

The World Bank as a Development Teacher



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*The World Bank has been widely critiqued as a source of development norms. Yet one aspect of its activities has received relatively little academic attention: the socialization of development norms through training programs. This article addresses this gap in the literature by analyzing changes in the curricula, pedagogy, and methodology of the Economic Development Institute and the World Bank Institute—the teaching and learning arm of the World Bank. The article argues that, unlike the coercive nature of World Bank loan conditionality, the two teaching institutes have operated quietly in the background attempting to persuasively habitualize and naturalize member country participants into accepting particular understandings of and approaches to development as best practice and common sense. It concludes that the institutes have been active in the creation of toolkits used to socialize individuals into accepting and following World Bank development norms. **Keywords:** World Bank, training, norms.*

By taking seriously what the [World] Bank does and says, I learned that one of the Bank's greatest accomplishments has been to make its worldview, its development framework, and its data sets the ones that people around the world choose above others.

—Michael Goldman, *Imperial Nature*¹

MUCH HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT THE WORLD BANK'S ROLE IN DEFINING THE parameters of mainstream development. There is a rich and varied literature examining the nature, quality, and impact of its ideas. Yet academia has largely overlooked its quieter and more background activities in the socialization of development norms through training programs. In this article, I seek to address this gap in the literature by analyzing the operations of the Economic Development Institute (EDI) and the World Bank Institute (WBI)—the teaching and learning arm of the World Bank. The institutes run courses, provide facilities, and publish research intended to instruct others on how to think about development. The EDI was established in 1955 and remained in operation until 1999, when it was replaced by the WBI. Emphasizing the pedagogical principles of practical learning, global networks, and collaborative partnerships, their audience base reveals their influence. In 1956, the EDI delivered two courses to a few dozen people. In 2005, the WBI offered over a thousand learning products to 110,000 government officials, private sector representatives, and educators, adopting a training-the-trainers approach geared toward

building the capacity of graduates to teach others what they have learned. Yet they have received little scholarly attention, either being overlooked, reduced to a footnote, or conflated with other activities of the World Bank. My argument in this article is that, unlike the coercive nature of loan conditionality, the institutes have operated quietly in the background attempting to persuasively habitualize and naturalize member country participants into accepting selective understandings of and approaches to development.

The contribution of my article is twofold. First, it complements the literature that addresses the material power of the World Bank (i.e., its financial leverage capable of coercing policy reform through loan conditionality) by examining its ideational power.² Second, it adds to the constructivist literature that focuses on international organizations and norm dynamics by positioning the teaching and learning arm of the World Bank within the constructivist story.³ Importantly, this article contributes to the literature by focusing on the toolkits used by the EDI and WBI in their attempt to socialize member country participants into accepting particular development norms; it observes changes in curricula, pedagogy, and methodology. The question of to what degree do graduates integrate what they have learned into their later day-to-day activities is beyond the scope of this article. In what follows, I first examine the power of ideas in the World Bank, analyzing its capacity as a norm entrepreneur, and then go on to evaluate the EDI and WBI.

The Power of Ideas in the World Bank

The World Bank is an arbiter of development knowledge. As Michael Goldman remarks, “In a policy world obsessed with the belief that only ‘global expertise’ is valuable, the Bank has no real rival.”⁴ Deriving its authority from the perceived legitimacy of its research and policies, numerous authors have already investigated its potential as an actor capable of defining and promoting development orthodoxy.⁵ Notably, many have recently commented on its role as a Knowledge Bank, an institutional turn formalized under the presidency of James Wolfensohn (1995 to 2005). While the World Bank has long projected an image of itself as a source of data and analysis, the Knowledge Bank approach saw it aim “to produce and manage knowledge for the broader community of people interested in development issues: by producing reports, organizing training and conferences, and through Internet initiatives.”⁶ While the knowledge packages under the new approach were conceived as public goods, a range of authors have argued that the approach “has been (and remains) overly prescriptive and universalistic.”⁷ As such, the rationale behind the Knowledge Bank must be acknowledged within the context of the World Bank projecting its own development norms. However, as Maria Pía Riggirozzi observes, “‘Knowledge transferred’ is not necessarily ‘knowledge taken.’ . . . The ontological power of the World Bank’s knowledge and its instrumentalization into policy practices defines a new role for the World Bank