Social entrepreneurship is a relatively new field. It combines business’s best practices and nonprofits’ focus on social change. As colleges and universities have incorporated social entrepreneurship into their curricula, it has provided a unique academic space for contemporary students’ interest in social causes and their desire to move beyond critique to action. Spanish for the Professions and Other Specific Purposes can also capitalize on students’ enthusiasm for the topic. In this essay I define social entrepreneurship, review its place in higher education curricula, and examine its current role in Spanish for the Professions and Other Specific Purposes. I then more closely examine two specific business concepts and their relationship with social entrepreneurship. First, I focus on income generation. By teaching students the concept of “core competencies,” they can understand how nonprofits can go beyond annual dinners and t-shirt sales to create sustainable revenue streams. Secondly, I examine notions of innovation, which does not necessarily mean creating something that is “brand new.” I provide concrete cases in which leading social entrepreneurs identify autochthonous solutions to locally-defined problems. For both its overarching goal of creating sustainable solutions to social problems and its specific examples of innovative social projects, social entrepreneurship is a compelling addition to the standard Spanish for the Professions fare.

Definitions of social entrepreneurship vary, and the lack of a commonly-accepted definition has been a preoccupation of social entrepreneurship research for the past decade (Martin and Osberg; Tan, Williams and Tan), leading to the claim that “[s]ocial entrepreneurship is a term in search of a good definition” (Abu-Saifan 22). Nonetheless, in the decade of the 2000s several important projects emerged that offered their own definitions and examples of social entrepreneurs. In 2005, the PBS series The New Heroes brought to a mass audience the concept of a social entrepreneur as someone who “…identifies and solves social problems on a large scale” (“What Is Social Entrepreneurship?,” online). The Skoll Foundation, created in 1999,
supports social entrepreneurs who are “creators of innovations that disrupt the status quo and transform our world for the better” (“About,” online). Ashoka is a leading foundation focused on global social entrepreneurs who are “individuals with innovative solutions to society’s most pressing social problems. They are ambitious and persistent, tackling major social issues and offering new ideas for wide-scale change” (“What Is a Social Entrepreneur?,” online). In terms of defining the field of social entrepreneurship as it emerged in the 2000s, Greg Dees’ work is seminal, and his widely cited white paper titled “The Meaning of ‘Social Entrepreneurship’” synthesizes the definitions of commercial entrepreneurship with the purpose of social entrepreneurship:

Social entrepreneurs play the role of change agents in the social sector by:

- Adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value),
- Recognizing 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. (4)

A precise profile of social entrepreneurship education in US colleges is equally difficult to pin down. Entrepreneurship education was first introduced in colleges in purely commercial terms; that is, the early entrepreneurship programs, courses and extracurricular activities centered on the analysis of commercial, for-profit start-ups. Indeed, commercial entrepreneurship education gained critical mass in higher education in the early 2000s (Kuratko) and resided almost exclusively in business and engineering schools. Then the Kauffman Foundation sought to broaden entrepreneurship education’s location. In December 2003, they launched the Kauffman Campuses Initiative, a multi-million grant program, in order to “make entrepreneurship education available across their campuses, enabling any student, regardless of field of study, to access entrepreneurial training” (Kauffman, online), eventually funding these cross-campus efforts on a total of eighteen colleges and universities across the United States. As a result, the Kauffman campuses seeded entrepreneurial thought, teaching and research in disciplines not normally associated with—and sometimes antagonistic toward—entrepreneurship. As the Initiative closed, a report from the
Kauffman Foundation shared several lessons learned, including the need to “[a]llow schools and departments to define entrepreneurship independently” (Torrance 8). Indeed, for many departments outside of business and engineering, social entrepreneurship provided a better disciplinary fit, and the tools with which to teach it were emerging during the ten-year span of the Kauffman Campuses initiative: textbooks like *Entrepreneurship in the Social Sector* from professors at the Harvard Business School and handbooks for practicing professionals, such as *Enterprising Nonprofits: A Toolkit for Social Entrepreneurs*.

Despite advances in social entrepreneurship education, many academics remain suspicious of the concept of entrepreneurship itself. Dees acknowledged and responded to critiques of social entrepreneurship, writing that “… the situation is not simply black and white, with markets being bad and other social institutions being good” (“Social Entrepreneurs” 54). Even though language departments and the humanities in general can be somewhat hostile towards entrepreneurship in any form, the Kauffman Campuses Initiative did make inroads into foreign languages. At Florida International University, Maida Watson created a course on “start ups related to foreign languages to meet the growing demands of a globalised market” (Watson 155). Darcy Lear, at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill created a freshman seminar, in English, on social entrepreneurship (Lear and Sánchez) and a course on venture creation, in Spanish, to fit within the Spanish for the Professions minor (Lear). At the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, “Spanish and Entrepreneurship: Languages, Cultures and Communities” has been taught each year since 2006, focuses on social entrepreneurship (Abbott “Social entrepreneurship”), incorporates community service learning (Abbott and Lear; Lear and Abbott) and enjoys healthy enrollments. As momentum builds, new courses such as “Español para empresarios” and “The Entrepreneurial Language Professional” created by Karen Rauch and Dawn Slack at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania are added to the list of languages for specific purposes (LSP) courses that incorporate entrepreneurship education. Others LSP educators, like Deb Reisinger at Duke University, have opted to create a module on social entrepreneurship within a more traditional business language course.

In sum, social entrepreneurship is still an emerging field, but its combination of business concepts within cultural contexts designed to create social value make it of interest to many language students and particularly well-suited to LSP. Almost any business concept can be taught in an LSP course through the lens of social entrepreneurship: marketing, branding, finance, pricing, strategic planning, leadership and many more. In this essay I will focus on just two key business concepts and illustrate their connections to social entrepreneurship and LSP.
Leverage Core Competencies to Generate Income

A basic business concept is that an enterprise’s success lies within its core competencies (Prahalad and Hamel). Core competencies are the things that an organization does very well and does often. They are the strengths (knowledge, skills, processes, etc.) that set the organization apart from others. For example, a nonprofit dedicated to the economic advancement of a particular community might have core competencies in the areas of individual financial advising or childhood financial literacy programming; the staff are experts in those activities and do them with excellence. Any income-generating activity that an enterprise (commercial or social) undertakes should be built upon those core competencies. All too often, though, nonprofits depend on t-shirt sales or fundraising dinners to generate income. Those activities align with the organization’s core competencies only if the nonprofit’s daily work is focused on clothing manufacturing or on catering and event planning. This is not to say that selling t-shirts or holding fundraising banquets is bad; it simply distracts the organization from its core competencies and requires time and effort to acquire new competencies that are probably infrequently employed.

For many, income generation is the activity that distinguishes social enterprises from other nonprofits: while social enterprises’ primary objective is to create social value, they also “look for creative ways to generate revenue, like businesses” (Dees, Enterprising 9). To generate revenue, social enterprises must “leverage their key assets” (Wei-Skillern 143) and inventory their key capabilities (Dees, Enterprising 67). To put it even more simply, nonprofits can generate earned income by “getting paid for what you already do” (Dees, Strategic 194). Some easy-to-understand examples include the American Red Cross selling first aid kits, a school for behaviorally challenged adolescents offering workshops about “dealing with difficult teenagers,” and City Year offering consulting services about the employee training workshops that are central to their core program (Dees, Strategic 201).

To situate the business concept of core competencies within a cultural context, an LSP course should demonstrate the theory with examples from the target language and cultures. One example is Idealistas.org, a website dedicated to connecting nonprofits that need volunteers, interns or employees to people who are looking for volunteer, internship and job opportunities. To begin, students explore the site and browse the information in the “Centro de Recursos para la Acción Social” in order to familiarize themselves with specific concepts and vocabulary in the target language, such as el tercer sector (the nonprofit sector), emprendedores sociales (social entrepreneurs) and responsabilidad social corporativa (corporate social responsibility) (“Centro de Recursos,” online). Then students experience the service that
Idealistas provides by using the search tools on the home page. Guided by their own interests, students select a type of opportunity, an issue, and a place. The search results offer more opportunities to define vocabulary, locate sites on a map and discuss the cultural nuances of the offerings. Finally, students read the page that explains “¿Cómo nos financiamos?,” paying particular attention to the two income generating activities (ingresos propios): a fee paid by US-based organizations to advertise their opportunities and the registration fees charged to universities that participate in their career fairs. In the first case, building and running a complex, on-line database is one of Idealistas’ core competencies. US-based organizations pay a fee for Idealists to do what they already do: enter their data into their database. In the second case, Idealistas stays true to its mission—to connect organizations and people—but in a face-to-face format. Since they organize career fairs anyway, selling booth space to universities does not require competencies they do not already have. French LSP students can do the same exercises with the French website fr.idealyst.org. Spanish LSP students can do a comparative analysis of Idealistas.org and Hacesfalta.org, a similar organization that is also transparent about the role of income generating activities (fondos propios) in their funding mix (“Cómo nos financiamos,” online) and in their annual report (“Informe Annual,” online).

Whereas Idealistas.org and Hacesfalta.org showcase the possibilities of on-line social entrepreneurship in international contexts, Homeboy Industries is an example of a US-based social enterprise with strong direct ties to a local community. Homeboy Industries is based in Los Angeles, California and provides job training programs to former gang members, mostly Latino. Like many nonprofits, they sell t-shirts. The difference, though, is that the t-shirts are the product of one of their core competencies: a job-training program focused on the “high-quality production of screen-printing and embroidery with outstanding customer service and turnaround times” (“Homeboy Silkscreen,” online). In addition to clothing items made by the job-training recipients, Homeboy Industries also runs several other income-generating enterprises. Their restaurant and catering job-training program generates income from café and diner sales, catering contracts and grocery items made in their kitchens. The very process of training former gang members to be bakers produces high-quality baked goods that Homeboy Industries sells in their café, delivers throughout Los Angeles and ships nationwide through on-line sales. To emphasize the linguistic and cultural context within which this organization operates, students can analyze the Latin American influence in the menus of Homegirl Café and the products sold through Homeboy Grocery. Likewise, students can consider the cultural implications of the titles, cover art and translations of two books about Homeboy Industries and its founder, Father Gregory Boyle: G-Dog and the Homeboys and Tattoos on the Heart.
Finally, after students’ analysis of Homeboy Industry’s core competencies and income-generating activities, they can apply those concepts and propose solutions to the following questions: if these programs were replicated with service recipients of a different linguistic and cultural heritage, what changes would be in order?; and, if Homeboy Industries decided it needed to offer job training in a different area, for example, computers and electronics, how could they generate income based on those core competencies?

Combining social entrepreneurship education with community service learning (CSL) allows students to experience first-hand the connections between core business concepts and the concrete linguistic and cultural contexts within which they operate. At the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, many of the students enrolled in the course “Spanish & Entrepreneurship: Languages, Cultures and Communities” do their CSL work at the East Central Illinois Refugee Mutual Assistance Center (ECIRMAC), a local nonprofit whose mission is to help refugees, asylees, and immigrants both resettle and preserve their home cultures. The majority of their service recipients are from Spanish-speaking countries, but the office serves people from Vietnam, Russia, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other countries around the globe. When students work in a nonprofit, identify with its mission and comprehend its day-to-day operations, they are better able to apply entrepreneurial concepts to an actual nonprofit context. They quickly understand how one of ECIRMAC’s core competencies—translation—might be provided for free to their immigrant service recipients but at market value for other members of the community. They can also envision how a core program—the Saturday Morning Tutoring Program—which is currently offered only to immigrant children could be retitled, slightly repackaged and offered at a premium price to a different market—upper-middle class, well-traveled, professorial parents who want their US-born children to have a high-quality multilingual and multicultural experience (Abbott, “Social Entrepreneurship”).

The next step is to take students beyond examples of income-generating activities that already exist, or that could be built upon an existing program, and ask them to identify income-generating opportunities themselves. To do this, one half of the class would generate a list of core competencies they have observed at ECIRMAC during their CSL work. To help them generate more extensive lists, it is important to remind them that core competencies are not just about observable actions that the staff undertakes; they also refer to the staff’s specialized knowledge and information. The second half of the students would be assigned a target market—local employers—and asked to identify some of their pain points (Burgstone and Murphy). This serves two purposes: it forces students to think beyond ECIRMAC’s current “clients” as potential “consumers” of ECIRMAC’s core competencies, and it moves
their attention to a target market with more money to pay for services. After they have generated these two separate lists, students from the first group would pair with students from the second group and attempt to identify potential income-generating opportunities that use ECIRMAC’s existing core competencies to solve local employers’ pain points. This is not an easy exercise. It requires a type of analysis and imagination that are not often required in college courses. However, it is the kind of thinking that creates income streams for nonprofits to enhance their economic stability.

Opportunities do indeed exist. ECIRMAC could maintain an opt-in list of current service recipients who are on the job market and sell that list to employers. The list is valuable if ECIRMAC screens the people on the list for qualities that employers seek, and it solves a pain point for employers who have high turnover or trouble filling certain positions. Employers face another pain point if the people in charge of their human resources do not know how to handle the paperwork for foreign-born employees. ECIRMAC already offers helpful links on their website (“Employer Information,” online), but many busy professionals might prefer to pay ECIRMAC a consulting fee to complete the paperwork for them, a process with which ECIRMAC staff are already familiar. If enough businesses are interested in hiring foreign-born employees, ECIRMAC could offer, for a fee, a short training course, either face-to-face or on-line. Finally, if language is a barrier with these employees, employers could pay one of ECIRMAC’s bilingual staff members to do a walk-through of the factory, farm or other type of work environment accompanied by one of the foreign-born employees, looking for safety hazards due to English-language signage or other problems.

Creating revenue streams within a nonprofit should build on core competencies so that the organization stays focused on the work it does every day to create social value for its service recipients. If that same work can be leveraged and sold to other markets without distracting the organization from its mission, the organization will be more economically sustainable. This does not mean that nonprofits should abandon grant writing, fundraising or donor relations; it does mean that a mixed financial model has the potential to increase the funding that goes toward programming that creates social value.

**Innovate in Culturally-appropriate Ways**

The term “innovation” is often used synonymously with entrepreneurship. In fact, the names of many entrepreneurship programs in higher education in the United States incorporate both words: MIT’s MBA program offers an Entrepreneurship & Innovation Track, Northwestern University houses the Farley Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and Carnegie Mellon includes a Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. In departments
outside of business or engineering schools, using the term “innovation” can be a tactical step to avoid the charged term of “entrepreneurship.” The two terms are not the same, though. Innovation—“establishing new and better ways for accomplishing a worthwhile objective” (Dees, *Enterprising* 162)—is only one important component of entrepreneurship.

For LSP students to understand innovation as a key business concept, it is important first to emphasize that innovation routinely takes the form of an improvement on something that already exists, not the creation of something brand new (Dees, *Enterprising* 162; Goffin and Mitchell 6–7). The main drivers of innovation are technological advances, changing customers and needs, intensified competition and a changing business environment (Goffin and Mitchell 2-5). Once the need for innovation is established, there are at least seven categories of innovation for social entrepreneurs: creating a new or improved product, service, or program; introducing a new or improved strategy or method of operating; reaching a new market, serving an unmet need; tapping into a new source of supply or labor; establishing a new industrial or organizational structure; framing new terms of engagement; and developing new funding structures (Dees, *Enterprising* 163–64).

Innovation does not happen in a vacuum, of course, and much entrepreneurship research is dedicated to understanding the cultural contexts (government stability, bureaucratic obstacles, etc.) that foster or inhibit entrepreneurial activity, both in the United States and internationally. Another strand of entrepreneurship research has sought to delineate the personal characteristics of entrepreneurs. Dees offers a modified version of William D. Bygrave’s list of characteristics that entrepreneurs possess, called the 10 D’s: dreamers, decisiveness, doers, determination, dedication, devotion, details, destiny, dollars and distribution (*Enterprising* 6). While understanding the typical profile of entrepreneurs is helpful, the very concept of social entrepreneurship is an attempt to create sustainable nonprofit organizations that do not depend on the cult of one particular entrepreneurial individual, usually the founder. So the research into culture’s role in entrepreneurship differs from the perspective of foreign language educators for whom cultural contexts are an object of study in and of themselves and who seek to understand the three Ps of culture (products, perspectives, and practices). Furthermore, an ethics of autonomy pervades foreign language education’s approach toward cultures, and it opposes a dominant culture’s imposition of its own products, perspectives and practices onto other cultures. Unfortunately, there are many historical and contemporary examples of dominant cultures (including the United States) defining other cultures’ “problems” and obliging them to solve them with the dominant culture’s products, perspectives and practices. Therefore, it is very important for LSP students, especially those who are engaged in specific cultural contexts through their CSL work, to understand
that innovations should first and foremost spring from autochthonous solutions to locally-defined problems.

To illustrate this, students can explore one group dedicated to creating co-working spaces throughout the world: Impact Hub (impacthub.net). First, students explore Impact Hub’s website in order to understand its mission to provide shared workspaces where social entrepreneurs and other innovators can network, collaborate, and learn. Once they have thoroughly explored the site’s descriptions, maps, videos, and photos of the Hub spaces in various cities, students can then begin to analyze Impact Hub in terms of innovation by simply stating in what ways the organization is innovative and then identifying one or more of the seven categories of innovation (Dees, *Enterprising* 163) it represents. After analyzing the umbrella organization, Hub Impact, students can then do a comparative analysis of two Impact Hub sites: one in Madrid, Spain, (madrid.impacthub.net) and one in Oaxaca, Mexico (huboaxaca.org). Again, students should thoroughly explore the websites by reading and analyzing pictures and videos. The objective is for students to note how each Impact Hub site reflects the ways in which both the challenges and solutions have been defined according to the local culture. Students can compare the website designs, the design of the physical spaces (including furniture, artwork, light sources, etc.), their upcoming events, the members and their entrepreneurial projects, and other details. In the end, students will see similarities as well as obvious differences in how each impact Hub reflects local needs, local solutions, and local cultures. Perhaps most striking is the inclusion of indigenous cultures in the Oaxaca Impact Hub versus the European realities reflected in the Madrid Impact Hub.

Ashoka offers another example of an international organization that supports social entrepreneurs all over the globe, but in a way that allows them to define for themselves the problems they tackle and the culturally-appropriate innovations they implement as solutions. Students can discover a wide range of locally-contextualized entrepreneurial solutions in the following activity which requires some advance preparation on the LSP instructor’s part. Before class, browse the list of Fellows from Spanish-speaking countries at Ashoka’s website (ashoka.org). Whatever the number of students in the class, choose half that number of Fellows, being sure to include a wide variety of projects and countries. For example, for a class with twenty students, choose ten Ashoka Fellows. Then for each Fellow, print the description of “The Problem” and of “The Solution” on two separate pieces of paper. Shuffle the pieces of paper thoroughly, and in class, pass one piece of paper to each student. Students first read the information on the piece of paper they receive. Next, they write a short summary in Spanish without mentioning the name of the social entrepreneur or the country in which he or she works. Then students circulate among their classmates, sharing the
summary of the information they received and searching for the student who has the “problem” to their “solution,” or vice versa. Once they find their pair, they sit down together and use their two sheets of information to evaluate the following: which characteristics of an entrepreneur (the 10 D’s) the Ashoka Fellow displays, which of the seven categories of innovation characterize the Fellow’s solution, and in what ways the local culture is reflected in the framing of “the problem” as well as “the solution.” This activity reveals to students that when we look through our own cultural lenses, we might misidentify a community’s problems and be blind to innovative solutions.

The long list of Ashoka Fellows also provides many examples of innovations that are not “brand new,” particularly in the area of technology. Today’s students might be inclined to base their entrepreneurial solutions on technologies that are new and hold exciting and unexplored potential: social networking sites, apps for smart phones and tablets, video conferencing and texting. Yet several Ashoka Fellows use a much older technology for their innovative solutions: the radio. Students can read through the projects of several of these social entrepreneurs (Nestor Busso or Alfredo Mariano Olivera, Argentina; Fernando Andrade, Bolivia; Victoria Quevedo Méndez, Chile; Aleida Calleja Gutiérrez, Mexico), compare and contrast them, and propose reasons why a relatively old technology can be used in new ways to create social value in these particular cultural contexts. While it is important for students to see and analyze existing examples of social entrepreneurship that are culturally-appropriate, it is also important to encourage them to create new ideas of their own. To this end, students can work in teams to identify student-centered problems on their campus and propose solutions that utilize either “old” technologies (e.g., radio, television, faxes, telephones) or newer technologies (handheld devices, internet programs, apps, social networking sites, gaming).

Similarly, students can do a search for Ashoka Fellows in Spanish-speaking countries who focus on issues of concern to indigenous communities. On the one hand, these projects provide LSP students an opportunity to learn and develop a more nuanced understanding of indigenous communities in Spanish-speaking countries, a topic that is unfortunately rarely covered in-depth throughout Spanish curricula. On the other hand, it is an opportunity to look at problems within students’ own cultures through indigenous perspectives. In other words, students can not only learn about indigenous cultures but also learn from them. For example, Epifanio Pachecho Calvimontes’ work in Bolivia reconceptualizes land ownership and access to natural resources through traditional, indigenous governance structures. How, then, could students look at land ownership differently in their own community to achieve social justice? Jesús Salinas Pedraza’s work in Mexico aims to help preserve oral indigenous languages that are in danger
of extinction. What can students learn about the connections between their own culture and language, even if it is about the preservation of dialects, sayings, or oral histories instead of dying languages? Cristina Bubba Zamora works in Bolivia to help indigenous communities utilize international laws to help them recover their own community’s artefacts that were illegally trafficked to art collectors in the United States. How might students better educate themselves about the ethical purchase and use of indigenous arts? What artefacts of their own community do they consider sacred and believe should not be sold?

When looking for ways to innovate and create social value, LSP students should be reminded that simply offering existing services in another language is a very important innovation that they are uniquely qualified to offer. It is not necessary to start a new nonprofit organization, launch a brand new program within an existing nonprofit or even create a new process of service delivery. With the ever-growing importance of Spanish and other languages within the United States, LSP students can be an integral part of providing access to programs and services that are currently only available in English.

Conclusion

Social entrepreneurship provides a particularly felicitous connection to LSP teaching and research. It fits nicely within the realm of Business Language Studies (Doyle) because it utilizes core business theories and practices. It also connects easily with language studies’ emphasis on cultures. Still, it is subject to the same “sources of opposition” that Christine Uber Grosse and Geoffrey M. Voght noted about LSP in general; faculty in language departments often resist the institutional reforms it would require to integrate LSP. “In spite of the demand for LSP and policy statements by professional organizations on the need to restructure language departments to prepare students for employment in a global society (e.g., MLA, 2007)” (193). From students’ perspective, though, learning about the basic tenets of social entrepreneurship equips them with the best of both worlds: the business concepts that prepare them for employment after graduation and the cultural contexts in which the language they have studied for so long can actually be applied. When combined with CSL, students learn about the theories behind social entrepreneurship and are also exposed to the work of local nonprofits that serve Spanish speakers. Those students will be uniquely equipped to then go on and create social value in whatever communities they live and in whichever organizations they work.
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