From Entrepreneurship to Activism:
Teacher Autobiography, Peace and Social Justice in Education

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Abstract

This article argues that while social entrepreneurship shares concerns similar to those of social justice activism, the corporate and business ethos in the idea of entrepreneurship is not suited to the social concerns that teachers and other educators deal with in their everyday lives. The article points out 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 four Malawian schools in 2004, this article places the historical context of peace and social justice activism in Malawi in the struggle for independence, and in the theoretical concept of *uMunthu*. Using autobiography as a research methodology, the article discusses the approaches and implications for promoting teacher independence and activism to make teaching relevant to social change and innovation in Malawi.

Introduction

Since 1994, Malawi has embraced a multiparty system of government, as well as liberalization of the economy, education, and social sector services. With support from international agencies and non-governmental organizations, the country has pursued a decentralization policy alongside a privatization agenda. The proliferation of non-governmental organizations working in education has taken the idea of entrepreneurship to a new level. Educational policy and practice have been caught up, perhaps unwittingly, in the process.

Given the prevalence of the idea of entrepreneurship and its penetration into education, and given the relative absence of the idea in educational scholarship, the time seems ripe for a discussion of the broad issues raised by developments in the field of social entrepreneurship. The lack of discussion on social entrepreneurship in educational scholarship easily creates the impression that the idea has nothing in common with education. Yet given global, historical and political developments in Malawi and around the world, particularly since the end of the Cold War, this is far from accurate.

This article argues that an understanding of social entrepreneurship and how it manifests itself in education needs to embody a concept of social justice. The article points out that rather than blur the social and the entrepreneurial, the corporate and business ethos found in entrepreneurship are not suited to the social concerns that teachers and other educators deal with in their everyday lives.

The first concern in this article is to caution against any rush to see an easy, unproblematic fit between social entrepreneurship and education. Some of the characteristics that define social entrepreneurship are indeed shared with the concerns of teachers who teach for peace and social justice. However, rather than see teachers as

social entrepreneurs, as some scholars do (Bornstein, 2004), the article suggests that a more suitable fit may be to reconceptualize social entrepreneurship as peace and social justice activism. The article places peace and social justice in the historical context of the activism that informed the struggle for independence in Malawi, and in current efforts to make education relevant to social problems. Following this context is a discussion of the methodology and theoretical framework of the study. I then define social justice activism, and social entrepreneurship, before providing examples of incidents that reveal how injustice creates perceptions that make it difficult for teachers to be social justice activists in Malawi. The article suggests what ideas are needed to promote teacher independence, resilience, and *uMunthu/uBuntu*, the humanness that constitutes the human community and encompasses the awareness and activism necessary to make teaching relevant to social change and innovation.

The article ends with considerations of implications for policy, curriculum, and teacher education and development, in thinking of how to reconceptualize social entrepreneurship as social justice activism in Malawi. The question of how to make the move from entrepreneurship to activism is an important beginning point.

From entrepreneurship to activism
In Malawi, schools, teachers and communities already have to deal with issues and ideas spilling over from the global and historical contexts that have brought the idea of decentralization and privatization to the fore of development. Non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) have been a major part of this (Fowler, 2000). Because teachers conventionally bear the expectation to implement educational policies, any discussion of how educational research should deal with the issue of social entrepreneurship should place teachers at the center.

Social entrepreneurs are said to operate with social impact as their main goal, and business acumen and efficiency as their strategy (Dees, 1998, 2001; Bornstein, 2004). The emphasis falls more on the entrepreneurship and less on the social, as pointed out by Dees (1998, 2001): "Social entrepreneurs are one species in the genus entrepreneur. They are entrepreneurs with a social mission" (p. 2). The implications for this definition in education are complex, and require a perspective that is capable of reconciling the apparent dilemma and contradiction of tying social change to profit, even if only as a means to a social end, as some scholars suggest (see Dees, 2003). If the idea of social entrepreneurship is going to be useful to education, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, it will need to be stripped of its current corporate-sounding and profit-making character, putting more emphasis on the social than on the entrepreneurship. To that end, in order for the "social" aspects of innovation and efficiency to be promoted in teacher education and development research and practice, this article suggests a reconceptualization of social entrepreneurship as peace and social justice activism. A peace and social justice identity shares several of the characteristics that social entrepreneurship espouses, but finds questionable the emphasis on entrepreneurship. The notion of entrepreneurship has strong connotations with profit making, and is distanced from historical and political contexts. Furthermore, just as there are several aspects in the idea of a social entrepreneur that share conceptual mutuality with the idea of a social justice activist, there are also aspects that do not. Some of the shared aspects deal with concern with and desire to solve social problems, pioneer social change, and promote community service.

Those aspects not shared between the two emanate from the entrepreneurial ethos associated with businesses. The two categories therefore do share overlaps, although their differences are significant enough to warrant caution in discussing their fit in education.

As with social justice activism, social entrepreneurship sees itself as "critical to solving current social problems in an increasingly globalized world" (Grenier, 2003, ¶2). Both social entrepreneurship and social justice activism tackle "the underlying causes of problems, rather than simply treating symptoms" (Dees, 1998, 2001, p. 4). As Thompson (2002) observes, social entrepreneurs:

> are people with the qualities and behaviors we associate with a business entrepreneur but who operate in the community and are more concerned with caring and helping than with 'making money'. In many cases, they help change people's lives because they embrace important social causes (p. 413).

In this study, social justice was taken as a central perspective informing the analyses of educational practices that seek to make schooling relevant to the understanding of community problems and the contexts in which these problems occur (Ayers, 2004; Allen, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Peterson, 1999). The concept of "social justice" emerged out of the stories that participating teachers told and wrote in their autobiographies. The teachers narrated lived experiences that create a social justice and human security perspective, described as a "peace problematic" in the African scholarship on peace (Hansen, 1987, p. 2). Seeing teachers' lived experiences from this perspective provides a practical rationale for teachers to be given opportunities to redefine themselves in peace and social justice contexts. This stresses the social, rather than the entrepreneurial, a process that draws on the historical perspectives of social justice activism in Malawi. This activism made it possible for Malawi and other formerly colonized countries to overcome racist and colonial domination, and win the struggle for independence. The entrepreneurial spirit that went along with the struggle had a strong educational, socioeconomic and political motivation, whose self-emancipatory message does not appear as prominent in the current thinking about social entrepreneurship today.

Race awareness and historical context
Seeing teachers as social justice activists requires an understanding of the historical legacy of the anti-colonial struggle, and how colonized subjects used education and a critical awareness of racism to empower themselves (Chiume, 1983; Chipembere, 2001). The struggle for independence in many African countries provides an illustration of how a social justice perspective on the problem of race gives rise to an awareness of what actions were needed for African people to emancipate themselves from colonialism. In many cases, this critical awareness developed within the educational setting of colonialism. For teachers today, being aware of how education can be used for emancipatory and social justice purposes means doing away with pedagogical practices that fail to question the ideologies implicit in knowledge production and dissemination, and the globalization discourse these ideologies come couched in (N'zimande & Mathieson, 2000; Hallak, 2000; Popkewitz, 2000).

Part of the crisis in Malawi has been brought about by the abandonment of African perspectives on what constitutes community wealth and historical resilience, a

consequence of the capitalist global order, the creation of which colonialism played a pivotal role in (Sindima, 1995). A social justice perspective for teachers requires the awareness of the twin roles education played in the struggle for Africa, i.e., pioneering the independence struggle, while creating class differences based on elitism and the privileging of a foreign ideology over endogenous epistemologies. The methodology used in the study took this awareness into account.

Methodology and theoretical framework
I went into the field aiming to discover what genres of writing were best suited to teaching for peace and social justice in Malawi. The research focused mostly on 21 Malawian teachers in four Malawian schools, from February to August 2004. The research methodology involved classroom observations, interviews, and a writing workshop. The teachers had endless stories to tell about their lives growing up and going to school in Malawi under a dictatorship, and their lives now as teachers. Autobiography therefore turned out to be an important genre of writing for these specific teachers.

I worked with the teachers to plan lessons that would address Malawian problems from a peace and social justice perspective. In order for teachers to plan lessons and teach them from a peace and social justice perspective, it was necessary for them to define peace and social justice from their own perspectives, with the awareness of how other peace educators defined these concepts.

The data collected from the study comprised of teachers' autobiographies, interview transcripts, notes from classroom observations, and a journal I kept throughout my stay in the field. A four-part thematic framework has been used to analyze the data. In the framework, peace, social justice and human security are defined as the humanness that constitutes human identity. African epistemologies define this humanness as *uMunthu*, in the Chichewa language; *uBuntu* or *uMotho*, in some southern African languages (Musopole, 1994; Sindima, 1995, 1998; Ramose, 1996).

From these definitions come topical issues that contribute to the peace curriculum in the classroom and the school, informed, in part, by lived experience, told through storytelling and life writing. The peace curriculum enables a peace pedagogy, which leads to Praxis (Freire, 1970; Spence and Makuwira, 2005).

The peace and social justice framework used as its central assumption the idea that lived experiences provided teachers with a form of knowledge that enabled them to recognize social injustice. Social injustice was therefore seen as arising out of the denial of their humanness. In becoming activists for peace and social justice in their schools and communities, these teachers therefore sought solutions that started with autobiographical accounts of their lives as Malawians and as teachers, using their stories to confirm their humanness, as a starting point.

The research highlights new perspectives on teacher education and peace building in Malawi by bringing teachers' life writing to the fore and demonstrating the importance of African perspectives on lived experience (Assefa & Wachira, 1996; Prah, 1996; Ramose, 1996), in the formation of a peace-activist identity amongst teachers. It is this

peace and social justice activist identity that this article is pointing to as a reconstructed identity for teachers, sharing those social concerns that social entrepreneurs also see as needing innovations and solutions.

Defining social justice
When the participants were invited to take part in the study, the key terms that were used in introducing the project to them were teaching, writing and peace education. To make the connection from writing to education to peace and social justice, there was a need to investigate the contexts of the problems the teachers were talking about. A good number of the participants wrote about cases of social injustices committed against them as children, as teachers, and as members of society.

It is this revelation about the teachers' shared stories of injustices through which their life writing shares a connection with their teaching and social justice. According to Barash and Webel (2002):

> A society commits violence against its members when it forcibly stunts their development and undermines their well-being, whether because of religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual preference, or some other social reason. Structural violence is a serious form of social injustice (p. 7).

This understanding of social injustice and human insecurity underscores the need for a pro-active sense of peace: "creating material conditions which provide for the mass of the people a certain minimum condition of security, economic welfare, economic efficacy, and psychic well-being" (Hansen, 1987, p. 4). Thus awareness of contexts of injustice is considered in this article as the first step toward defining social justice activism, a process that is linked with personal narrative and lived experience. As stated earlier, social justice activism does share concern with social entrepreneurship, but the conceptual differences in the two constructs are equally significant.

Defining social entrepreneurship
Dees (1998, 2001) points out that although they have not always been labeled as such, social entrepreneurs have always been around, and have contributed to many of the establishments we have today. Dees defines social entrepreneurs as those who "play the role of change agents in the social sector" (p. 4), listing five characteristics that enable the creation of social value: the recognition of new opportunities; the promotion of innovation; adaptation and learning; the overcoming of resource limitations; and a heightened sense of accountability to constituents. Stressing social and lasting impact, Dees sees the social entrepreneur as someone who envisions opportunity where others see obstacles. Yet the emphasis on social entrepreneurship risks excluding schooling contexts, seeing social entrepreneurs in individualistic terms taken out of the social, political and historical settings of lived experiences. For teachers, this reconstruction cannot succeed without using real, lived experiences of teachers lives, many of which have, admittedly, little to do with business entrepreneurship.

The notion of entrepreneurship would appear to ignore the historical and racial contexts of schooling. A social justice notion would consider these contexts as important (Henry, 1998; Peterson, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Bigelow, 1999). In the next section I report one incident that I observed while conducting this research, which raises two issues that, as this

paper suggests, need to be examined further in reconstructing a social justice identity for teachers. The issues in question are passive resistance and perceptions of self and other.

Passive resistance; perceptions of self and other
The incident offers an example of an event that could have been seized upon by teachers to highlight the importance of social justice activism in their work. For reasons that showcase the political power relations the teachers deal with in their daily lives, this did not happen.

One Monday morning, I arrived at one of the four research sites, and was greeted with the news that seven teachers from Tsigado School had been removed from the list of returning officers for the forthcoming presidential and general elections that were to be held on May 20th, 2004. The teachers had been removed to make room for seven teachers from a neighboring school, who themselves were being moved from their school so as to make room for court clerks and other government officers who had also been recruited for the exercise.

The head and two other teachers from Tsigado went to their Teacher Development Centre [1], to ask for clarification from a primary education adviser (PEA). Primary Education Advisers in Malawi, formerly referred to as district inspectors of schools (DIS), serve as immediate supervisors of head teachers and their schools, and as liaisons between the schools and the district education office. The rest of the teachers were on "chalk-down"—they would not teach until the matter was resolved and their fellow teachers reinstated. In the week before, head teachers who would serve as presiding officers on Election Day had threatened to lock up all voting materials if the district commissioner were to go ahead with a plan to remove several head teachers and replace them with civil servants from other government departments. The commissioner got wind of the planned action and immediately reinstated the head teachers.

The incident does not necessarily depict the said teachers adopting an activist stance, but the fact that they did not seize the given moment to pursue a social justice stance points to the general absence of an activist culture amongst the majority of Malawian teachers and educators. A social justice stance would have involved a number of actions to raise awareness about the teachers' plight beyond the school: discussions with students, other teachers, and the community; letter writing campaigns; the involvement of the teachers' union; and so on.

In order to build a social justice consciousness in Malawi's education, there is need to begin with those teachers who already espouse change, peace and social justice as part of their teaching identity. The general absence of social justice activism shows how historical, ideological and political contexts have not been adequately interrogated in Malawian educational discourse. One particular teacher in the study talked about "teacher independence" as having contributed to how he began the process to reconstruct his teacher identity.

Teacher independence as social justice activism
In this section I discuss views expressed by two teachers who, in an autobiographical context (Chaunfrault-Duchet, 2004), exhibited an awareness of the need to build a peace

and social justice consciousness. All the teachers in the study expressed a sharp awareness of the problems besetting them, but they differed in the ways they reacted to them. With the earlier incident, the teachers were engaged in passive resistance, refusing to teach, but not taking their action further. With the two teachers I discuss below, their responses to the perceived injustices were different. Not only did they continue teaching during crises, they also sought connections and networks of support, by being actively involved in the reform process, and thinking of their students' welfare in their decision making process. They did not necessarily call themselves social justice activists, but their awareness of the injustice they face is an important step in the process to reconstruct and redefine teacher identities.

One of these teachers was Nduluzi, a teacher who was actively involved in the currently ongoing Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR) project, since its inception in 2001. During one workshop session, a number of teachers expressed reservations with the reform, saying teachers were hardly involved, yet they were the ones expected to implement the reforms. Nduluzi expressed shock that the teachers had not been involved in the reform process. He launched into a step-by-step description of the process that had led to the reform. He mentioned the sources from which the main concepts of the reform were being taken: the policy investment framework (PIF), the poverty reduction strategy paper, and the Vision 2020 paper, among others[2].

Nduluzi used the term "developing independence," narrating his experiences being involved at the highest level of the reform, while being a "mere primary school teacher", just like the others. He talked of how he developed his independence and stopped being under the spell of the abuse, exploitation and manipulation:

> I want to tell you that you have the opportunities. I'm not in the training profession by chance. I was trained. I qualified. When I get to a place, or even at the TTC I know they don't see my problem. So on my own I tell myself I am a teacher, I know how to teach. So that gives me confidence (Transcript, April 14, 2004).

Nduluzi said he did not let his frustration get in the way of his teaching. He told the teachers how to take the initiative and use the resources available to do school projects.

Another teacher who participated in the study, Pinde, also spoke of her resilience in the face of frustration and injustice. She gave examples of being denied deserved promotions and opportunities for further education, but said because of her self-motivation, she persevered and overcame feelings of hopelessness.

In the interview with Pinde, she said injustices were relevant content to discuss in the classroom with students, noting that when you as a teacher know what is going on, "you can handle these children properly, to prepare them so as not to have this kind of unjust attitude" (Transcript, July 22, 2004).

Pinde offered ways teachers could involve students in creating an awareness of injustices, using a specific example in which a group of teachers were cheated out of money that was due to them after they went on an international trip. The senior ministry

officers who also went on the trip all got their per diem money, but not the teachers. She said:

> When you are teaching them, you can use current events, things you hear outside the classroom. You can explain to them. Even this very story, you can bring it to them and make them discuss it. "With this problem, who was at fault? Was it the teachers, or was it their bosses?" The children can know that it wasn't the teachers' fault. It was the bosses' fault . . . If it were you, how would you handle it? So the children will grow up mindful of stories like these (Transcript, July 22, 2004).

While Nduluzi's and Pinde's experiences do not contradict the accounts of frustration and anger the other teachers expressed, Nduluzi and Pinde used an approach that asked "How can we surmount this obstacle?" (Dees, 2001, 2003, p. 4), as opposed to giving up in frustration. These incidents might sound anecdotal and isolated, but they are indicative of paralysis, resistance, resilience and independence as various responses to injustice. In thinking of the implications that this study raises for peace and social justice activism amongst Malawian teachers, and for considering the place of social entrepreneurship in education, a number of issues come to the fore.

New directions
Currently Malawi is in the grip of a drought that has brought about a severe food crisis, for the second time in four years. Coupled with the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and a highly contentious political atmosphere with unresolved issues from the 2004 presidential election, NGOs and international aid and cooperation agencies are actively involved in attempts to deal with Malawi's problems. It is already known that the participation of the people on whose behalf such interventions are justified is more of lip service than a practicality (Makuwira, 2004). It thus remains to be seen, on the one hand, what impact the decentralization and privatization agenda is going to have on education in the long run. On the other hand is the undeniable need for funds and resources that Malawian schools are in dire need of. A spirit of entrepreneurship among school and community leaders would offer some solutions toward the problem of crumbling school infrastructure and dwindling supplies. How to reconcile this reality with the necessity for a social conscious poses a problem educational scholarship is yet to tackle.

Social justice activism thus entails finding alternative ways of continuing to produce excellence in teaching, while enhancing awareness of injustice, its contexts, and how to deal with it. This article has argued for a reconceptualization that places more emphasis on social justice activism than on entrepreneurship in teachers' work. The paper has argued for the centrality of teachers and their lived experienced, and has urged caution against haste in considering the place of social entrepreneurship in education. The paper has pointed out that while social entrepreneurship and social justice activism share similar ideals for social change and innovation, they have significance differences that educational policy and practice cannot overlook.

At the policy level, the implications call for further interrogation of how international aid and cooperation agencies are pushing the decentralization, privatization and entrepreneurship agenda in Malawi, and how that agenda is impacting education. At the curriculum level, the implications call for the need to identify and enhance

understanding of the historical, socioeconomic, political and autobiographical contexts of activism in Malawi. At the teacher education and development level, the implications for peace and social justice activism amongst Malawian teachers raised by this study call for further considerations of how a praxis rooted in a peace and social justice curriculum and pedagogy, informed by autobiography, and the endogenous epistemologies of *uMunthu*, play a role in restoring human dignity and promoting peace and social justice amongst Malawians. It is in these directions, among others, that a reconceptualization of social entrepreneurship as social justice activism in Malawian education needs to proceed.

Notes

1. Teacher Development Centers were introduced in the late 90s, to serve as central locations where as many as 15 schools per zone cluster for zone-level professional development, conferences, meetings, and other school-related programs and activities.

2. Vision 2020 was a United Nations Development Program project in which Malawian experts drew plans for the achievement of specific development goals.

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