

## WORLD BANK EDUCATION POLICY: DO THE NEOLIBERAL CRITIQUES STILL APPLY?

FRANCINE MENASHY OISE – *University of Toronto*

**ABSTRACT.** Throughout much of the 1990s, the overriding critique of the World Bank was placed on its neoliberal mandate, reflected in its various education measures. However, recently the Bank seems to have taken a notable shift away from this ideological stance in its rhetoric and initiatives. This paper attempts to ascertain the degree to which the neoliberal influence remains present in World Bank education policy, pointing to several contradictory stances presented in its major documents.

**POLITIQUE DE LA BANQUE MONDIALE EN MATIÈRE D'ÉDUCATION :  
LES CRITIQUES À L'ÉGARD DE L'INFLUENCE NÉOLIBÉRALE S'APPLIQUENT-ELLES ENCORE?**

**RÉSUMÉ.** Pendant une grande partie des années 90, la critique prépondérante de la Banque mondiale portait sur son mandat néolibéral qui se reflétait dans diverses mesures en matière d'éducation. Toutefois, récemment la Banque semble s'être distancée remarquablement de cette position idéologique dans sa rhétorique et ses initiatives. Ce mémoire vise à établir le degré auquel l'influence néolibérale demeure présente dans la politique de la Banque mondiale en matière d'éducation, en indiquant plusieurs positions contradictoires présentées dans ses documents d'importance.

What follows is a critical examination of World Bank education policies put forth in recent years. Throughout much of the 1990s, the overriding critique of the Bank was placed on its neoliberal mandate, reflected in its various education measures. However, recently the Bank seems to have taken a notable shift away from this ideological stance in its rhetoric and initiatives. This paper attempts to ascertain the degree to which the neoliberal influence remains present in World Bank education policy. First there will be an overview of the primary critiques of the Bank's policy and the reason it was labeled "neoliberal." This is followed by an examination of more recent Bank documents, pointing to apparent moves away from its earlier ideological agenda. Yet what will also be noted is that, concurrently, there is a continued adherence to certain neoliberal principles.

### *An overview of the critiques*

World Bank education policies of the 1980s and 1990s stemmed from an assessment of education in the developing world as deeply flawed. Large population segments were denied access to schools and resources were poorly managed. Expenditure on education was then perceived by the Bank as mis-allocated, leading to inefficiencies and inequities (Colclough, 1996; 2000). Therefore, policies were advanced that sought to reform education systems in order to “reduce unit costs, generate additional resources for education and promote greater equity” (Colclough, 2000, p. 199). The Bank charged that governments as providers of public education were primarily to blame. As there was little reason to believe governments would act to remedy their countries’ educational problems, or that resources would become available from the public sector, the Bank began to advocate market solutions (Biersteker, 1993; Colclough, 1996; Hinchliffe, 1993).

The solutions advanced by the Bank were extensive, and so this paper will focus on only a few of the key measures. First, the Bank promoted user fees for students. This would put the cost on parents rather than the state, and scholarships were to be made available for those bright students who could not afford the fees. Education would then be equitable, yet efficient. Student loans were also recommended. This measure was believed to be effective for, if students pay, they have greater incentive to work harder. The Bank also argued for the private provision of schooling at all levels. This was thought to contribute to cost-efficiency and resource generation, while assisting the public system by reducing their student enrolment and building competition from which higher quality may result (Biersteker, 1993; Colclough, 1996; 2000; Hinchliffe, 1993).

Furthermore, the Bank advocated a redistribution of educational resources to that sector which was thought to generate the most human capital, namely, primary schooling (Alexander, 2002; Colclough, 1996). In that governments were often cited by the Bank as the root of the difficulties facing education systems, decentralization was endorsed (Alexander, 2002). According to Keith Hinchliffe, World Bank policy

has been grounded on a strong central assumption. This is that by bringing educational services further into the market place through increasing private provision, subjecting the public system to demand-led pressures and expanding the coverage of charges to the beneficiaries, both the efficiency and equity of the system will increase as will the resources available for it. (1993, p. 183)

These measures, as advocated in such World Bank documents as 1986’s *Financing education in developing countries: An exploration of policy options* and the 1988 *World Development Report*, were met by intense critical examination (Colclough, 1996; 2000; Easton & Klees, 1992; Hinchliffe, 1993).

The critiques were placed on various features, from the empirical validity of the claims made, to equity issues and the Bank's top-down, prescriptive procedures.

First, as Christopher Colclough has argued, the measures advocated by the Bank did not necessarily lead to a reduction in expenditure, but instead were simply "cost-shifting" strategies (2000, p. 202). The Bank did not recommend increased spending, but instead the "shifting" of funds from one part of the education sector to others (such as from higher to primary education) (Colclough, 1996). Additionally, user fees, student loans, and the private provision of schooling were not seen as cost reduction strategies, as they only placed the burden on other sources, namely parents and students.

The Bank's policies were also critiqued as resting on false assumptions concerning the "consumers" of education. First, by introducing private schooling, competition was thought to occur and thereby increase efficiency. In this, parents were assumed to be adequate judges of quality (Colclough, 2000). Also, the argument that students will work harder if they pay for schooling was criticized as presumptuous and unverified (Colclough, 2000; Hinchliffe, 1993).

Colclough and Hinchliffe have argued against the empirical validity of many of the claims made by the Bank in their advocacy of these market-based policies. Problems with the evidence include dated sample sets which were limited to a few geographical regions and therefore not necessarily applicable to all areas of the developing world (Colclough, 2000; Hinchliffe, 1993).

Serious critiques concerning equity were also forwarded. First, as exemptions often did not occur and scholarships were bound to be mismanaged, user fees and student loans were thought to be barriers to education for poorer families (Alexander, 2002; Colclough, 2000; Easton & Klees, 1992). User fees, as argued by Nancy Alexander, primarily served to deprive poor children of an education (2002, p. 18). And even if scholarships were to be afforded, this put the less-bright poor students at an even greater disadvantage, and "the composition of the student body would ... shift even more towards children of richer households" (Colclough, 2000, p. 210). Furthermore, the private system of education was feared to be primarily "used by the richer groups in order to maintain their elite status" (Colclough, 1996, p. 606). These measures were then critiqued as perpetuating class inequities. Other potential negative consequences included increased social stratification and rural-urban divisions (Alexander, 2002, p. 23).

The push toward decentralization was particularly problematized in its capacity to diminish the responsibilities of national governments, who are primarily responsible for implementing and monitoring social policies, such as equity measures. It is difficult to monitor education systems when decentralized,

and so transparency of those managing the systems was thought to be quite low. Furthermore, localities were feared to either lack resources, or become overloaded with responsibilities (Alexander, 2002).

A further critique of World Bank policy was its “application of simple, standardized recipes,” despite the complex needs of diverse nations (Alexander, 2002, p. 18). It has been argued that the Bank has lacked an understanding that the effectiveness of policies is dependent on circumstances. Also, an assumption has been made by the Bank that there is a “linear relationship between the recipe and the outcome” (Alexander, 2002, p. 18). In this, the Bank was critiqued for its simplistic outlook on educational issues, and its attempts to apply universalizing remedies for diverse and contextual problems.

The Bank’s top-down, prescriptive mandates encountered much criticism, as well. A lack of participatory decision-making, community and parental input has characterized its “cookie-cutter approach’ to education sector lending” (Mundy, 2002, p. 495). For instance, in recommending countries concentrate their resources on primary level education, the Bank “oversteps its authority when it attempts to veto a domestic consensus in favor of significant support for higher education” (Alexander, 2002, p. 30). Furthering this critique is the fact that the Bank’s policies were developed in the industrialized, developed world, and often used evidence from the North, presumed to be applicable to Southern, developing nations (Alexander, 2002; Colclough, 2000). This implied a lack of openness to differing ideological stances, which would otherwise have been derived from the participation of others.

The World Bank has also been accused of a narrow perception of the aims of education. The focus on economic efficiency and growth as a primary goal was thought to neglect other purposes of schools. Consistent references to the “Human Capital theory” and “rates of return,” which evoke the economic benefits of educating, demonstrated that the Bank primarily viewed education in an economically instrumentalist light, or as job preparation. There has been frequent use of such terms as “cost-effective,” “efficient,” and “high rate of return” in reference to education in past Bank documents (Klees, 2002, p. 451). In this economic focus, other social benefits of education were considered to be disregarded. According to Peter Easton and Steven Klees, the focus on human capital and economic gain is

an inadequate measure of the social benefits of education; the framework ignores the very real institutional structures through which unequal power operates; it offers no satisfactory mechanism for understanding and dealing with problems of equity; and it cannot explain such phenomena as persistent discrimination along sex, race, and class lines. (1992, p. 131)

The stress on economics contributed to an overriding emphasis on efficiency, which was applied to schools in much the same way as “a factory manager

would attempt to increase output while cutting costs” (Alexander, 2002, p. 19). The needs of individual children and potential social aims of schooling, such as tolerance, citizenship, or democracy, were seen as subjugated to the Bank’s cost-efficiency emphasis in education policy (Olssen, 1996).

### *The Bank as “neoliberal”*

The abovementioned critiques of the World Bank’s education policies from the 1980s and 1990s have generally labeled the measures as influenced by “neoclassical” economics and as advancing a “neoliberal” agenda (Biersteker, 1993; Colclough, 2000; Hinchliffe, 1992; Klees & Easton, 1992). Neoliberalism is widely described as “free market” ideology, based on theories of economic liberalism, derived from Adam Smith’s *laissez-faire* economics and interpreted by later libertarians such as Friedrich Hayek (Olssen, 1996). Colclough describes neoliberalism, in reference to international development, as “reasserting the primacy of economic growth amongst policy objectives, believing poverty will thereby be most effectively reduced,” and cites a shared view amongst neoliberals “that the slow progress made by developing countries has been mainly caused by excessive economic intervention by their own governments” (2000b, p. 6). Mark Olssen examines the major presuppositions of neoliberal ideology:

subjects are economically self-interested; that the economy is separate from the rest of society; that the uncoordinated self-interest of individuals correlates with the interests and the harmony of the whole; that individuals are rational optimisers and are the best judges of their own interests and needs; and that a ‘flexible’, that is deregulated, labour market provides the same opportunities for people to utilise their skills and therefore optimise their life goals (Olssen, 1996, p. 341).

Derived from these descriptions, the main elements of neoliberalism can be identified as individuality and self-interest, advocating the free market with a reduced role of government, and economic growth as a primary aim. The Bank’s market-oriented view of education was thought to have been influenced by these neoliberal principles. The Bank policies of privatization, user charges, student loans, decreased role of government via decentralization, and focus on economic growth as the aim of education, all demonstrate adherence to this ideology. When critics accused the Bank of imposing prescriptive measures, it was charged with advancing a neoliberal agenda.

### *Still neoliberal?*

In more recent World Bank publications on education, there are noticeable trends that are apparent moves away from those measures which were so heavily critiqued in the past as neoliberal. It must then be asked: To what extent does this neoliberal characterization continue to apply given more recent reforms in World Bank education policies?

For instance, the chapter on “Education” in the 2002 *A sourcebook for poverty reduction strategies* (PRSS), the “Basic education services” chapter of the *World Development Report* (WDR) 2004, and the *World Development Report 2007: Development and the next generation* (published in 2002, 2003 and 2006 respectively), contain a noticeably altered discourse and various new recommendations that may counter the earlier neoliberal critiques. This shift can be tied to the Bank’s move toward a more acceptable public image (Mundy, 2002). In fact, the Bank directly addresses its critiqued past in the document, *Opening doors: Education and the World Bank*, which provides an overview of the Bank’s education sector strategies. In it is a short section titled “The Bank is doing things differently,” wherein references are made to various shifts in its mandate, such as increased country participation and partnership (World Bank, 2002b, p.5).

Various equity measures are now at the forefront of the Bank’s education policy, including a strong advocacy of universal primary education (World Bank, 2002; 2002b; 2003). In order to attain this goal, the Bank states that it, and other organizations involved in the *Education for all* campaign, “recommend strongly against charging tuition fees for public basic education” (World Bank, 2002). This move from advocating user fees counters the critique of earlier policies as perpetuating inequities. The universal primary education mandate is furthered by addressing “demand-side” interventions, which attempt to identify and tackle that which impede access to school for girls, poor students, and other marginalized groups (Alexander, 2002; Mundy, 2002; World Bank, 2002; 2006). For instance, in the case of girls’ access, the Bank recommends hiring more female teachers and staff and adding latrines for girls which would increase safety and thus make parents more likely to send girls to school (World Bank, 2002; 2006). The PRSS also includes recommendations for increasing access to students with disabilities and AIDS orphans (World Bank, 2002). There has been an increase in lending to what the Bank terms “social development, gender and inclusion,” with a rise from US\$800.8 million in 2000 to US\$1285.8 million in 2005 (World Bank, 2005b). These demand-side initiatives are measures that are apparently recommended for equity reasons, not out of concern for cost-effectiveness, and thereby ought not to be defined as “neoliberal.”

Other new initiatives also seem to respond to earlier critiques. For instance, there are several recommendations for free adult education programs mentioned in the PRSS, and the importance of tertiary and higher education is also addressed (World Bank, 2002; 2002b; 2006). The 2007 WDR is particularly focused on the importance of secondary education, containing a separate section on “enhancing post-primary education opportunities” (p. 72). And the Bank has increased its expenditures in these areas. For example, since the late 1990s, the Bank’s lending for tertiary education averaged US\$481 million dollars per year, with projects in 28 countries. This is an

increase of over US\$100 million dollars in the past decade (World Bank, 2002c; 2006). Furthermore, the Bank suggests the implementation of early child development and health and nutrition programs to be launched in schools as well as remedial programs for those in need (World Bank, 2002; 2006). There is a direct acknowledgement that these initiatives may not be considered cost-effective, but instead are “trade-offs” with long-term benefits for students and society (World Bank, 2002, p. 264-266).

The common critique that the Bank is a top-down, dictatorial organization out to disseminate its own ideology and agenda is contradicted in recent Bank documents in its advocacy of local participation and monitoring. For instance, the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) papers initiative has been advanced. The papers are intended to be developed by and for developing countries and country-owned, with widespread participation of stakeholders including those at the grassroots level (World Bank, 2002; Klees, 2002). The Bank takes an advisory role on the PRS papers, including such tasks as the development of the PRSS (the *Sourcebook*). The PRSS is advanced as a “guide to assist countries in developing and strengthening poverty reduction strategies. Its intent is only suggestive, and it may be selectively used as a resource to provide information about possible approaches” (World Bank, 2002, p. vii). This participatory endeavour contrasts earlier accusations of prescriptive mandates and a neglect of local interests. Additionally, local participation is advocated as the Bank advises nations to “involve citizens directly in the assessment and operation of the schools” (World Bank, 2003, p. 125). Citizens are to lend their “voice” in determining the best quality education for their children (World Bank, 2003, p. 113). And, more recently, the Bank encourages that children’s voices be heard, as well (2006).

Another shift from the unilateral neoliberal mandate of the Bank is an apparent collaboration with other organizations on global initiatives, such as the Education for All campaign, the United Nations Interagency Working Group, and the Africa Virtual Library (World Bank, 2002b). The Bank is also open to working with non-government organizations (NGOs) on youth initiatives (World Bank, 2006). These partnerships and participatory measures reflect a shift from the Bank’s independent approach to development, thus demonstrating a potential openness to diverse ideological stances.

However, despite these new initiatives and discourse shifts, the Bank has continued to advocate various education measures that may still be critiqued as neoliberal. In some cases, contradictions are apparent between policy recommendations. For instance, despite endorsing universal primary schooling, there is still an unfavourable picture painted of public education. The Bank contends that “[i]n many countries public sector provision is close to dysfunctional and rife with corruption” (2003, p. 111). This leads to an (albeit cautious) advocacy of private schooling. Private schooling is

presented as “never a disaster, nor a panacea” (World Bank, 2003, p. 127). The PRSS urges nations to “make use of the private sector” (World Bank, 2002, p. 256). The Bank advises: “When evaluating the characteristics of the education sector in a PRSP context, it is important not to neglect the private sector” (2002, p. 247). The 2007 WDR advocates “public-private partnerships” (2006, p. 72). Also notable is that the new advocacy of tertiary and higher education tends to not identify them as public goods, and addresses higher levels of schooling primarily in the context of a means to economic growth (World Bank, 2002; 2002c).

Furthermore, despite the various declarations opposing user fees, the Bank tempers these with such statements as: “but the severe shortage of public resources in some countries creates strong pressures for family contributions” (2002, p. 245). User fees, while not outright promoted, are presented as acceptable given certain “empirical studies” which “suggest that centrally controlled resources are almost universally devoted largely to payroll, while resources collected at the school level raise school quality by much more” (World Bank, 2003, p. 126). Also, the Bank assumes that “if communities are to feel pride in their school and empowered by their participation, then parents should be expected to make some contribution” (2003, p. 126). While refraining from an outright recommendation of private schools and user fees, the Bank does not deter nations from exploring these options.<sup>2</sup> Given that at times the Bank has an apparently positive perception of user fees, it must be considered if the stated opposition to them is empty rhetoric, or perhaps a contradictory stance. And more recently, the Bank has also advocated credit, or student loans (2006). As described earlier in this paper, loans to students have been heavily criticized as neoliberal.

A continued contempt for centralized power is also apparent. For instance, the Bank believes that “centralized control of teacher assignment and assessment can cause bureaucratic paralysis” (2003, p. 122). Centralization is identified by the Bank as a key education problem, contributing to “weak incentives for efficiency and low accountability for student learning outcomes” (2002, p. 237). While the advantages of decentralization are “not magic,” there is an assumption that it “is driven by the desire to move services closer to people” and so “works by enhancing citizens’ political voice in a way that results in improved services” (World Bank, 2003, p. 129). This limited role of government points to a Bank belief which may still be rooted in neoliberalism.

Although the Poverty Reduction Strategy initiative is an apparent attempt to include local concerns and challenge accusations of the Bank imposing its “one-size-fits-all” agenda on others, several critiques can be made of the project (Alexander, 2002, p. 41). There has been an absence of true citizen participation in the development on the PRS papers, in part due to a lack of



access to resources that would be required in order to effectively participate. And by and large, as argued by Nancy Alexander, “the PRS initiative has not changed basic things. As before, policy conditions for new loans or debt relief are negotiated in secret within a small elite group of IMF and World Bank officials and high-levels officials of the finance ministries of borrowing countries” (2002, p. 41). It is questionable just how participatory the PRS process can be for all levels of society, and the degree to which the papers themselves truly inform policies (Alexander, 2002; Klees, 2002).

The PRSs are intended to promote “country ownership,” meaning that citizens have the capacity to participate in the poverty-alleviation process. Yet despite this intention, the PRSs run the risk of simply falling into the hands of those who hold the most power in a country (generally the government), effectively blocking citizens from any participation. James Ferguson, in his book *The anti-politics machine*, provides an example of how this took place in Lesotho, demonstrating that “planned interventions may produce unintended outcomes that end up, all the same, incorporated into anonymous constellations of control” (2003, p. 20).

Furthermore, the mere existence of a “Sourcebook” (despite the claim of its simple “advisory role”), with its extensive and detailed advice on the development of the papers, can be viewed as a hindrance to country ownership and independent development of the Poverty Reduction Strategies. While an obvious shift from earlier top-down policies, the PRS initiative is likely limited in its effectiveness, and may only help to advance the Bank’s ideology free from much dissent.

Despite the reforms meant to increase student learning, the Bank seems to have a highly unfavourable perception of teachers. Teachers are depicted as irresponsible and contributing to poor quality learning (World Bank, 2002; 2003; 2006). In the *Opening doors* document, which is simply a brief synopsis of education policies, the Bank does indeed state it wishes teachers to be “well-paid” (2002b, p. 8). It is significant, however, that in other documents meant to inform policy, the Bank notes studies which conclude that “teachers salaries, even at very low wages, crowd out all other inputs,” and that “increases in teacher salaries have little or no association with learning outcomes” (2002, p. 116). In the 2007 WDR it is stated: “There is little evidence of the impact of teacher training on student learning” (p. 76). It is then deemed much more cost-effective to pay teachers less. Non-qualified teachers, requiring less pay, are suggested and pre-service teacher education is considered a luxury and not necessarily worthwhile (World Bank, 2003). In this, according to the Bank, the aim at high-quality student learning has little correlation to teacher training or pay. A critical examination of this claim is necessary given its counterintuitive conclusions and the convenient fact that it supports the most cost-effective strategy concerning teachers.

A further addition to the education discourse of the Bank is the advancement of an “Education for the Knowledge Economy” campaign, that “refers to the World Bank’s multidimensional efforts to equip countries with the highly skilled and flexible human capital needed to compete effectively in dynamic global markets” (World Bank, 2005). This initiative involves dissemination of information and consulting, in addition to the (as earlier described) advocacy of tertiary and higher education due to their contribution to the “Knowledge Economy” (World Bank, 2002c; 2005). The Bank’s conception of students as “human capital” and education as that which equips students to “compete effectively in dynamic global markets” point to a continued adherence to the neoliberal belief that economic growth ought to be the dominant aim of education.

The Bank’s education policy has evidently shifted from earlier, neoliberal mandates to become more open to country participation and directly tackling issues apart from financing. However, the Bank’s broad conception of the goals of education and functioning of education systems still reflect many neoliberal elements. Most importantly, the Bank’s view on the primary aim of education is still apparently economic in nature. Of course, the PRSS is designed to provide advice for “poverty reduction,” but it is notable that there are so few references to non-monetary or social benefits to education. For instance, no real mention is made of education initiatives for anti-sexism or anti-racism, and only in passing statements concerning teaching tolerance towards other marginalized groups, such as AIDS orphans. The Bank can be critiqued as perpetuating a particular instrumentalist conception of education, as primarily an investment and a means to economic development (Heyneman, 2003; Klees, 2002). In both the 2004 and 2007 WDR, efficiency and accountability are evidently at the core of the Bank’s concerns regarding education. This is made obvious in the language employed. For instance, parents and students are considered “clients,” emphases are placed on “high-productivity” and “management” (World Bank, 2003; 2006). This economic, business-related language riddles the documents, reflecting (in large part) a neoliberal perception of educational aims.

One must also critique the continued employment of conditionalities, or covenants, attached to World Bank loans, despite the discourse of participation (Heyneman, 2003; Klees, 2002). The following questions concerning these conditions, as posed by Stephen Heyneman, must be raised: “What if the covenants are based on faulty analytic techniques or unsound professional practice? What if the policy requirements recommended by the Bank and agreed to by a country are dead wrong? Who is responsible for the adverse results?” (Heyneman, 2003, p. 331) Conditionalities, furthermore, imply that there is a set of practices which must be followed in order to qualify for loans. These guidelines are not set by local communities and citizens, but by the Bank. Participatory initiatives can thereby be critiqued as limited in

their influence. The Bank is free from constraints that would impede them promoting their ideological agenda, which given the analysis provided of recent documents still contains various neoliberal elements.

It is also the case that the Bank continues to present a narrow, standardized, and simplistic “recipe” for education strategies (Alexander, 2002; Heyneman, 2003). The PRSS and the WDRs provide lists of issues concerning education and a few direct remedies for each of these problems, avoiding many of the complexities involved in implementing the strategies. This holds for new initiatives, as well. For instance, while girls’ education is widely promoted, there is little discussion of the ways in which culture and family life may be altered by the potential absence of girls in the home. The focus is on the “high opportunity costs of education,” which continues to concentrate on the economic ramifications (World Bank, 2002b, p. 5). Furthermore, the absence of addressing anti-sexist curriculum reforms in the policy documents is problematic given that most girls will be entering traditionally male environments. The Bank recommendations simplify obvious complexities concerning the implementation of various mandates. It must be questioned if this simplification reflects a placement of equity issues as secondary to economic goals.

Notably absent from the World Bank discourse is any reference to increased funding to the education sector. Reallocation of expenditures is addressed, along with mechanisms toward cost-cutting, but the notion of actually providing more funds to education lending does not seem within the realm of possibility (Klees, 2002).

In terms of educational aims, conditionalities, and funding constraints, the World Bank continues to advocate a fairly narrow agenda in terms of its education strategy. Despite reforms in place that may counter earlier critiques of the Bank’s policies as neoliberal in nature, there continues to be an overriding fiscal mandate that adheres to neoclassical economics. Privatization, possible user fees, decentralization and an emphasis of the economic aims of education, all adhere to free market ideology. What makes this clear is the Bank’s disregard of potential alternative economic structures that may better contribute to development.

For instance, several critics of the Bank’s education policies have addressed the issue of funding and suggested increased taxation of wealthier parties, including Northern nations, in order to contribute to development programs (Colclough, 1996; 2000; Klees, 2002). As Colclough argues: “The challenge of raising more public resources for education should mainly be addressed by increasing levels of taxation” (1996, p.605).<sup>3</sup> This recommendation, apparently influenced by a more compensatory liberal economic outlook, is in opposition to neoliberal development strategies. The World Bank does not address this as a possibility.

Another strategy can be found in debt relief. As advocated by several scholars, in order to “free up resources for education and other essential purposes, deeper debt relief and cancellation should be provided to more countries in more expeditious ways” (Alexander, 2002, p. 46; see, also, Klees, 2002). Again, this option is not widely considered.

Finally, despite declarations concerning universal basic education and equal access, in its major policy documents the Bank does not address the issue of education as a human right (Klees, 2002). If the Bank were to define education as such, there would be ramifications surrounding ethical implications of user fees and privatization measures. Of course, the concept of a “human right” is fraught with complexities.<sup>4</sup> However, the Bank’s reference to education independent from the rights discourse reflects a particular outlook on the purposes of and priorities in education.

#### *A conflict within the Bank*

Given this analysis, it is difficult to place a label on the ideological roots of current World Bank educational mandates. The critiques of the Bank throughout the 1990s, depicting it as a neoliberal organization are likely no longer applicable, for the Bank has apparently endeavoured to alter its course. Despite the possibility that some of the changes may be empty rhetoric, there does seem to be a notable ideological shift at work given much of the new discourse and initiatives. It would then be far too simplistic to critique the Bank exclusively as a neoliberal institution. A better assessment is that the World Bank advocates policies rooted in conflicting ideologies. Its education strategies often contradict their aims. Such contradictions are reflected in the juxtaposing of the following: universal primary education and user fees or privatization; participation and conditionalities; local, contextual interests and standardized, simplistic “recipes”; cost-efficiency and quality learning or good teaching. It is plausible that these contradictions result from an ongoing conflict within the Bank, due to “shifts and changes in the Bank’s internal culture” (Mundy, 2002, p. 503). In the mid-1990s, the then-World Bank president, James Wolfensohn, altered the Bank’s management practices in order to attain better efficiency. At the same time, there began a demand for a “publicly palatable development mandate” (Mundy, 2002, p.499). Concentrating on citizens, not profitability, was thought to create a more agreeable image of the Bank. However, this dual focus on efficiency and a more “palatable mandate” created understandable tensions.

Furthermore, Wolfensohn encouraged more “diversification” within Bank programs, where more than one sector of the Bank would be involved in a project. For instance, the Bank’s Internal Financial Corporation now provides loans for various education initiatives (Mundy, 2002). Separate sectors of the Bank may tackle educational management in different, possibly conflict-

ing ways, due to differing ideological standpoints. This potentially leads to conflicts within educational policy.

### *Conclusion*

As argued, the earlier neoliberal critiques of the World Bank continue to apply in some areas, while in other cases the Bank's policies have apparently shifted. This demonstrates that the Bank's education policy may be rooted in conflicting ideologies. These conflicts, made evident upon analysis of the Bank's policy discourse and initiatives, are perhaps due to the contradicting intentions of various actors within the Bank.

Yet one must continue to ask: Why is there no observable attempt to resolve these conflicts? A further area of study would be an attempt to explain why these contradictions are not more apparent to the policy-makers. Perhaps the strength of the neoliberal paradigm makes it difficult to see the tensions involved in the employment of market ideology to attain various social welfare aims.

### NOTES

1. This paper focuses on the PRSS and the 2004 & 2007 WDRs, for they are the three major education policy documents to be released by the World Bank in the past five years.
2. While there are Bank publications that outright object to user fees, such as "Education Notes" (2004), they cannot be taken as representative of actual World Bank policy. For instance, "Education Notes" includes the disclaimer "The views expressed in these notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank" (p.4).
3. Also see Colclough and Al-Samarrai's 2000 article, "Achieving schooling for all: Budgetary expenditures on education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia," where they argue that along with increased public expenditures, other reforms must be considered, including distributional and gender-focused reforms depending on the context (p. 1940).
4. See the January 2005 IDS Bulletin "Developing Rights" for articles examining complexities surrounding the concept of human rights.

### REFERENCES

- Alexander, N. (2002). Paying for education: How the World Bank & IMF influence education in developing countries. Retrieved March 2005 from: <http://www.campaignforeducation.org/resources/May2002/CNES%20Paying%20For%20Education.htm>.
- Biersteker, T. (1993). The "triumph" of neoclassical economics in the developing world: Policy convergence and bases of governance in the international economic order. In S. Smith (Ed.) *Governance without Government: Order and change in world politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Colclough, C. (1996). Education and the market: Which parts of the neoliberal solution are correct? *World Development*, 24(4), 589-610.
- Colclough, C. (2000). Who should learn to pay? An assessment of neo-liberal approaches to education policy. In C. Colclough & J. Manor (Eds.), *States or markets? Neoliberalism and the development policy debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Colclough, C. (2000). Structuralism versus neo-liberalism: An introduction. In C. Colclough & J. Manor (Eds.), *States or markets? Neoliberalism and the development policy debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Colclough, C. & Al-Samarrai, S. (2000). Achieving schooling for all: Budgetary expenditures on education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. *World Development*, 28(11), 1927-1944.
- Easton, P. & Klees, S. (1992). Conceptualizing the role of education in the economy. In R. Arno, P. Albach & G. Kelly (Eds.) *Emergent issues in education*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Ferguson, J. (2003). *The anti-politics machine. "Development," depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Heyneman, S. P. (2003). The history and problems in the making of education policy at the World Bank 1960-2000. *International Journal of Development*. 23, 315-337.
- Hinchliffe, K. (1993). Neo-liberal prescriptions for education finance: Unfortunately necessary or inherently desirable? *International Journal of Educational Development*. 13(4), 183-187.
- IDS Bulletin. (2005). Developing rights? Retrieved March 2005 from: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/bulletin/bull361.html>
- Klees, S. (2002). World Bank education policy: new rhetoric, old ideology. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 22, 451-474
- Mundy, K. (2002). Retrospect and prospect: Education in a reforming World Bank. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 22, 483-508.
- Olssen, M. (1996). In defense of the welfare state and publicly provided education: A New Zealand perspective. *Journal of Education Policy*. 2(3), 337-362.
- World Bank. (2002). A sourcebook for poverty reduction strategies, Retrieved March 2005 from: [http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/11019\\_preface.pdf](http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/11019_preface.pdf) & [http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/5798\\_chap19.pdf](http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/5798_chap19.pdf)
- World Bank. (2002). Opening doors: Education and the World Bank. Retrieved March 2005 from: <http://www1.worldbank.org/education/pdf/OpenDoors.pdf>
- World Bank. (2002). *Constructing knowledge societies: New challenges for tertiary education*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank. (2003). World development report 2004. Retrieved March 2005 from: <http://econ.worldbank.org/wdr/wdr2004/text-30023/>
- World Bank. (2004). Education notes. School fees: A roadblock to education for all. Retrieved March 2005 from: [http://www1.worldbank.org/education/pdf/EdNotes\\_Userfee\\_3.pdf](http://www1.worldbank.org/education/pdf/EdNotes_Userfee_3.pdf)
- World Bank. (2005). Education for the knowledge economy. Retrieved March 2005 from: <http://www1.worldbank.org/education.eke.asp>
- World Bank. (2005). *Annual report, 2005*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank. (2006). World development report 2007: Development and the next generation. Retrieved September 2006 from: <http://econ.worldbank.org/wdr>

FRANCINE MENASHY is a PhD candidate in the Theory and Policy Studies department of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Her current research interests include the ideological foundations of educational policy, with a focus on multilateral support of privatization.

FRANCINE MENASHY est candidate au doctorat au département d'études théoriques et politiques de l'Institut d'études pédagogiques de l'Ontario à l'Université de Toronto. Ses intérêts de recherche actuels comprennent les bases idéologiques de la politique éducationnelle, en mettant l'accent sur le soutien multilatéral de la privatisation.