When Models Become Monopolies: The Making of Education Policy at the World Bank

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Background: The Dilemma of Manpower Planning

In April 1976, I was invited to join the Education Department of the World Bank.[1] Like the Departments of Transport, Agriculture, Banking, and Industry, the Education Department was situated in the Central Project Staff (CPS). The purpose of CPS was to design policy, assess the effectiveness of current lending, support operations (on invitation from the operating divisions), design new policy, and do quality control checks. This latter one was thought to be the most delicate in that one was asked to comment on all operations, and in very extreme circumstances, one

[1] The reader is assumed to know the purposes and mechanisms of the World Bank. If not, one can read Heyneman (2005).

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would be able to object to those operations thought to be inadequate (see Fig. 1). On my first day, I was assigned 16 countries to monitor; most were countries I knew little about, including India, Algeria, and Nicaragua. On my second day, I was told to attend a decision meeting concerning a vocational education loan to Algeria.

The decision meeting was attended by 20 people: senior economists from the region, representatives of the department director, the legal department, and the team of experts who had appraised the project. The

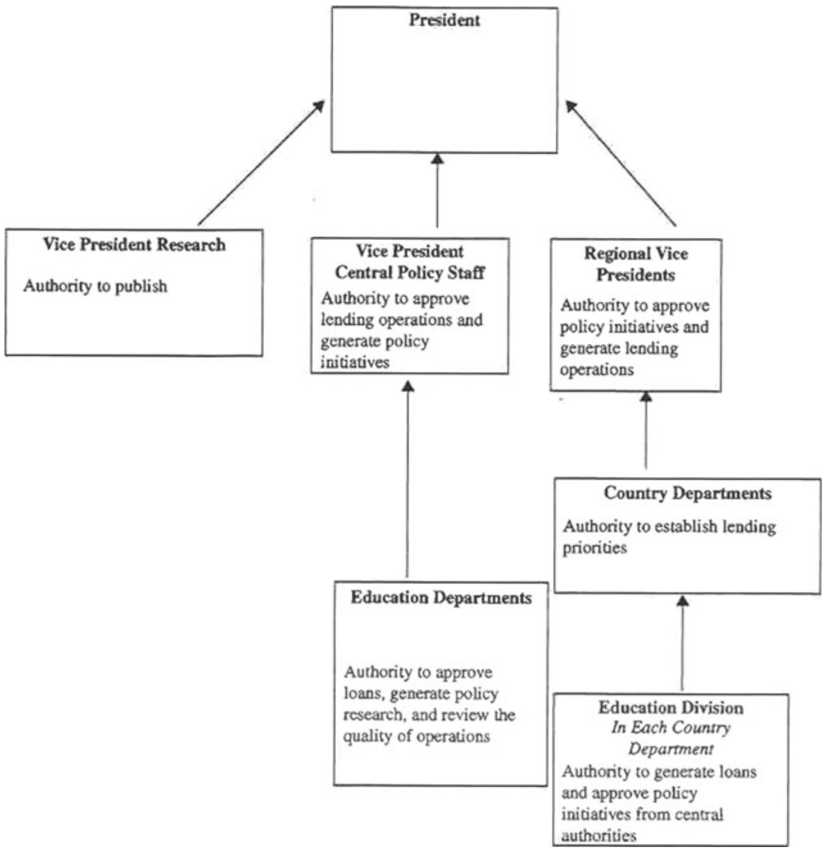

Fig. 1 World Bank's internal processes from the early 1970s to the early 1980s (*Source* Heyneman, 2005, p. 31)

meeting was chaired by the education division chief for the Europe and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions. The project intended to build new vocational schools and modernize existing schools. It had been justified on educational grounds because the current curriculum was considered overly academic. It was justified on economic grounds because, according to a recent manpower forecast, the need for technical manpower was growing. The chair asked if there were any questions. I put up my hand to ask if we had any other economic evidence to justify the project other than a manpower plan. There was a moment of silence. The chair responded that no other economic evidence existed. That is how the trouble began.

I had just completed a degree at the University of Chicago and was nurtured on the evidence described by Mary Jean Bowman as economic rates of return. I knew that economics had other types of evidence. I reported the essence of the meeting to my director, Mats Hultin, the ex-Minister of Education from Sweden. He told me to chat with chief economist Manuel Zymelman, who carefully explained to me why economic rates of return were useless for planning development. Wage rates were a poor substitute for productivity. The evidence took years to collect and, while perhaps marginally useful for sector work, economic rates of return were completely impractical for deciding on a specific loan.

How the World Bank Makes Education Policy

There were two problems with his explanation. Manpower planning could only justify the expansion of specific skill training. This left out any assistance to primary or general secondary education or higher education outside of engineering or any of the technical fields. Because only one type of evidence was acceptable, the bank could not respond to country requests for assistance to any other part of the education sector, in spite of the fact that the needs were desperate in many cases. In the effort to infuse skill training into general education, the absence of prices in manpower forecasting allowed the Bank to design projects that were underutilized and distorted. For instance, every secondary school assisted by the Bank was required to build diversified workshops in agriculture, metalwork, woodwork, and domestic science (for girls). These increased the unit cost by 250% and ended up not being used for their original purposes, instead getting turned into normal academic classrooms. This also meant that primary schools, when assisted, had to double as community centers. In one case, it meant that the construction of a university library could only use the bank's support for books and materials related to engineering (Heyneman, 1985, 1987, 1999). When I tried to discuss the importance of primary education with the chief economist of the Africa region, he was quick to tell me that primary education could never be considered a priority for the Bank. It was too scattered in implementation, unrelated to a nation's manpower needs, and was the responsibility of local governments, not a developmental assistance agency.

The second problem had to do with the Bank's education sector staff. All were well-versed in manpower planning, but none had experience with any other kind of evidence. The monopoly given to manpower planning implied a powerful vested interest within the staff that would be threatened if change were to occur. How could one break the monopoly of manpower planning when such a strong opposition to any analytic change was present?

As luck would have it, the answer came in the form of a new Education Director. Aklilu Habte was suggested by World Bank President Robert McNamara. He was the first Ethiopian to receive a Ph.D. in education (Ohio State, 1952), a professor of education, a dean of education, a president of the University of Addis Ababa, a minister of education, and a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) governing board; he was the first African Education Director in the Bank.

The first move was to actually utilize rates of return in a Bank document. Since India was assigned to me for monitoring, I was asked to draft a desk study on the economics of education in India. This short paper relied on economic rates of return and challenged the common perception in the Bank that India was overeducated (Heyneman, 1979). Fortunately, the new Vice President for South Asia, David Hopper, had been a friend of Aklilu for years. While the India paper was slowly making its way through the layers of bureaucracy for (mostly skeptical) comment, Aklilu sent it directly to David Hopper at his home address. The next day a memo came from the Vice President's office to me personally (an unprecedented event). It had one sentence: "re: paper on India: Damn fine paper." This effectively trumped the many layers between the vice president's office and me and helped to inspire an encouraging response from the India division.

A second opportunity occurred with the announcement that a tracer study had occurred in Malawi, another country on my watch. This study had followed secondary school students into the labor market. Data existed for those who had left secondary school after two years as well as for those who had finished in four years. The questionnaire asked about earnings. This led to the first use of rate-of-return evidence to assess the economic viability of investments in secondary education in Eastern Africa (Heyneman, 1980).

In some ways, having these two precedents helped make the point that other kinds of evidence were feasible. But the major thrust for change came from a decision from the president himself. To explore new education policies that Aklilu might wish to inaugurate, the president appointed an external panel. Included on the external panel was Mary Jean Bowman from the University of Chicago. The panel's report (World Bank, 1978) was explicit in pointing out the likely distortions from manpower planning and called for a diversity of evidence. This led the way to the next question as to who we might invite to help us systematize alternative sources of economic evidence.

Act Two: The Acquisition of George Psacharopoulos

Over a lunch with Aklilu, I suggested that we approach George Psacharopoulos, an economics graduate of the University of Chicago and at the time teaching at the London School of Economics. Arrangements were made for me to visit London and take him and his wife out to dinner. Over that dinner, I proposed that he consider joining the World Bank. The offer was accepted.

Psacharopoulos was not seen as being problem-free. He had a reputation for being a strong advocate of the use of economic rates of return; the question was raised whether he was broader than that. I pointed out his work on equity. This was accepted as a sign of diversity of interest, and the bank hired him to manage a research unit within the Education Department. Immediately, conflict broke out with Manuel Zymelman. But this conflict was exactly what had been anticipated and was the purpose behind his acquisition. We could not diversify our evidence if the current senior economist was opposed to it; he had to be neutralized.

The combination of having a precedent for using economic rates of return in education sector work (Malawi and India), guidance from the external panel, and an articulate advocate (Psacharopoulos) led to the explicit statements in the new Education Policy paper, which called for diversity of evidence and, just as importantly, diversity in lending purposes. Specifically mentioned were general primary and secondary education, higher education, and education research. Under certain conditions, all were economically justified (World Bank, 1980).

Act Three: The Monopoly of Rate-of-Return Evidence

While the use of economic rates of return had opened the Bank to consider general education (as opposed to vocational), problems quickly came with the data's interpretation. A report published by Psacharopoulos et al. (1986), which was later followed by additional evidence (Psacharopoulos, 1994), argued that public finance for higher education should be transferred to primary education and that higher education should increasingly become privately financed through tuition. Low-income students should be offered loans to help finance their university studies. East Africa had an immediate reaction. Newspapers and radio commentators associated this line of argument with neocolonialism and a way in which the Bank might be trying to keep Africa in a subordinate position. In response, Psacharopoulos was sent to Nairobi to explain the paper's point of view. As I recall, the thought was that Kenyans simply needed to better understand economics and the reasons why these policy recommendations were equity-enhancing. He returned, stunned by the response that evidently had come close to being violent. This was the first encounter with a line of argument not included in our regressions. As I recall, it was dismissed as being just politics.

In the 1980s, Psacharopoulos was transferred to the office of the Vice President in the Latin America region. The region was volatile. Flush with Middle Eastern capital from the oil embargo, banks had made extensive and often improper investments. Crippled by bad loans in Brazil and Argentina, major banks in New York and London had been endangered. New infusion of capital had to be quickly transferred to local authorities to refinance the otherwise faulty loans. This was the Baker Plan, named after the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury. At one of the meetings for implementing this plan, he was said to have commented about the absence of the World Bank at the table. Until then, the Bank had been an institution that operated on the basis of project-by-project development. Each project was geared to a five-year implementation cycle. While the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was supposed to be the fireman to call in the case of a fiscal crisis, the bank had very different terms of reference. But to not be at the table when strategies are being planned is not in the nature of any important institution; hence came the birth of a new form of lending called structural adjustment. Instead of allocating monies to cover the cost of infrastructure improvements, the Bank's Board of Directors approved the possibility of allocating resources on the basis of policy change. The resources were large, often in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and were implemented quickly, in some cases within a week of being approved.

When the Bank began loaning money in Latin America for structural adjustments, criticisms arose that the poor were being adversely affected. Moreover, because reductions in public-sector salaries (including teacher salaries) were sometimes part of the adjustment process, education in rural areas was said to be suffering (UNICEF, 1987). The question became whether there might be a way to protect the poor through education within a structural adjustment loan. Psacharopoulos' response included the same short list of policy options proposed in his earlier paper (Psacharopoulos et al., 1986); namely, to reduce public expenditures on higher education, transfer those expenditures to primary education, and institute a program of educational loans to help finance the private higher education costs for those who could not afford the tuition. The difference in this case was that the policy menu was negotiated in the context of a structural adjustment loan, a loan usually given to the Ministry of Finance. As a result, the education policy changes were agreed upon with the Ministers of Finance, sometimes over the objections of the Ministers of Education.

Policy-based lending became an important new sector in the Bank with active projects in Africa, Latin America, and occasionally other regions. Also, because policy-based loans were a hybrid between policy and lending operations, a new office was established above the vice presidents. This office was titled the Senior Vice President for Policy (see Fig. 2).

Psacharopoulos was transferred to this office in the late 1980s, thus raising the visibility of rates of return and the short policy menu that had been proposed many times in Latin America and Africa. This new position gave the rate-of-return approach a virtual monopoly over sector work in terms of lending as well as policy development.

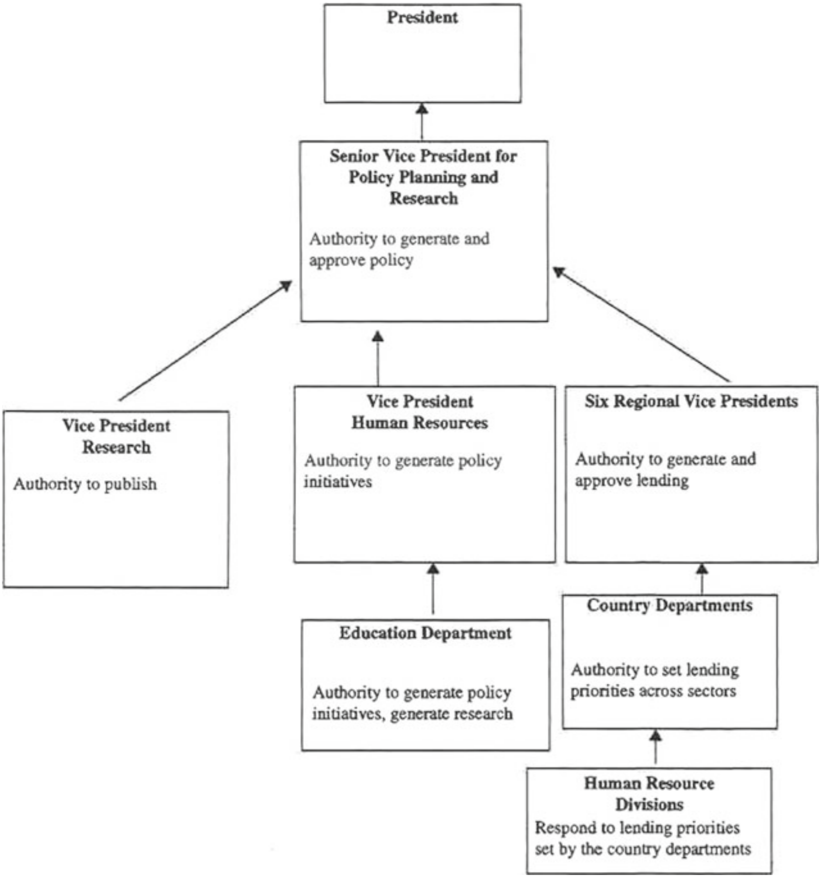

Fig. 2 World Bank processes from the early 1980s to the early 1990s (*Source* Heyneman, 2005, p. 35)

Act Four: The Struggle Over Higher Education Policy

The first sign of a problem occurred with the development of a new policy paper on higher education (World Bank, 1994). While the contents of the paper were unobjectionable and approved by each of the regional division chiefs,[2] the published versions contained a statement that primary and secondary education will continue to be the top priority sub-sectors for countries that have not yet achieved literacy and adequate access and quality at primary and secondary levels in the Bank's education loans. The bank's interest in higher education in these countries will be to make financing more equitable and cost-effective (World Bank, 1994, p. 12).

The statement implied that expanding higher education was not among the Bank's priorities, and for most countries, higher education constitutes a lower priority than other education levels. The paper quickly came in for criticism from the academic community (Buchert & King, 1995). King commented that the title was not conceived as a bank-bashing exercise, but only to imply that the bank had not learned from its lessons (Morna, 1994).

What the academic community may not have realized was that the appearance of this statement without our clearance had led many of us to suspect that an ideological battle had commenced in our sector over and above our authority. Our feelings that we were being circumvented were substantiated in the development of a new policy paper discussing the sector from primary to graduate education and designed to cover each of the six regions (World Bank, 1995). The problem slowly recognized was that in the last few years the developing world had changed. Many of the staff had been exposed to the problems of sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia, problems of extreme poverty where a lack of educational opportunity in primary education was among the most serious. But we were responsible for a completely new category of borrowers: The Russian Federation, China, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Chile, and Malaysia, countries whose reference group came not from low-income countries but from the world's industrial democracies. Often these countries had full enrollment in primary education and a primary priority toward higher education access, quality, and efficiency. In many instances, the concerns of the education sectors in these countries focused on the innovations prevalent in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries: merit pay, voucher systems, site-based management, and performance standards. The professional experience of many Bank's education staff did not include the

[2] I was division chief in the technical department of the new Europe and Central Asia Region and was responsible for the 27 countries in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

educational debates in their own countries. Hence the Bank's education sector was the object of the type of adjustment not unlike what their client countries experienced (Heyneman, 1994). For example, to suggest that resources should be shifted away from higher education would be political suicide in the Russian Federation; yet this suggestion was being made again in the draft of the new policy paper. In fact, one draft of the executive summary contained the statement that higher education could become or remain largely privately funded. The response to this statement from the regions was unambiguous: "Take it out" (Heyneman, 2005, p. 328).

In one note from the operational division chiefs to the paper's authors, criticism was explicitly spelled out that the rate-of-return is faulty because it has weak evidence that is drawn from a few traditional borrowers. The paper provides only a simple analysis of the trends and refers only to the main education categories—primary, secondary, and higher education. Since the paper is based solely on the rates of return approach, it excludes other possible rationales for the allocation of public finance like national interest, market failure, and equity. Unlike that over one-half of World Bank loans are devoted to post-secondary education, the paper remains silent about higher education. It also ignores postgraduate education, adult education, preschool education and educational research, educational technologies, disabled people, and all professional education (Internal note, November 18, 1994).

In spite of the dissent within the Bank, the text of the paper changed very little between drafts. The regional division chiefs felt that the education sector was in danger of becoming a source for cheap ideology. The leaders of four of the six regions met once at night to discuss what to do. Their meeting took place in a park so as to ensure confidentiality. Each regional representative decided to draft a memorandum addressed to their vice president objecting to the paper. The memorandum was to be signed by each of the operational division chiefs within each region. Of the 26 division chiefs responsible for education, 20 signed the memorandum on February 2, 1995, asking that the paper not be sent to the Bank's Board. Two others agreed with the memorandum but refused to sign. One objected to the memorandum. Three others were traveling and could not be reached. For all intents and purposes, the Bank's education sector was in revolt.

The paper was eventually re-edited, but its thrust was unchanged. Even after an unprecedented level of internal protest, the monopoly over the

Bank's view from the position of the Office of the Senior Vice President for Policy was too powerful to overcome. Eventually, the publication led to many objections from the academic community and replies from the Bank (Bennell, 1996; Burnett, 1996; Burnett & Patrinos, 1996; Jones, 2000; Lauglo, 1996; Samoff, 1999; Watson, 1996).

During this period, I often felt that the academic community misunderstood the Bank's staff. They were often assumed to be subject to unanimous thinking. The internal struggles were not common knowledge. I felt that it might be important to raise some of the internal objections in a public forum, summarized the arguments against using economic rates of return for making investment decisions, and presented them to UNESCO. I was encouraged to publish them. However, publishing them would mean, given my position, that I would probably be fired. One evening I gathered my children around the kitchen table and explained the situation. It might mean that we would have to sell the house, perhaps move to a different neighborhood and change schools. One son, known even today for his commitment to good causes, replied, "Go get'em, dad." His view was not enough to convince me. I had to make a Hobbes-like choice: loyalty to an institution which I dearly loved or loyalty to my profession as educator and to which I had devoted my life. I had come to believe that the behavior of the institution had come to be antithetical to the standards of my profession. I am sure that many others have found themselves in parallel circumstances. The choice is not easy.

The article titled "Economics of Education: Disappointments and Potential" went to the head of the publication schedule and quickly appeared in *Prospects* (Heyneman, 1995). I sent each director and each division chief a copy with a cover-notes worth of explanations. My phone started ringing within a few minutes.

The Final Act: The Bank Rights Itself

My personal story aside, however, the Bank began to realize that it had lost professional credibility with the education community and decided to make amends by sponsoring a new paper on higher education. Unlike previous papers, though, the Bank chose to not use any World Bank staff. The paper was drafted entirely by external experts. These experts consisted of a panel chosen for their independence and unquestionable credibility. They included Mamphela Ramphele (Vice-Chancellor of University, Cape Town), Henry Rosovsky (former Dean of the Faculty of

Arts and Sciences, Harvard University), Kenneth Prewitt (ex-Chairman, Social Science Research Council and current U.S. Census Director), Babar Ali (Pro-Chancellor, Lahore University of Management), Hanan Ashrawi (former Minister of Education, Palestine), Jose Joaquin Brunner (former Minister of Education, Chile), Lone Dybkjaer (former Danish Minister of the Environment and current member of the European Parliament), Georges Haddad (professor, University of Paris), Motoo Kaji (Vice President, University of the Air, Japan), Jajah Koswara (Director of Research and Community Service Development, Directorate for Higher Education, Indonesia), Narciso Matos (Secretary General, African Association of Universities), Manmohan Singh (former Minister of Finance and current member of Parliament, India), Carl Tham (former Minister of Education and current Secretary General of Palme International Center, Sweden), Kamal Ahmad (attorney at Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver, and Jacobson), and David E. Bloom (professor, Harvard University). Their report, "Task Force on Higher Education and Society," was published by the Bank in 2000.

This report included extensive discussions on higher education and public interests, the importance of higher education to science and technology, and the importance of general education. In its coverage of the economics of higher education, the report emphasized that traditional economic arguments ignore the social contributions of higher education institutions. Rate-of-return studies consider people valuable only if they earn higher and extract greater taxes. The report states educated people have extensive impact on economic and social well-being of the societies and they create an environment where economic development is viable. Lastly, the report criticizes the rate-of-return analyses for disregarding the university-based research function of higher education that is undisputable social benefit for developing the societies (p. 39).

Several years later, the Comparative Education Review sponsored a moderated discussion of these issues (Task Force on Higher Education and Society: A Moderated Discussion, 2004). Psacharopoulos was asked to comment on the report. He criticized the report for failing to include specific recommendations on what developing countries should do with regard to higher education or education in general. He repeated that primary education has a higher rate-of-return than other levels. For this reason, primary education should be given priority in countries where primary education is not yet universal. He said the incidence of public spending on higher education was too regressive, with children of the poor getting less than children of the rich. Therefore, any expansion in higher education must be linked to selective student fees (student loans will be available to all, equal to the full social cost for the rich, but also including allowances for the poor) (Psacharopoulos, 2004, p. 76).

Bloom and Rosovsky were asked to respond to this comment. They replied to him by saying that the standard rate-of-return analysis is always questioned in terms of its adequacy in terms of making investment decisions. The apparent accuracy and rigidity of these estimates eliminated the scope of alternative decisions. These analyses completely ignore the external negligence that is related to education. These range from the food and health benefits that educated women to bring to their families and communities to the benefits of university research and education on the speed and sustainability of national development. This line of thinking is certainly not limited to the Task Force Report. When rate-of-return analyses are based on incomplete models and incomplete data, they will reveal estimates that are not clearly related to actual rates of return. More careful analysis may pave the way for the establishment of social investment priorities (Bloom & Rosovsky, 2004, pp. 85–86).

Just as the Education Sector Policy had done in 1980, the Task Force Report essentially liberated the Bank from its previous dogma. Since the Task Force Report, several new higher education policy papers have appeared and all of them were carefully prepared and highly appreciated (Salmi, 2009; World Bank, 2002; Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2007). Psacharopoulos himself seems to have dropped out of favor. In the 1995 policy paper, he is cited nine times; in the most recent policy paper (World Bank, 2011), he is not cited at all (Heyneman, 2011).

Implications

From this story of how a model became a monopoly, one might draw two lessons. Every organization struggles for a strategy that is comprehensible, feasible, and compelling in its justification. In this, the Bank is typical. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNESCO, and the Department for International Development (DFID) are no different. Dogma occurs whenever a strategy becomes common wisdom. The problem is that all organizations need to grow and improve, and none can do this unless what is taken to be common wisdom is able to be challenged.

Whenever an organization silences those challenges, it will become endangered. This monopoly occurred in the Bank and took a decade to recover from it.

But in addition to the lesson of monopoly is that of what to do when an otherwise well-meaning organization becomes a danger to one's profession and one's professional standards of honesty. Many parallels exist in the military, the pharmaceutical industry, power companies, banks, and insurance companies. The question then becomes a matter of ultimate responsibility. In my case, I felt that the responsibility was mine. I asked myself many times if I was going to battle over a trivial issue. A trivial issue would be pointless. In the end, I felt that the issue was not trivial but essential to the making of public policy. In her book *Democratic Education*, Amy Gutmann (1987) argues that rates of return or any other economic model is not a road map to making investment decisions, just a guide to policy. In her view and in mine as well, assessing the value of public goods and externalities, because they are not easily quantifiable, can only be made by the public at large. This is why a poor country may choose higher education over primary education, because what it values may be different and, for the most part, outside of our best models.

The criticisms of the Bank's education policies continue into the 2020s but have been led by the same short list of scholars and have not expanded in content beyond what they were in the past.

Has the Bank Learned a Lesson: A Brief Commentary on the Education Paper of 2011

The World Bank has numerous publications on education. Some are authored and are the responsibility of that author. These may be circulated in a journal as a product of research or as a discussion series to generate debate. A policy paper is different. This is a paper which must be approved by the executive directors and lists the World Bank as the author.

From the beginning, policy papers have shared certain characteristics, this one included. None may contain a statement that would challenge long-standing convention. It may infer. It may suggest. But in the end, it must be approved by all the executive directors who represent its 185 members. No draft policy paper would be put to a vote of the executive directors if it were to generate opposition or even controversy. Essentially, a policy paper must represent a consensus.

Policy papers reiterate that the Bank is subject to its suggestions. Countries are autonomous and independent entities. If directives are included in the paper, they are turned inward and suggest that the Bank will operate differently in one or another arena, that the bank will place new criteria for its operations, or that the Bank will respond warmly to new initiatives in the arenas under discussion.

In spite of these organizational restrictions, this paper pioneered new arenas for the Bank. It redefines education system as a term. The new definition includes learning wherever it occurs and wherever it can be organized. It places a heavy emphasis on early childhood education and adult literacy. It includes corporate training. It includes providers of all kinds, whether public or private, charitable or for-profit. It includes not only providers of education programs but also providers of education products and services. In fact, it leaves out very little, and apart from early childhood education, it places no priority anywhere.

But will it do things differently? Rather than building schools, this new strategy suggests that it will emphasize the efficiency of the education system and help reform its management, governance, and finance. Rather than provide new curricula, it will try to lay the foundations of an education knowledge base by supporting the use of both local and cross-national academic achievement assessments. Countries will be asked to measure their progress against statistical evidence. The bank may also experiment with a reorganization of its education staff. Instead of them working on regions in isolation from one another, they will begin working on education systems divided by their stages of development. While none of these changes are entirely new, they all represent progress from my point of view.

Early childhood education is nice, but has the Bank made progress on the elements that had been the subject of past criticism? One criticism was that it was ideological; on the basis of a narrow interpretation of economic rates of return, it had advocated a short policy menu demanding that countries shift public resources from tertiary to primary education. The major proponent of this view had been George Psacharopoulos. In the education policy paper from 1995, the one to which 20 division chiefs had signed a memorandum of protest (Heyneman, 2005), Psacharopoulos was cited nine different times. However, in the policy paper from 2011, he was not cited at all (see Table 1). There are some (perhaps including myself) who would also interpret this as progress.

Table 1 World Bank education policy papers and George Psacharopoulo

Years	*Number of citations*
1995	9
2011	0
2018	0

Another criticism of the World Bank in the past was that it had been insular in its orientation and had tended to cite only its own works and staff members. This implied a narrow view of development and ignorance of much of the analytic work the world beyond the Bank had done. This was said to be parochial and counterproductive.

For instance, in the policy paper from 1995, over 13% of the references were of other policy papers, and 32% of the references were of the Bank's staff members. If one includes the references to the reports from other agencies, the Bank is seen to have only used sources outside the development community about 50% of the time. That was in 1995.

In 2011, the sources for references had changed dramatically but in the wrong direction: 26% of citations were derived from other policy papers, with 16% from its own staff and 29% from other agencies. This latter figure is the result of James Wolfenson's efforts. The official rationale was to collaborate with other agencies as though development should be a team effort. However, it had also served the Bank's needs for political coverage to protect itself from external criticism. It is more difficult to criticize the Bank when UNICEF, Save the Children, and the Sierra Club are sitting on the podium. This was not by accident.

The problem is that the portion of the cited references from other sources has declined. In 1995, it was 50%. In 2011, it was only 28%.

One might counter with the suggestion that this is an accurate reflection of the insight and knowledge in the field of education and development. To explore this, I looked at the sources for the report on basic education published by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences in 2006. This report cites the World Bank policy papers 2.2% of the time; they cite other academic sources 89% of the time. This suggests to me that the insularity of the Bank has gotten worse, not better (see Table 2).

Another criticism of the Bank was that it did not consult enough: It developed its policy papers in isolation from stakeholders' opinions. This paper goes a long way to convince the reader that its consultations were extensive. It lists a total of 69 meetings held to discuss the content of this

Table 2 Sources for references in education policy papers: percent of references in each category

	Other				
	World Bank as author (%)	*WB staff as author (%)*	*Agencies as author (%)*	*Other authors (%)*	*(#)*
World Bank (1995)	11.9	28.5	4.8	45.2	(270)
World Bank (2011)	26.5	16.2	29.1	28	(117)
U.S. National Academy of Sciences	2.2	8.8	0	89	(45)

Sources World Bank. (1995). *Priorities and strategies for education*. Washington, DC: The World Bank. World Bank. (2011). *Learning for all: Investing in people's knowledge and skills to promote development*. Washington, DC: The World Bank. Cohen, J. E., Bloom D. E., & Malin M. (2006). *Educating all children: A global agenda*. Cambridge, MA: National Academy of Sciences/MIT Press

paper, meetings across all regions and with all donors. It even lists the most frequently asked questions. Here they are in order of importance:

1. What is the strategic component of the Education Sector Strategy (ESS) 2020?
2. How does ESS 2020 address the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and support countries in reaching the two education MDGs?
3. How does ESS 2020 relate to the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative (EFA FTI)?

This continues for 16 more questions.

My reaction to this list of questions from the consultation meetings is one of disappointment. They constitute what the Soviets used to call a *langue de bois*, a wooden language. They have little relevance to the scholars of development and little relationship to the questions the 2011 policy paper addresses. They reflect the fact that the Bank continues to listen to itself and to other donor agencies in a kind of isolated universe.

What might constitute a question frequently asked about this policy paper? Is the Bank still recommending that public finances shift from higher to primary education? Is the Bank able to work outside of government ministries of education to assist the development of the private sector? Is the Bank prepared to confront the fact the greatest threat to the quality of education is from within the system itself in terms of corruption? Is it prepared to stop lending to a country that misappropriates its assistance? Is it prepared to sanction staff who propose conditionalities that later prove to be professionally incorrect?[3] Is it prepared to equip low-income countries with policy advisors so they might negotiate loan conditionalities with more equity? Is it willing to confront the fact that education constitutes only a tiny percent of the development agenda? No response is found to these questions and likely others in the policy paper from 2011.

Has the Bank Learned a Lesson? A Brief Comment on the World Development Report 2018[3]

The World Development Report (WDR) is the Bank's most prestigious publication. It remains under development for more than a year in advance and is authored by carefully selected staff who are given the luxury of concentrating on a single subject, excused from all other responsibilities, and assured of the likelihood of promotions if the task is completed well. For the first time in the 60 years of the Bank's educational lendings, a WDR concentrating on education was released in 2018. Titled "Learning to Realize Education's Promise," the document makes no mention of manpower forecasting or economic rates of return, the two traditional methods for judging the viability of an education investment. Instead of private or public income returns, it focuses on learning as the single most important dependent variable.

This is an enormous improvement. The main investment chapter is titled "Spending More or Spending Better, or Both," in which the WDR argues that education investments can be made equally well for reasons such as improving efficiency and effectiveness. It altogether ignores the issue of education levels (primary versus secondary, etc.) and concludes that countries require (i) better information, (ii) stakeholder coalitions to promote learning, and (iii) more iterative, adaptive systems to deliver learning. It argues for investments in preschool, not because children will

[3] Payment by results may apply to both borrower and lender.

gain a cognitive head start, but because preschool will help prepare children to be emotionally and behaviorally ready when they formally enter primary school. It has taken more than half a century, but the Bank has finally learned to appreciate not simply the importance of education but also the sector's complexity. With this comes new respect for professions working on education problems and the delicateness of the sector's political vulnerability. Now with the educational damage from COVID-19 and the iterative adaptive educational changes in response, the World Bank's responsibility toward education may be unprecedented and essential.

One might ask whether the battles 25 years ago over using economic rate-of-return models were justified. My response is "Yes, they were." As a result of those battles, the Bank has broken the technical monopoly that distorted its policies. Today, tertiary, preschool, or vocational education cannot be excluded as an investment priority on the grounds of economic rates of return alone. Education investments today can be justified on the grounds of increasing efficiency, effectiveness, equity, or the general cohesion of the education sector as a system. The Bank has now lived up to the vision that the Bank's first African Director Aklilu Habte had for it in 1980. It took time, but the struggle was worth it.

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