EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Why an Issue on Social Entrepreneurs?

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In its first issue, "Are NGOs Overrated" (1998), Current Issues in Comparative Education (CICE) initiated a debate on the significance, challenges, and purposes of various types of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in advancing social and educational change. This topic was triggered by the dramatic political and economic transformations of the 1980s and 1990s that shaped the relationship between states, civil societies and markets around the world (CICE, 1998). Authors argued that, among their serious weaknesses, NGOs had shown increased dependence on state funding and upwards accountability, thereby compromising NGO performance, and ultimately, their legitimacy (Edwards & Hulme, 1998), and that many had engaged in implementing prepackaged international reforms, rather than challenging these imported reform packages with alternative ones (Steiner-Khamsi, 1998). In addition, the contributions demonstrated that while certain indispensable functions of the state could not be replaced (Arnove & Christina, 1998), and NGOs had been 'overrated' by progressives, they continued to represent the most significant challenge to contemporary development strategies (Klees, 1998).

Seven years later, the issues raised by the debate on NGOs appear to resonate with the emerging discussion on social entrepreneurship, a term that has been increasingly incorporated into the discourses of practitioners, donors and policy makers in the development field since the late 1990s. The two are intimately linked in the discussion of potential and limitations for advancing social change. In fact, a growing number of donors have begun to support social entrepreneurs, rather than NGOs, based on a belief that social entrepreneurs are more effective and innovative in generating social change. The term social entrepreneur has therefore been increasingly incorporated into the debate on the strengths and weaknesses of NGOs. Attention to social entrepreneurship as a source of social innovation has also been recognized in the academe. An increasing number of programs--mostly Business and Public Policy Programs--are promoting research on the subject, and training social entrepreneurs.

This increasing interest of donors, practitioners and researchers inspired CICE to question why such heightened attention to social entrepreneurship is taking hold today. Indeed, Dees (2001) argues that social entrepreneurship is not new. Is the growing interest in social entrepreneurship therefore a reaction to the failed promises of NGOs, the most notorious of which being their detachment from the communities they serve? Since social entrepreneurs generally establish organizations to carry out their projects of social change, are these organizations and projects any different from NGOs? How does social entrepreneurship apply or manifest itself in the educational arena? And what are the implications of social change agents borrowing strategies from the business world and applying them to advance a social agenda through education?

To analyze the implications of social entrepreneurship for research within the field of Comparative and International Education, first, we examine how social entrepreneurs are often conceived, since the concept of entrepreneurship has been "long hallowed in the context of business and economic ventures" (Brown et al., 2004, p. 260), and only recently has it increasingly been applied to social problem solving. As reviewed by Brown et al. (2004), social entrepreneurs are conceptualized in three related ways. The first understands social entrepreneurs as combining social impact with commercial enterprise. The second, represented by Dees (2003; 2001; 1998), focuses on the innovation of social entrepreneurs for social impact, regardless of the economic feasibility of their ventures. Building on definitions of entrepreneurship in economics and management theories, Dees provides an ideal type of social entrepreneurs. Thus, social entrepreneurs represent this ideal type in different ways, and to different degrees. For Dees, social entrepreneurs are change agents who adopt social missions, recognizing and pursuing new opportunities. They tackle roots of social problems, and work towards decreasing existing social needs more willingly than treating problems' manifestations, engaging in processes of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning. They act without being limited by existing resources at reach, and therefore, they might start working before they may have the necessary resources. In addition, they exhibit high accountability to the communities served and for the outcomes created (Dees, 2001; 1998). The third understanding is mainly concerned with their potential to "catalyze social transformation, well beyond the solutions of the social problems that are the initial focus of the problem" (Brown et al., 2004, p. 262).

The field of Comparative and International Education is concerned with issues of social change, and the role of civil society and its organizations in education. Inquiry into the implications of social entrepreneurship for education provides avenues to expand insights and bring new perspectives to these issues. Education--whether taking place inside or outside of schools--is one of the areas in which social entrepreneurs are said to be innovating and creating change. Whether their projects advance changes in school classrooms or outside of schools, ultimately, their practices do have implications for education and vice versa. However, most of the literature on social entrepreneurship is currently based in business and non-profit and civil society studies.

This issue of CICE seeks to stimulate debate on the ways in which social entrepreneurship is conceptualized and manifested within the field of education. The contributors tackle a wide range of questions, such as: how and where are social entrepreneurs developing opportunities and innovations in education, and for whom? How does a perspective of social entrepreneurship relate to teachers as catalysts for change? How do social entrepreneurs make use of networks to advance educational change? Can and should the educational innovations of social entrepreneurs at the local level be institutionalized? How can academic programs educate for a practice of social entrepreneurship that transcends the market metaphor?

In **From Entrepreneurship to Activism: Teachers as Agents of Social Change**, Steve Shara argues that while social entrepreneurship shares similar concerns with social justice activism, the business ethos in the idea of entrepreneurship is not suited to the social concerns that teachers and educators deal with in their everyday lives. The article identifies characteristics of social entrepreneurship that are shared with

the concerns of peace and social justice, but cautions against a rush to blur the distinctions between social entrepreneurship and education. Based on fieldwork conducted in Malawi, the article presents a historical context for peace and social justice activism in Malawi, and the ideas needed to promote teacher independence and activism to make teaching relevant to social change and innovation.

In **The Politics of Social Entrepreneurs in Access to Education: A Case Study of Shan Burmese Refugees in Southwestern Thailand,** Celina Su and Peter Muenning draw on Dees's characterization of social entrepreneurship to present a case study of Shan Burmese families in Northern Thailand. The thirty families they examine face hardships finding work, accessing healthcare and placing their children in schools. Two Thai nationals, Yai and Noi, assist this community by establishing a primary school. Over four years, this nonformal school succeeds in raising educational standards so that Shan children can be comfortably integrated into Thai schools. Yai and Noi promote academic achievement, and generate momentum throughout the community to keep the school sustainable. Their concomitant efforts to improve sanitation and healthcare for Shan families exemplify an innovative and adaptable social mission that improves refugees' qualities of life.

Jill Sperandio discusses how social entrepreneurs are developing educational opportunities outside the formal system of education for low-income children and women in **Social Entrepreneurs and Educational Leadership in Bangladesh**. Sperandio argues that social entrepreneurs innovate and experiment with new methods in the delivery of education, since they are less constrained by the 'educentric' paradigm. The article also points out that for countries that are struggling to provide disadvantaged groups with access to education, social entrepreneurship offers the potential of increasing the availability of education and of introducing innovations that may be adopted by the national education system.

In their essay entitled **Social Enterprise and re-Civilization of Human Endeavors**, Maria Humphries and Suzanne Grant remind us that the market as an organizing metaphor is increasingly used to organize the delivery of social services. They take Dees's (2003) distinction between social and economic entrepreneurs, to argue that that all economic activity is social activity; and suggest that the uncritical market metaphor may be seen not only as an inadequate disciplinary mechanism for the conduct of social enterprise, but as the generator of the social ills social entrepreneurs seek to address.

The potential of social entrepreneurship to advance education and social change has not been sufficiently explored by Comparative and International Education scholars. This issue of CICE contributes towards this end. It is expected that ultimately this will bring further vitality to our field and provide new insights to the research community studying social entrepreneurship.

Notes

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