Reform movements in higher education often take predictable paths. They begin as work on the margins and then bid for respectability, push for institutionalization, work to embed in the curriculum, determine boundary definitions, form advocacy organizations, host conferences, establish new journals, call for renewal, critique the mainstream, and so on (Clark, 1968).

The history of service-learning and civic engagement illustrates these points (Butin, 2005; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Whether and how a field becomes a permanent fixture in the higher education landscape and what it eventually stands for become fodder for the movement’s advocates as well as for those with quite a different idea about the academy’s purposes. Service-learning, civic engagement, and social entrepreneurship education are amongst the latest reform movements gaining a foothold in the university.

For a few years now, I have been wading in the waters of service-learning, civic engagement and, more recently, the field of social entrepreneurship. While there are multiple definitions of social entrepreneurship, for purposes of this review we rely on the one developed by Light (2006), professor of Public Service at New York University and author of several books on social entrepreneurship:

A social entrepreneur is an individual, group, network, organization, or alliance of organizations that seek sustainable, large-scale change through pattern-breaking ideas in what or how governments, non-profits, and businesses do to address significant social problems. (p. 50)

Because service-learning, civic engagement, and social entrepreneurship are focused on social change, orient their work outside the university, propose greater engagement in and with the community, advocate nontraditional models of learning, and are relatively new developments in higher education – one cannot but help compare them. What I have observed is that this more recently emerging field of social entrepreneurship is garnering a great deal of attention (and funding) and, as was the case with the service-learning and civic engagement movement, is trying to secure a place in higher education as way to teach students how to ameliorate social and economic conditions locally and globally. The social entrepreneurship movement has an active national and international organization, Ashoka, as well as growing numbers of faculty and universities teaching courses and developing minors, concentrations, and certificates focused on this work, both on the undergraduate and graduate level. The field has established journals (The Journal of Social Entrepreneurship, The Stanford Social Innovation Review, The Social Enterprise Journal) and national conferences (such as those sponsored by Ashoka U, Ashoka’s organizational division for higher education; New York University’s Conference on Social Entrepreneurship; The Social Enterprise Conference hosted by the Harvard Business School and Kennedy School of Government; and many others). Excellence in social entrepreneurship on campuses is recognized by Ashoka’s Changemaker campus designation, similar to Carnegie’s elective Community Engagement designation for curricular engagement, community outreach, and partnerships in service-learning and civic engagement.

The growth of social entrepreneurship on campuses began about ten years ago at the graduate level in Masters of Business Administration programs. A decade later, most of the nation’s leading business schools have well-developed and popular programs (Worsham, 2012). The roots and growth of social entrepreneurship in business schools and subsequently in other university departments, tracked by Ashoka, is noteworthy. In 2013, Ashoka U, as part of its focus on higher education’s work in teaching and supporting...
social entrepreneurship programs on campuses, surveyed more than 200 campuses in the U.S and in other nations to assess the status and institutional location of social entrepreneurship initiatives (Ashoka U, 2014). The report found marked growth in both curricular and cocurricular offerings, including speaker series, incubator development, course development and implementation, and institutionalization in campus centers and other offices. According to Ashoka’s research, while these programs are most likely to be located in business schools (55%), recently the field has seen the development of social entrepreneurship courses elsewhere, such as in public policy (9%) and social sciences (6%). This is not to say that these programs are well integrated across the curriculum; perhaps, the field is too young to expect a deeper adoption of this movement at this point in its history. Interestingly, the survey also identified 22 campuses (11%) where service-learning was used as the umbrella term for social change, with various forms of social innovation seen as “included in service-learning efforts” or having “direct overlap between social innovation and service-learning efforts” (p. 24). A small number of these campuses reported that social innovation either was distinct from service-learning or that they didn’t know the status of social innovation on their campus. The social entrepreneurship field has allied itself with the growing emphasis on innovation on campuses, expanding the use of the term to cover not just social entrepreneurship but other developments such as design thinking, business and nonprofit incubators, and boot camps.

The development of social entrepreneurship teaching on campuses lagged behind the development by social entrepreneur practitioners in the field, though not by much. With initial development in graduate schools of business, social entrepreneurship glommed onto emerging campus programs in general entrepreneurship. This by no means suggests that standard programs in entrepreneurship welcomed this new field. As Dees recounts this history in an interview with Worsham (2012), there was considerable rebranding and realignment of social entrepreneur work so that engagement with nonprofits and applying business principles to these organizations would make sense to general entrepreneur program leaders. As we know from the history of service-learning on campuses, the framing of a new campus initiative has important implications for how and how successfully an innovation may be adopted.

A few questions arise as we see the growth of social entrepreneurship on campuses. What do service-learning professionals think of this movement? Do we consider this field a complement to, extension of, or challenge to our work? And finally, do the fields of service-learning, civic engagement, and social entrepreneurship, all of which purport to teach students about changing the world, shortchange students when they are independent of each other? Light takes up these and other questions in Driving Social Change: How to Solve the World’s Toughest Problems (2011).

As with any new movement, social entrepreneurship is characterized by its own share of hyperbole. Some advocates of social entrepreneurship suggest this movement has a singular role to play in social change. Brock, Steiner, and Jordan (2012) suggest:

social entrepreneurship differs from other social and organizational efforts because it uses technology and innovation to address societal challenges by creating long-term, self-sufficient business enterprises. In this regard, social entrepreneurship is the only truly sustainable model of humanitarianism in place today. (p. 90; emphasis added)

One can find echoes of this sentiment in some of the movement’s literature. Books, such as Philanthro-capitalism: How the Rich Can Save the World (Bishop & Green, 2008) and The Power of Impact Investing: Putting Markets to Work for Profit and Global Good (Rodin & Brandenburg, 2014), celebrate the work of social entrepreneurs in bringing new approaches to social problems that are adopted from the use of markets and business principles. Light, a friendly critic of the social entrepreneurship movement, puts the hoopla about social entrepreneurship into perspective. As a scholar of social entrepreneurship and an academic who early on studied this emerging field and drew some borders around the practice, what Light has to say has profound meaning not only for the social entrepreneurship movement but for social change education across the curriculum as well. Even for those who do not believe that the purpose of service-learning and civic engagement is social change, Light’s points about what is required to change the world and how we teach those perspectives, orientations, and skills are apt and important. He argues that higher education is critical to the task of educating the next generation of social change agents, not simply in one tool, like social entrepreneurship, but in a broad set of skills and orientations that embrace collaboration, understand politics and civic life, appreciate power dynamics, and build community capacities.

As Light explains, social entrepreneurship is characterized by a moving definition, which those familiar with the service-learning movement will recognize as characteristic of an emerging field. What counts as social entrepreneurship to some does not make the cut for others. Although business models are key to some definitions, others focus on other sorts of innovations and transformative change. Some would include...
Martin Luther King, Jr. and Wendy Kopp of Teach for America as social entrepreneurs, while others only would celebrate businesspeople such as Blake Mycoskie of Toms Shoes whose business model of Buy One, Give One provides shoes for poor children across the globe. Light suggests an expansive view of social entrepreneurship, as cited earlier in this essay, seeing multiple paths and strategies toward what he calls transformative change.

In *The Search for Social Entrepreneurship* (2008), one of his earlier books, Light contends that it is not only the inspired and charismatic leader that characterizes the movement but that groundbreaking ideas can happen in large mainstream organizations and/or created by a collaborating team. Further, he offers that ordinary citizens can also catalyze breakthrough change through organized actions and collective work. Obviously, Light can be characterized as being organizationally agnostic; he sees no particular magic in the business model and appreciates that nonprofits, even established ones, can be as innovative and entrepreneurial as a brand new start-up launched by a recently-minted MBA. In my thinking, Light provides a broadly-oriented model of what it takes to create and sustain social change, and in doing so, offers an important framework for campus and in place?

In *Driving Social Change*, Light makes clear that he is not interested in small peripheral changes but instead in deep, sustained transformations that tilt toward social justice, for which he suggests the term “social breakthroughs” to characterize “fundamental changes in prevailing wisdom about who gets what, when, where, and how from a society” (p. 3). With this conceptualization in mind, he poses three questions. First, in our ongoing hunger for the next new thing, he wonders if we are “overselling social entrepreneurship as the primary, or even only, driver of social breakthroughs” (p. 2)? Second, are other important levers and drivers of social change ignored and overlooked in our current fascination with the lone social entrepreneur? Third, how does social change happen and who and what needs to be on board and in place?

To answer these questions, Light proposes a more comprehensive model of social change than the social entrepreneur model suggests, identifying four tools of social action leading to deep social change: (a) social entrepreneurship – new combinations of ideas and strategies that characterize social innovations (e.g., microfinance or KIVA), (b) social safekeeping – the aggressive defense of past breakthroughs (e.g., social security), (c) social exploring – careful and bold investigations of social trends and solutions (e.g., books such as Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* (2010), with her focus on mass incarceration and strategies to address this), and (d) social advocacy – the “unrelenting demand for change embedded in social networks” (e.g., the campaign for civil rights, the Dream movement) (p. 4). Light makes the important point that the social change strategy to be employed in any given situation depends on the issue to be addressed. “If our purpose is to change the world, we must concentrate on every driver possible, not just the ones we can see (p. 4).” Or for purposes of this review, if we want to teach students about social change, we may need to significantly expand our definitions and approaches and consider a full array of what may be employed in a social change pedagogy.

In the world of service-learning, we pay attention to models and student and community impacts. In the world of social entrepreneurship, measurement and scaling up are keystone values, especially the latter. If an innovation is proven to be effective, it should be replicated. Scaling up is a major challenge, of course, not just for the logistics of taking an effective approach and trying to replicate it somewhere new but also for the challenges that different contexts present. As we all know, there is a long history of well-intentioned projects failing because of rapid implementation without adequate supports [e.g., Play Pump and the failure of many clean water projects (Kenny & Sandefeur, 2013)] or a clear appreciation of context or community voice (consider the documentary Good Fortune’s lessons on development in Kibera and the Yala Swamp (Van Soest & Levine, 2009). Light’s recent insight suggests that the promise of new transformative ideas championed by social entrepreneurs cannot succeed without what he calls catalytic collaboration. This necessarily involves other tools – social advocacy, social safekeeping, and social exploration. One can take issue with Light’s selection and definition of these four tools of social change (perhaps, there are other tools and other useful distinctions); these, nonetheless, give a place to start a conversation about what and how we should teach students about social change and how to undertake it?

In the first two chapters of *Driving Social Change*, Light takes up the changing and somewhat contested view of social entrepreneurship. In chapter 2, *Agitating the Prevailing Wisdom*, Light outlines the main idea of his book: The use of a particular social change strategy depends on the social breakthrough required or envisioned; in other words, social entrepreneurship is not always the best arrow in the quiver. If a new combination of ideas for change is needed, social entrepreneurship is probably the best driver for change. If systems are in place but need repair, protection, maintenance, or fine-tuning, then social safekeeping is the best approach. If the aim is to identify
trends, anticipate threats, or evaluate the effectiveness of what is working, then social exploring may be the best means. And if lobbying, legislation, or a social movement are called for, then social advocacy moves to the forefront. In this chapter, Light briefly explores how each of these tools works. He notes that it is just as important, for example, to protect social security or environmental legislation as it is to create a new organization to address the issue of clean water.

In chapter 3, Light presents his framing of the social change breakthrough cycle, which he suggests has nine stages and engages each of his four change tools as well as network development and activation, organizational collaboration, environmental analysis, and a clear understanding of the obstacles and assets facing the change strategies. His final steps include careful planning and strategizing to “secure the breakthrough through formal and informal enactment of the breakthrough idea, whether in the form of significant policy change or new norms and expectations for a just world” (p. 11) along with safeguarding the breakthrough from counterattack.

Light is not sanguine about social change. He doesn’t suggest social change is easy or linear, nor is he proposing that all environments are equally open to change. He suggests in another article that opportunities for change come in waves, when prevailing wisdom weakens and when the shortcomings of the status quo create appetites for change and opportunities for experimentation (Light, 2009). Light suggests that creating lasting change requires civic participation, not simply astute business skills and the creation of an innovative organization by a social entrepreneur. He contends that transformative and sustained social change necessarily involves public work and active networks made up of broad coalitions as well as actors and organizations across the domains of social change he suggests – social entrepreneurs, social explorers, social safekeepers, and social advocates. As we think about what we teach in service-learning and civic engagement, we ought to consider not only aligning those civic lessons with creating commitments to positive social change, with helping students to understand civic participation in all its forms, and with creating demands for change, but also with the various strategies used to facilitate social change.

It is nearly impossible, for example, to activate the social breakthrough cycle without a basic commitment to making a difference, nor create momentum forward without assets such as civic demand for change, basic freedoms to act, government responsiveness, and faithful execution of the laws. (Light, 2009, p. 11)

In the fourth and final chapter, optimistically titled Prepare to Expect Wonders, Light offers suggestions for activating social breakthrough networks even as these are under attacks. He argues that more important than sharpening the divisions among the four social change strategies is the development of and commitment to civic leadership “in all its forms.” Here, I suggest, is where service-learning and civic engagement pedagogy are especially challenged. How do we connect our students with opportunities to learn about social advocacy, social safekeeping, social entrepreneurship and social exploring? There are many valuable models of service-learning that support these change strategies; the question that arises is whether we need to articulate and activate these more deliberately.

The Promise of Social Entrepreneurship

Although there are multiple varieties of social entrepreneurship, perhaps the best recognized is what are called social ventures, that is, projects with the aim of enhancing revenue to support a social change mission. As Foster and Bradach (2005) report, the pressure for nonprofits to be entrepreneurial and innovative as funders emphasize sustainability has increasing numbers of nonprofits thinking about, and often creating, social enterprises to support their respective missions. A survey of the profitability of these businesses was not encouraging; fewer than 25% believed they were profitable, but even this low percentage can be construed as inflated as not all of these nonprofit businesses adequately account for overhead and other administrative costs from the parent organization. Pressure on nonprofits has pushed them to develop these enterprises when these organizations face major challenges in mounting a successful business. Chasing profits may be a losing proposition for nonprofits, despite the attraction of income without strings and the general enthusiasm for business solutions. Because our students work with nonprofits and may be in their employ at some point in their careers, they should know about the social entrepreneurship movement, what it means, and what is the evolving landscape for nonprofits’ efforts at social enterprises and their survival, sustainability, and success.

There are many promising developments in the larger field of social entrepreneurship that deserve recognition. A community of practice is emerging that holds up exacting standards for innovations in the community. Journalists David Bornstein and Tina Rosenberg share the duties of writing a weekly blog for the New York Times called Fixes [e.g., see a recent entry by Rosenberg on addressing AIDS in Africa (Rosenberg, 2014)]. This series provides detailed accounts of promising social innovations, from education to health and from aging to technology. Readers respond to these entries with critiques or examples of other inno-
vations that appear to be similarly promising. The series provides important material for any of us involved in social change education. As important as it is for a sociology professor to teach her social problems course with a service-learning component, one can argue that equal attention should be paid to social entrepreneur efforts and why they work or fail.

Gregory Dees, an intellectual leader of the social entrepreneurship movement, sees sharp distinctions among charity, problem solving, and social entrepreneurship approaches to social problems (2012), in parallel fashion to Keith Morton’s service-learning typology (1995). As service-learning has done in some of its practices, social entrepreneurship draws distinctions between its perspectives and practices and those of charity. He suggests that a significant battle has emerged between these two camps – those entrepreneurial types who disparage the sentiment and lack of concern about results by those in the charity camp, and those in the charity camp who find fault with market-based approaches. The first camp contends that the charity folks think that good intentions are enough while their opponents argue that analytic, results-based approaches ignore social capital and other community building values that are difficult to measure or quantify. Although Dees sees clear value in the history and traditions that underlie charity as an animating force for problem-solving and social entrepreneurship, he nevertheless finds it limiting. While charity may lead to acts of kindness and compassion,

the culture of charity, even when well-intentioned, can lead to actions that perpetuate the problems it is addressing and that create new problems in the psychologies of both charitable sectors and the recipients of charity. Both of these are antithetical to problem solving. (p. 329)

As with Light, Dees (2012) is advocating a way forward, bringing these concepts together in what he calls a new culture. To do this, he advances several ideas. The ones most relevant here are to educate students in the practice and philosophy of problem solving. He claims that it is insufficient to teach students to be empathic and caring. Education needs to go beyond the triggers of empathy to identify significant social problems and to address them.

We need a parable of the “Better Samaritan” who not only helps the traveler but also sets up an effective crime prevention program to keep travelers safe. Education needs to warn about the potential harms caused by the norms of the culture of charity. (2012, p. 330)

We can also suggest here that we should also be teaching students about the potential harm created by some social entrepreneurial approaches as well.

A Concern about Social Entrepreneurship

Associated with the social entrepreneurship movement is the growing popularity of so-called “conscious consumerism” or “shopping for good movements,” such as Toms Shoes or Project RED. The popularity of Toms Shoes reveals some of the power of this movement to attract a wide audience and group of supporters and also offers a way for us to offer a critique of this work and suggestions for improvement and reflection. Toms employs the Buy One Get One Model to support the distribution of shoes to poor communities. A consumer understands, “If I buy a pair of shoes for myself, Toms Shoes will donate a second pair to a poor child.” The attraction of this model is its concreteness and the good feeling engendered by doing good simply by buying a pair of shoes. According to the organization, over ten million pairs of shoes have been donated. The organization has more recently added glasses and coffee to their offerings (Toms, 2013). What could be wrong with this model?

In fact, Toms has faced multiple critics (Bansal, 2012). For example, not all shoes distributed by the company are appropriate for the environment where they are donated. Others argue that large give away programs like this undermine local sellers and manufacturers. Until recently, most of the donated shoes were made in China, which for some critics raised the question of how those shoes were manufactured, e.g., were there safeguards for workers and child laborers? Other critics contend that many of the donated shoes are given to individuals who may otherwise be able to afford them. In addition, while children may temporarily be served, the target population may become increasingly dependent on the donors. Perhaps, as some suggest, the community would be better served by programs that create jobs for local workers and retailers, instead of undermining these with donations that flood the market. And instead of transporting donated goods from other places, donors could issue vouchers for food, clothing, and other goods that could be used in local markets, thereby creating or sustaining local jobs (Rosenberg, 2013).

Locating Social Entrepreneurship on Campus

Where is it to best locate social entrepreneurship on campus? As noted above, social entrepreneurship first gained traction in business schools, and more recently has migrated to other academic departments. Dees (Worsham, 2012) suggests that business schools may not be the best place for teaching social entrepreneurship; he points to the lack of emphasis in typical business school curricula on what he calls emotional intelligence and empathy. Business skills may provide a rigor in thinking about typical business problems, but the challenge presented in social
Enos provides coherent insights into the field of social change “is more complex. It is more like a many player game with complex environmental factors, such as dynamic political and economic conditions…. about action under complex uncertainty” (p. 446). A business model may fall short in responding to a social problem challenge. His point is that there is a need for interdisciplinary approaches involving several departments across a university to help students understand the complexity of social problems, social settings, and problem solving. Dees suggests, as does Light, that we provide students with a portfolio of options for learning about social change, placing social entrepreneurship in the context of other social change approaches but not showcasing it as the best or only way to address all social challenges.

Lessons from Service-Learning and Civic Engagement

In the history of service-learning, we have grown to understand more about the ways in which campuses relate to the community – both near and far; we have learned about pedagogy and the critical role of reflection and measuring student outcomes; we have learned about building sustaining partnerships for the long haul; and we have developed a deeper sense of humility and have recognized the danger of the unintended consequences of our work in communities. We have seen service-learning and community engagement emerge across our campuses, in multiple disciplines and curricular models. These lessons should have value for the social entrepreneurship community. In journals such as the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning and others, we have assembled an enviable record of lessons learned about how our institutions may best prepare students for a life of engagement. After decades of honing this craft and reconsidering this work, we know some valuable lessons about the ways in which this work can best be advanced on campuses and in larger communities. It may be an auspicious time to share what we know with the social entrepreneurship movement.

Conclusion

Driving Social Change is a good read because it provokes a broader conversation about the aims and claims of social change pedagogy. Accordingly, it should be of special interest to those in the service-learning and civic engagement community who are invested in social change. How social entrepreneurship, service-learning, and civic engagement continue to develop on campuses is a matter of speculation. They may continue to work in isolation or they may reach out for greater collaboration and integration. For those in the service-learning community, Light provides coherent insights into the field of social entrepreneurship and creates a framework that could facilitate building bridges for greater collaboration and deeper engagement. There may be other ways forward, but Light’s perspective provides a starting framework for a deeper conversation. For those in the social entrepreneurship community, the service-learning community knows a lot about community and voice. We know a lot about students’ understanding of community issues. We have learned a great deal about what it takes to orient campuses to the larger community. If our aim is to educate students for engaged civic and social purposes, we should empower them with a portfolio of social change approaches. As Light suggests in Driving Social Change:

Higher education must play a more aggressive and unified role in educating the next generation of change agents. Higher education is moving toward the long-needed transformation from a dry, bureaucratic, top-down good-citizen model to a vibrant, collaborative, and inclusive system of leadership that reflects the values and visions of a new generation of young people…[T]he new model assumes instead that all students, no matter how young or old, have a capacity to contribute to and participate in something larger than themselves…Colleges and universities act as gatekeepers into the world of social change and play a crucial role in shaping student attitudes about engagement of all kinds. (p. 14)

References


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