Over the last few years leaders of bilateral, multilateral, and regional aid agencies and heads of state of most industrially advanced countries have come together and achieved a remarkable level of agreement that global poverty is the largest threat to social welfare and global security. Equally remarkable is agreement emerging on the processes and actions necessary to reduce poverty and attain world development. And, to further add to surprises, education has increasingly emerged as a centerpiece of strategy for poverty reduction, social, and economic development. Thus, what might be termed a global development orthodoxy has emerged with far reaching implications for educational strategies from the sector level to the classroom. Although neither the contextual, cultural, social or economic changes, nor the accompanying changes in educational policy and planning, have fully taken institutional and operational form, there is something approaching a consensus on the core dimensions of the new development approach.

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Educational Strategies for the New Development Orthodoxy

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In the opening years of the 21st Century it would appear that a new development model has emerged supported by multilateral assistance groups such as the UN Group, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and various NGOs. This paper will: (a) briefly sketch the emergence of the major concepts and proposed actions which form the new model for development; (b) analyze the strategic implications for national and local educational change; and, (c) critique both the general model, and in particular, examine its limitations in planning and implementing educational reform. The analysis and critique will include an argument that the new development orthodoxy requires significant and, at times, unrealistic changes in the capacities and consequences of education programs and systems.

Key Words: education, strategies, development, policy

This paper will attempt to: (a) briefly sketch the emergence of the major concepts and proposed actions which form the new model for development; (b) analyze the strategic implications for national and local educational change; and (c) critique both the general model, and, in particular, examine its limitations in planning and implementing educational reform. The analysis and critique will include an argument that the new development orthodoxy attempts to alter significantly and, at times, unrealistically, the functions of education programs and systems (Asian Development Bank & World Bank, 1999; Asian Development Bank, 2001).

The Evolvement of the New Development Orthodoxy

The emerging development orthodoxy, although presenting no single, elaborated ideology, constitutes an attempt to respond to earlier failed orthodoxies. The ‘development problem’ as currently largely defined by bilateral and multilateral assistance agencies (i.e., the World Bank, UN Group, and the Asian Development Bank) would likely include the following general interpretations: the number of poor people globally is
shifting interpretation of development

Early theories of development concentrated largely on economic growth, focused on a national product with GNP and GNP per capita, the favored indicators of success. Lewis (1955) in his popular early book on economic development explained: “The subject matter of the book is growth of output per head of population. Growth or output are treated as synonyms or even occasionally for the sake of variety these terms may be substituted with progress or development” (p.11). To Lewis, the ideas of growth, output, progress, and development are identical. What matters in this view of development is the total sum or aggregation of outputs of the economy with little attention to distribution or characteristics of growth.

Subsequent modifications in development theory added to growth the idea of ‘redistribution’ (Chenery, 1974), thus, to a degree, recognizing the need for protection of the poorest sectors of the population. Recently, views of economic development have been further supplemented with a variety of social objectives, even with some recommendations that the popular development measure of income be replaced by a needs-based concept. The importance of economic growth has persisted, but “basic needs” and the ideas of fairness and justice have been increasingly, but not universally, accepted as a component of the conceptualization of development (Leach & Little, 1999; McMahon, 2000).

The emerging approach to development, at least in rhetoric, goes well beyond, interpretations of most of the literature emphasizing growth and basic needs. Within the new development orthodoxy, outlines of a localized participatory model for policy and planning are beginning to emerge, hastened by national policies and international trends in decentralization, publicized by the grass-roots experience of NGOs and other organizations working in local health, education and rural development, expedited by the market place, and, recently strongly encouraged by changing priorities of major international donors.

Table 1 represents an attempt to capture similarities and distinctions on nine dimensions of three general models of development. There is some empirical evidence suggesting an historical trend across the approaches toward acceptance of the language of institutional capability. However, during the last several decades elements of all three approaches can be found at any given time. Thus, for example, even in the 1960s when development goals were dominated by a focus on economic growth, with only occasional references to noneconomic factors, there were a few scholars and practitioners calling for more attention to the human side of development.

Modifications and extensions of development goals have seen the idea of basic needs, most explicitly in health and education, gain importance in the 1970s and remain a priority today. However, the emerging overarching goal of most development agencies and many developing countries has become poverty reduction, a condition achieved through empowerment of the poor in processes of social development and social inclusion as well as economic growth.

Another change in emphasis recognizes the strong inhibiting effects of government corruption and the importance of honest, effective governance as a context for endogenous change. Human capital concerns continue to dominate the policy dimensions; however, the additional concepts of cultural capital and social capital have become part of the broader capital concept. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the development process, and therefore the measurement of outputs and outcomes, have been freed from domination of quantitative approaches and a preference for ‘objectively verifiable indicators,’ giving encouragement to inclusion of a wide range of qualitative research methods.

The success and legitimacy of the new development model is assumed to lie in participatory activities central to the processes of policy making, planning, assessing and sustaining change involving and serving local and national aspirations and expectations.

Strategies for the new development orthodoxy generated largely by multilateral agencies, in particular the World Bank, attempt to: (a) reverse traditional patterns of centralized dominance of decisions, (b) extend social participation and opportunity, and (c) demonstrate good governance and institutional efficiencies. Clearly, greater challenges and higher expectations of the contribution of education are found in the new model.

The following sections examine the expectations for education and provide a critique of the key concepts associated with the new development model.