The Challenge of Social Entrepreneurship Through Social Studies Education

Biodun Ogunyemi

Department of Curriculum Studies & Instructional Technology, Faculty of Education, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye

Abstract

Social entrepreneurship involves a devotion to addressing problems of the society. While social entrepreneurs borrow from the tenacity of businessmen and women, the focus is not on profit-making but working for the promotion of improved quality of life of members of their target communities. Educators are challenged to perform this role because of the increasing legitimacy crisis of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This paper examines the various dimensions of social entrepreneurship and draws out the implications of the entrepreneurial spirit for social studies education. It argues that the traditional concern of social studies as a problem solving subject challenges teacher educators in the field to equip their trainees with capacity to act as social entrepreneurs in Nigerian schools and communities. Likely problems and solutions in this regard are discussed in the paper.

Introduction

Today's world demands people with capacity for solving personal and social problems. The complexity of modern living, occasioned by rapid industrialisation and technological innovations, demands skills in problem solving as individuals and groups strive to understand their circumstances and give their life better meaning.

This human struggle for improved standard of living sometimes result in competition and crises at various levels of human interactions, that is, community, nation-state, regional and global levels. Educators are strategically placed to equip children and youth with knowledge and competencies required to face challenges associated with these complexities by preparing them as change-agents in the matrix of human existence. Social studies education is particularly tailored towards this end.

The goal of social studies education is to produce citizens who are contributing members of their society. Every modern society looks up to its educational system for producing people who do not only demand their rights, but are equally conscious of their responsibility to others and the society at large. As part of efforts to build a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy, and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens, Nigeria's philosophy of education is etched on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen while fully integrating him or her into the community (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). Social studies and citizenship education, particularly at the basic education level (primary and junior secondary school), occupies a centre-stage position in actualising this compelling demand of modern education in general and the Nigerian social studies education in particular.

The central thesis of this paper is that the goals of social studies education are better achieved if the school subject is promoted within the paradigm of social entrepreneurship. The paper attempts a conceptualisation of "social entrepreneurship" and differentiates it from the relatively more popular one associated with business entrepreneurs. The similarities and differences between a social entrepreneur and a social studies educator are highlighted. This is followed by an overview of likely problems and prospects of integrating social entrepreneurship into the Nigerian school social studies.

What is Social Entrepreneurship?

The term "social entrepreneurship" can not be defined without reference to "social entrepreneur"; as the former is made explicit in

the characterisation of the latter. What readily comes to mind at the mention of "social entrepreneurship" is what goes on in the business world. One is likely to see the picture of an individual who strives to add value to his or her investment in the stock market, commerce, industrial production or any other economic venture. In practical terms, the concern of this individual is increasing profit on investment ‒ the higher the profit margin, the better the value added. This situation applies to all business entrepreneurs but, certainly, not for those called social entrepreneurs. Unlike in the business world, the primary concern of the social entrepreneur is not profit making; it is how to add value to the life of the community and humanity as a whole.

The principles behind social entrepreneurship are not new. For centuries, the human race has produced individuals who made life commitment to making social impact not counting the cost or daunting obstacles on their path. In the last century, Florence Nightingale, the founder of the first nursing school and developer of modern nursing practices, was one of such exceptional individuals. The contributions of Margaret Sanger who founded the Planned Parenthood Federation of America ‒ the precursor of the International Planned Parenthood Federation- equally singled her out as a social entrepreneur. And, more recently, Professor Muhammad Yunus was awarded the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for his initiative on microloans in Bangladesh way back in 1976. His pioneering efforts gave rise to the Grameen Bank which is reputed for empowering the impoverished people to become economically self-sufficient through microcredit without the traditional collateral security. This model of microcredit is being replicated in different parts of the world.

The human activity called social entrepreneurship indeed has a long history, but its development as an academic field is fairly recent (Dees, 1998; Alvord, Brown & Letts, 2004; Mair & Marti, 2005). One of the pioneers in the field is J. Gregory Dees ‒ professor of social entrepreneurship and nonprofit management at the Duke University, USA. Justifying his preoccupation with this emerging field,

Dees (1998) remarks:

> The time is certainly ripe for entrepreneurial approaches
> to social problems. Many governmental and philanthropic
> efforts have fallen far short of our expectations. Major
> social sector institutions are often viewed as inefficient,
> ineffective, and unresponsive. Social entrepreneurs are
> needed to develop new models for a new century.

To Dees, therefore, social entrepreneurship represents a paradigm
shift in the search for improved ways of service delivery; be it in
education, health, or public infrastructure. Drawing upon the ideas
of economic theorists like Batiste Say and Joseph Schumpeter, Dees
conceptualises social entrepreneurs as individuals with a social
mission. He goes further to characterise these individuals as those
who play the role of change agents in the social sector by:

♦   Adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just
   private   value),

♦   Recognising and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve
   that   mission,

♦   Engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation,
   and   learning,

♦   Acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in
   hand,   and

♦   Exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served
   and for the outcomes created.

Recognising that various individuals would meet these conditions
to varying degrees, Dees suggests that the closer a person gets to
satisfying them, the more that person fits the model of a social
entrepreneur.

Dees' pioneering efforts did much to put in proper perspective
who qualifies to be called a social entrepreneur. However, his model
of social entrepreneurship has been criticised for underplaying the
place of profit in sustaining the activities of social entrepreneur (Mair
& Marti, 2005).   Jerr Boschee and Jim McClurg as cited by Dylla

(2007) particularly express very strong opinion on this matter. They insist that a nonprofit organisation which is not generating earned revenue from its activities is not acting in an entrepreneurial manner. According to them, "It may be doing good and wonderful things, creating new and vibrant programs: But it is innovative, not entrepreneurial". This dimension brings to clear focus the second model of social entrepreneurship combining income-generating activities with innovation; a devotion to twin-objectives of earning both financial and social returns.

One variant of this income-generating perspective to social entrepreneurship is the idea of corporate responsibility. This term is often used to capture the activities of corporations or for-profit organisations which "are desirous to find ways to repair their images by developing environmentally sensitive and socially responsible projects, joint venturing with nonprofit charitable organisations, and creating offices of social responsibility" (Pomerantz, n.d). Examples of organisations involved in this "damage-control" process are multinational corporations involved in prospecting for oil in the Niger-delta region of Nigeria. Their involvement in activities bordering social entrepreneurship, no doubt, brings to bold relief the challenge of "giving-back" to the society from where all individuals and groups draw the basis for their activities and existence.

Broadly speaking, however, the two major perspectives to social entrepreneurship are interwoven. For example, a social entrepreneur may raise funds through charitable organisations or donor agencies like the Ashoka Foundation, MacArthur Foundation and Skoll Foundation. He or she may equally source for funds through personal efforts to actualise his or her dream. However, he or she must equally be concerned about the continuous flow of resources for sustainability. Therefore, while the drive for social impact keeps the social entrepreneur going, equally important is the 'business spirit' with implicit concern for sustainable resources. Matai (2006) actually calls for the 'business plan' approach; "thus allowing the social entrepreneur to address the issue of sustainability of the social venture undertaken".

In what way(s) then is the business entrepreneur different from the social entrepreneur? Again, Dees (2005) provides an answer. Dees argues that what distinguishes the two is the level of commitment to solving social problems. He brings out this more clearly in a recent contribution on the subject.

> When it comes to improving society, I am a pragmatist who believes in experimentation and innovation as important methods for finding better ways to promote human flourishing. More than ever, I am convinced that we need to break down the walls between our economic and social lives, not to advance the hegemony of "the market" but to integrate our out this potential of social studies more clearly. In their words,

> Social studies education should be measured by what learners can do with what they know. It should be designed to help learners use knowledge for significant and laudable purposes. Although the definition of a 'significant and laudable purpose' may vary from one society to another and from group to group within a society, in every case the accomplished student will be able to use acquired information and ideas to achieve goals. Students who accumulate facts and skills as ends in themselves are less well educated than those who are able to use knowledge as a means to understand their world (Patrick, et al., 1981: 158).

Patrick and his colleagues further identify three categories of essential skills in social studies education, namely: (1) skills in studying and learning; (2) skills in enquiry and decision-making; and (3) skills in responsible group participation and civic activity. In his more recent book, Stockard (2007) highlights the key areas where skills would be required by the 21st century learners of school social studies to include demographic considerations (e. g. population and health); economic considerations (e. g. poverty and labour); political considerations (e. g. human rights and democratic citizenship) and global considerations (e. g. global platforms and protocols on environment). There is no disputing the fact that the problem areas identified by Stockard largely constitute focal points in the activities of leading social entrepreneurs including serious-minded non-

governmental organisations (NGOs). Individuals with relevant training (based on appropriate skill acquisition) in the social studies field had been found quite suitable in the operational settings of these social innovators (Ogunyemi, 1995).

That products of social studies programmes present relevant credentials within social entrepreneurship however does not automatically make them social entrepreneurs. To attain that status demands much more; they require self-development, further training and dogged determination to chart a new course and not be given to the band-wagon effect permeating the current NGO community in Nigeria (Ogunyemi, Tella & Bruno, 2005).

Implications for Social Studies Education

Like social studies education, social entrepreneurship involves a process resulting from the continuous interaction between individuals and the context in which they and their activities are embedded (Mair & Marti, 2005). Entrepreneurship represents a growing source of social innovation that makes strong appeal to professionals in academic and professional fields. Although not much, if any, has been done to apply it within the social studies education field, social entrepreneurship is nevertheless a rich source of research, curriculum enhancement and innovative pedagogies.

Social studies educators have ample spaces for experimenting with their "problem-solving" philosophy within the social entrepreneurship paradigm. Opportunities abound for conducting baseline studies into local issues like pollution of a local river, erosion, waste management, bush burning, political apathy, human rights abuse, sexual networking and HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and harmful cultural practices including female genital mutilation. Such investigations had traditionally ended with survey reports which end up on library shelves or, at best, get published as journal articles or book chapters. Adopting a social entrepreneur spirit however demands that evidence from field work be put to use through innovative activities that bring about the change(s) by the researcher-activist. A researcher's report, if it gains the required attention at the official quarters, may possibly yield some policy reform. But given the observed inefficiency of government institutions, especially in Nigeria, the impacts of baseline studies are better concretized through community intervention programmes as a way of avoiding the "use-and-dump"

allegation by communities from whom "data" are usually extracted. What is required is the building of social capital and civic engagement through such elements as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995).

In the western world, the idea of social entrepreneurship has significantly changed the face of curricula of educational institutions especially at the secondary and higher levels. Training in social entrepreneurial skills is not only being promoted within the traditional business departments, it is also being incorporated into such seemingly remote fields like music (Dylla,2007), liberal arts (Pomerantz, n.d.) and sports (htt://www. change makers.net/files/Sport%2OEntrpreneurship.pdf). It is suggested that the ongoing clamour for the introduction of "Entrepreneurial Education" in the curricula of tertiary institutions in the country should take due cognizance of the social dimensions while necessary steps are taken to "plug in" the key concepts of social entrepreneurship at lower levels particularly in the National Basic Curriculum for Social Studies and Citizenship Education.

It is perhaps in the area of pedagogies that immediate action is required if social studies teachers are to respond to the challenge of social entrepreneurship. The teaching and learning of the school subject must be improved upon and this demands the introduction of innovative ideas. The America's National Council for the Social Studies (1993) identifies some basic principles for the promotion of social studies teaching and learning of the subject. These are as paraphrased below:

♦ Social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are meaningful. Indeed, the teacher is to be guided by the principle of proceeding from known to unknown and from simple to complex.

♦ Social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are integrative. The teacher is to emphasise the multi-dimensional aspects of every topic taught as every human phenomenon has historical, economic, political and other ramifications at the same time.

♦ Social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are value-based. Ethical issues permeate all aspects of human life as people are daily faced with moral dilemmas and problems of decision-making.

♦ Social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are challenging. Effective teachers are those who model seriousness of purpose and a thoughtful approach to inquiry

and use instructional strategies designed to elicit and support similar qualities from students.

♦ Social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are active. Active social studies teaching requires reflective thinking and decision-making as events unfold during teaching-learning interaction.

Implicit in the above principles is the challenge to take due cognizance of new trends in pedagogies of the school subject. Such trends, according to Stockard (2007) include learner-centred instruction, multisensory stimulus, multipath progress, multimedia/hypermedia, and collaborative work. Other trends implicit in these principles are information exchange, active, exploratory, inquiry-based learning; critical thinking/informed decision-making; proactive/planned action and authentic/real-world context.

In this era of global citizenship, social studies educators must operate with the mind-set that every action promoted at the classroom and community levels have both immediate and remote implications. "Think globally, act locally" seems to be the new catch-phrase. Through such a mind-set, social studies educators can fire the creative potentials of their students towards becoming those who are ambitious in tackling social problems; mission-driven as they set out to make impact; build strategic alliance in realizing their vision; and mobilize resources for their goal attainment. In other words, the skillful social studies educators can successfully imbue the learners with the spirit of social entrepreneurship which can drive and see them all through life.

Likely Problems and Prospects

Much as social entrepreneurship makes a strong appeal to social studies educators, it is not without some likely problems particularly in the Nigerian setting. First among this is the problem of conceptual clarification. It is widely acknowledged that social entrepreneurship is still an emerging field of research and learning(Dees, 1998, 2005; Mari & Marti, 2005). This situation is particularly more complex in education-related fields (Lafuente, 2005), prompting Sharra (2005)

to observe that the lack of discussion on social entrepreneurship in educational scholarship easily creates the impression that the idea has nothing in common with education. While this paper has shown that social entrepreneurship has much in common with education, and particularly social studies education, the issue of conceptual clarification is still likely to daunt the path of its application within the field. The manifestation of this problem is likely to be drastically reduced as more researchers and writers in the field of social studies venture into exploring this emerging area of research and learning.

Another likely problem is the undeveloped capacity of intervention-oriented research. As noted earlier, much of the available reports in social studies research in Nigeria's tertiary institutions are of the survey type which hardly make any social impact. The situation looks especially worrisome among the primary and secondary teachers who are largely deficient in skills for impact-focused and action research. Getting social studies educators to the level of conducting research for social impact certainly demand a regime of capacity building borrowing from the perspectives of experienced trainers and professionals in academic institutions as well as within the community of service providers such as the NGOs and multilateral agencies (UNDP, UNESCO, etc.)

A critical issue in teaching and researching for social impact is funding. With the continued decline in funding support in Nigerian tertiary institutions, many committed academics can hardly implement their ideas. Social studies educators are not an exception to this category of under-funded researchers. However, an essential ingredient of the entrepreneurial spirit is ability to amalgamate resources from a variety of sources for agenda setting and implementation. A working knowledge of the funding requirements of donor communities across the globe will certainly be helpful. Beside locally sourced funds, donor agencies like the MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Spencer Foundation and the European Union all provide potential funding sources for projects that could spark off a regime of change. What is called for is creativity on the part of the social studies educator-researcher.

The last possible source of problem is the seeming natural human resistance to change. In the same manner the introduction of social studies was resisted in many parts of the world, it is not impossible that the social scientists, who arrogate the competence in investigating and addressing all societal problems, may begin to challenge the competence of social studies educators when they adopt the social entrepreneurial spirit. As committed social entrepreneurs, however, they should remain focused. Social studies educators need not change their identities before they can introduce

innovative ideas on problem-solving which will rub on their students and their host communities.

Conclusion

Social studies education of the 21st century demands more practical application of its principles as a problem-solving school subject than the tradition arm-chair theorisation. Experience and research have shown that tertiary institution students have continued to ask "why social studies"? At the secondary school level also, it would seem many of the students saw the abrogation of the senior secondary school social studies curriculum as 'good riddance to bad rubbish' because they never wanted it. It would therefore seem that the Nigerian social studies educators have good opportunity in the promotion of social entrepreneurship to not only revive the sagging image of the subject but practically demonstrate its relevance to redressing a myriad of problems currently plaguing many Nigerian communities and Nigeria as a country.

Social entrepreneur, also known as social innovators or social capitalists, are changing the face of the globe today. As a dynamic school subjects, social studies cannot be oblivious to the challenge of social entrepreneurship. Perhaps what is required of social studies educators is to "act" what they "preach" in line with Mahatma Gandhi's aphorism – Be the change you want to see in the World.

It is self-fulfilling prophecy for social studies educators to lay claim to specialisation in a "problem-solving" field when, in reality, all they do is to theorise about problems. It would serve the purpose of the school subject better at all levels – primary, secondary and tertiary including teacher-education – if social studies educators stepped out from their shell of invisibility to become concrete problem solvers at the level of the community. They can do this by borrowing from the mental set, doggedness, tenacity and persistence of social entrepreneurs who the initial difficulties of official tardiness, dearth of resources and other temporal constraints cannot deter.

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