 a).

**5. Different ways of supporting educational change.**

Bank study groups learned, from their investigation of the comparative data about education in the past few decades, that there is no 'one size fits all' type of education system that will improve educational provision everywhere (Farrell 1999, 170). They conclude that success in using educational reform to promote productivity and equity depends on several factors, such as:

- whether there is real and meaningful change in the model of education
- the extent to which educational reform is tailored to the needs of particular local conditions
- whether the economy is being strengthened rather than weakened by global factors including the pressure of global financial agencies
- whether economic changes are creating new jobs in higher occupational categories which will absorb greater numbers of people being educated.

To help them with the work of envisaging how alternative World Bank policy in education could look, Bank groups studied concrete educational experiments which have had extraordinary success. Some



impoverished countries have improved education by allowing or encouraging decentralized experiments in devising new models of schooling. Cuba, on the other hand, has achieved outstanding success by using a centralized policy and planning approach to bring about meaningful change in the model of formal education.

Scholars such as Farrell (1999: 170-171) point to the relative success of attempts to alter fundamentally the traditional teacher-directed model of schooling throughout the developing world. These experiments, emphasising learning rather than teaching, have provided a superior educational experience for highly marginalised people. The experiments have been trying different combinations of teachers including fully-trained and partially trained teachers, para-teachers and community resource people. They are using a variety of delivery methods – radio, television, correspondence, and sometimes computers. Teachers and students are together constructing new materials. They are using multi-grade classrooms, child-centred rather than teacher-driven pedagogy, free flows of children and adults between the school and the community, and they are changing the cycle of the school day and year to match work and social imperatives in particular communities. Not constrained by centralised strait-jackets, these experiments stimulate and unleash the creativity, enthusiasm and practical knowledge of teachers. Such change programs do not tinker with adding, subtracting or changing one or two features of existing schools (e.g. add more textbooks, modify assessment, give teachers a little more training) while leaving the system intact. Rather, says Farrell, ‘they represent a thorough reorganization and a fundamental re-visioning of the standard schooling model such that the learning program, while often occurring in a building called a school, is far different from what we have come to expect to be happening in a school. They tend to break down the boundaries between formal and nonformal education and to focus less on teaching and more on learning. Where they have been evaluated, the results have generally been very positive’ (p. 171). Major examples include the Escuela Nueva in Colombia, ‘Faith and Happiness’ schools in Venezuela, the nonformal Primary Education Program of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), and community schools in Pakistan, all of which have spread from localized experiments to thousands of communities which have embraced them as opportunities for high-quality learning (Farrell 1999, and Arnove et al 1999).

The Bank study groups also investigate reasons for the outstanding educational achievements of schoolchildren in Cuba, a country in which the economy has had to struggle to survive the crippling blows of decades of a trade embargo imposed by hostile US administrations, and a devastating loss of support when the Eastern bloc communist economy collapsed in the early 1990s. In spite of these hardships, the Cuban government has so effectively restructured and supported education that Cuban school students ranked first in a UNESCO assessment of language and mathematics carried out across 15 Latin American nations (UNESCO 1998). According to a Caribbean Education Task Force of academics and government officials (2000), the following are among factors which have contributed to the high performance of the Cuban educational system, and which represent ‘important lessons to be learned by other countries in the Region’.

TABLE 2

*Factors contributing to the high performance of the Cuban educational system.*

- Sustained high levels of investment in education
- high levels of non-salary expenditures: approximately 40% of the education budget
- nation wide provision of low cost, high quality instructional materials, adapted to local realities
- a consistent policy environment supportive of quality education
- high professional status of teachers; regular in-service professional development through formal and informal methods
- involvement of teachers in applied research aimed at improving learning outcomes
- emphasis on evaluation and accountability throughout the system and aimed at school improvement through identification of problems and formulating and implementing plans of action
- a system of ‘emulation’ rather than competition in which collaboration among peers is emphasised, high performing schools serving as a model to others

- wide stake-holder participation in school management
- strong commitment and support to rural children and those with special needs, ensuring access and provision of incentives to teachers who work in remote areas
- linking school and work through “labor education” emphasis on technical vocational education (50% of students who complete Grade 9 pursue these subjects)
- provision of “values education” as a core subject in the curriculum.

The Bank study groups came to see that the 1999 document, and indeed Bank educational policy over the decades, had neglected serious consideration of most of these factors in the strategies recommended to governments. Bank policy over the years particularly neglected vocational education (Watson 1996:53). It also neglected higher education, including the education and professional development of teachers (Watson 1996: 52, Torres 1995: 9-10). The 1999 document continued the pattern of treating these important keys to educational improvement rhetorically rather than specifically. For example, the document asked rhetorically as one item on its checklist of key interventions: ‘Is adequate attention being paid to linking education with the rest of the country’s development?’ (p.41), but set out no strategies to develop or improve the vocational education for youths and adults which would clearly be needed to achieve this link. Similarly, although the 1999 document mentioned supporting scholarships for the poor to go to traditional schools (p.34), there was little in it about helping governments to support the kinds of creative experiments in education outlined by Farrell (1999) which, more successfully than conventional schooling, brought basic education to the most marginalized groups. The document mentioned the importance of higher education (p. 8), and the importance of good teachers (pp. 8 & 19), but failed to follow this up with commitment to supporting countries in upgrading higher education including that of teachers, or the working conditions of teachers. Obviously this had to be rethought, given the vital role to be played by national higher education institutions in stimulating the kind of education, research and development that can become the cornerstone of a country’s progress (Arnové et al, 1999:323, Hickling-Hudson 2000 c).

The Bank Education study groups realise that although their 1999 document set out many well-meaning ideas, its weakness was that it was based on an outdated conceptualization of education. They agree that a new framework is needed for thinking about ways in which they can influence and support educational change in the countries impoverished by the workings of global capitalism. First, they decide to state their support for those World Bank trends, embodied by the dynamic work of Zwelitsha, the new leader of the education section, to move out of its disastrously economic mind set, and towards making the Bank more responsive to balancing economic and social development. This is a background for their agreement to cease their uncritical advocacy of the misleading ideas of human capital theory which sees education as serving one narrow economic model rather than broader humanist goals, and as being correlated with outcomes that it cannot possibly guarantee. Next, they decide to state that they will be encouraging and supporting nation states and global agencies to explore and develop new paradigms of educational change which will be more likely to tackle problems than the old paradigms of nineteenth century education. This is based on their recognition that the postmodern era is, as Aviram (1996) argues, making the traditional education system obsolete and old educational institutions dysfunctional. The most fundamental aspects of education are being challenged by postmodern thinking and circumstances. The aims of individualism and old ideas of the ‘good life’ are under question, the target audience is unclear since the distinction between childhood and adulthood is less sharp, traditional curriculum content is increasingly irrelevant, methods based on books and writing have to compete with a range of modes of electronic communication, and educational organisations need no longer be hierarchical or spatially fixed. Education leaders who develop new educational strategies on the basis of these understandings are the ones who can help pull others into new educational paradigms which can meet the challenges of the future in ways explored by Beare and Slaughter (1991), Aviram (1996), Sardar (1996), Lankshear (1997), Luke (2000) and Hickling Hudson (2000 b). Only then will education systems be more likely to be able to move towards achieving these overall goals of quality:

- getting rid of the subordinate literacies for the majority built into the stratified educational structure

- ensuring that education provides not only for multiliteracies and the multiple intelligences of students, but also that it provides dominant and powerful literacies for all
- restructuring the curriculum so that all students are required as a matter of course to combine general and vocational education in ways that relate to economic, environmental and social improvement

Whatever strategies it takes for impoverished societies to reach these goals are the ones that the World Bank education loans and grants should support. Thanks to the program of study and reflection, Bank educators decided to meet the challenge of reinventing themselves as educators collaborating with their national clients in looking to the future in these ways, rather than remaining wedded to the outmoded and dysfunctional institutions and strategies of the neo-colonial past.

## 6. Conclusion

This essay has used the device of imagining Education staff at the World Bank engaging in study and discussion that could put them on the path of rethinking their 1999 Education Sector Strategy document. The conclusion of the essay is the time to admit the obvious - that this rethinking reflects my own views on educational reform in countries impoverished by the world economic system. I do not wish to be dogmatic about the sequence of arguments that I have advocated, but rather to put them forward as 'game openings' inviting dialogue, in the manner in which Foucault (1981) advocates putting forward propositions. My observations are based on the vast disparities that I see when I travel, as I do regularly, between education systems in wealthy countries such as Australia and the USA and impoverished ones such as many of those in the Caribbean, my region of origin. It is these disparities and contradictions, explained in the literature that I have cited, that lead me to agree with the stance that seekers of global change with equity need to try to engage with the World Bank by suggesting how it could better use its vast resources, rather than just critiquing its activities.

My engagement asks Bank educators to consider the proposition that the strategies that they are advocating might well improve conventional education minimally, but will fail to bring about either educational efficiency or a high quality curriculum that meets the 'planetist' needs of new times (Ellyard 1999). This is not only because the education model itself is flawed. It is also because the economic model that global economic agencies such as Bank and the IMF are enforcing even further saps the economies of countries which, recently emerging from a debilitating colonialism, are not strong enough to be flung into the deep end of neo-conservatism. The tearing down of protection for infant industries, thus destroying most of them, and the truncation of the social responsibilities of government suit the rich who have already built up their industries through protection, not those who are late starters. As Ellyard points out, the successful Asian economies 'have long-term vision that is directed towards industrial development programs which involved high levels of government intervention' (1999:36). The globalisation of an individualistic, Wall-Street type of capitalism is not only harming economies, it is also having disastrous consequences for social and ecological environments. Human capital theory is seriously deficient in assuming that if only the traditional education system inherited from colonialism were to be strengthened, it would prepare people effectively for a competitive global economy, thus magically ensuring outcomes such as material sufficiency, harmony and social cohesion. A good education strategy means little without an economic strategy in which the World Bank helps governments implement policies that create more and better jobs, not relying entirely on the market to do so, that envisions a much larger role for the public sector, and that encourages progressive taxation to fund social safety nets and research and development initiatives.

The World Bank education sector could, indeed, use its vast resources more effectively. It could start by defining 'quality' in education as the addressing of equity issues through the de-stratification of literacies, in the manner argued above. It could learn much more from the strategies and philosophies of groups (such as the BRAC practitioners), agencies including NGOs, and countries (such as Cuba) which have organised for educational success in the face of adversity. It could contribute to financing

more South-South cooperation. It could help provide national clients with the funds and expertise to make basic and primary education more flexible and creative, combine sophisticated levels of general and vocational / technological secondary education for all, and expand higher education systems in a way which educates large proportions of their populations, enhances research and applies it to economic and social development combined with the conservation of the environment. All of this should be carried out within the overall framework of helping countries to develop post-industrial educational paradigms and structures that would achieve culturally sensitive educational change appropriate for the challenges of the new global age.

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