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Fostering the Common Good: The Portrayal of the Social Economy in Secondary Business and Economics Textbooks

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Fostering the common good: The portrayal of the social economy in secondary business and economics textbooks

Economics is an overlooked subject area in social studies education for preparing youth to become democratic citizens (Branson, 2003; Davies, 2006). Citizenship education research focuses on the political and social aspects of citizenship as they are taught either in civics courses or as a general theme spread across the history curriculum (Hahn, 1999). Efforts to link economics with the development of citizenship have typically focused on topics such as economic freedoms, personal decision-making, or the economic references in constitutional documents (e.g., Vanfossen, 2005; Walstad, 1998). As a complement to and extension of these approaches, we propose that the study of the social economy¹ has the potential to teach adolescents important lessons about the common good. The social economy encompasses a range of nonprofit and social enterprise organizations that put “people before profits” by solving social needs rather than amassing financial profits. In this regard, it is civic in terms of emphasizing shared social needs over private aims. As Jeremy Rifkin (1996) argued, “Advancing the goals of a civil education requires that educators look to the non-profit sector in addition to the marketplace and government, to inform curriculum development, pedagogy, and the organization of schooling” (p. 44).

Attention to the common good in the economics curriculum is particularly significant because youth are already bombarded in the media with competitive and consumerist economic messages (Schor, 2005). Previous research indicates that adolescents have a weak understanding of the relationship between individual and social benefit (Davies, et al., 2002) and that children

frequently have misunderstandings about fundamental economic concepts (S. L. Miller & VanFossen, 2008). Nevertheless, the National Council on Economic Education's (NCEE) *Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics* (1997) only partially include aspects of the social economy (See Standard 10, Role of Economic Institutions. NCEE, 1997). Furthermore, the standards do not recognize the social economy as a specific economic sector, instead only briefly referring to labor unions and nonprofit organizations in the Benchmarks for grade 8. The implications are that attention to the social-oriented economic sector is needed in order to reach the full potential of economics education to contribute to the development of democratic citizenship.

In this article, we examined the coverage of the social economy in 13 popular secondary economics and business textbooks used in U.S. high schools. This study is part of a broader initiative that aims to examine and compare this topic across several countries. We focused on the extent that the social economy is included in these textbooks and its representation. The following two research questions guided our inquiry:

1. To what extent is the social economy, directly or indirectly, included in popular secondary economics and business textbooks in the U.S.?
2. When the social economy is covered, in which ways is it portrayed and represented?

The extent and ways that the social economy is portrayed in textbooks provides a starting point for better understanding how economics education can support teaching about the common good and ultimately contribute to the preparation of adolescents for democratic citizenship.

Our study drew on a research tradition that examines the ways political struggles over what knowledge and values are most important shape textbooks and other forms of the school curriculum. A fundamental insight of this approach is that broader national and global contexts

are important influences on the curriculum (see Morris, et al., 1997). In particular, we were interested in the relationship between the dominant economic approach in the U.S., namely neoliberalism, with the educational discourse over economic and business education. The scant research that exists on the social economy in secondary education indicates that it plays a minor role in economics and business courses (Hill, 2000; Schugurensky & McCollum, 2009, forthcoming). However, much of this research comes from other nations and there is little research on the topic in U.S. education. Our study addresses this situation by providing a comprehensive examination of coverage of the social economy as a sector and of its component organizations in textbooks used in U.S. high schools.

Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

Researching economics and business textbooks

Textbooks and the ways they represent society provide insights for understanding the values, norms, and official politics of a nation (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). They are key transmitters of official and legitimized knowledge that reveal the ways that certain knowledge is valued and organized in a society. In this sense, textbooks do not represent all social actors, instead highlighting some while marginalizing others. Formal actors and institutions are typically represented in favor of non-traditional ones. Such representations are particularly significant for civic education. The ways and extent to which civic virtues are fostered through education is important for the development of a democratic citizenry that is inclusive and oriented to the common good.

Much of the work on textbooks has focused on its role in transmitting the hidden curriculum, which refers to the meanings and values that students learn in schools separate from

the stated educational objectives of the schools. From such as perspective, understanding which topics are omitted from textbooks is as important as which are included. Social studies textbooks, in particular, are important for such research because they are agents of national political and economic values (Gonzales, et al., 2004). Textbooks, then, can influence the type of democratic values that are learned in schools by legitimating certain knowledge. This insight suggests that it is necessary to interrogate which knowledge is represented in the curriculum and to assess its implications for the development of democratic values.

The significance of the social economy for civic education is that it emphasizes the economic contributions to the common good. Understanding of and commitment to the common good is a key learning goal of civic education (Barton & Levstik, 2004). The common good refers to a tradition in democratic theory dating back to classical philosophy that focuses on concern for collective and social benefits of the public as well as on the democratization of society (for example, see Smith, 1999). The common good emphasizes public over private benefit. In this regard, it is considered one of the core civic virtues (or attitudes) that serve as the foundation for civic education, in addition to civic knowledge and participatory skills (Quigley & Bahmueller, 1991). Yet economics education focuses overwhelmingly on the private and competitive nature of economics, which has been the dominant and official representation of economics in the U.S. In contrast, the social economy connects a commitment to improving society for everybody with sound economic activity and business practices. For example, Davies (2006, p. 20) argued for “understanding the relationships between private and social well-being as the key to economic understanding and citizenship”.

Previous arguments for the connection of economics and civic education have focused on economic policy debates and the economic dimensions of political documents, especially the

references in the Constitution to a market economy (Branson, 2003; Otlin, 2008). For example, Branson (2003) outlined four economic values in the Constitution as a foundation for civic education: 1) legal protection of the right to private property, 2) support for private entrepreneurial activity, 3) support for a large common market among the states, and 4) the rule of law, which provides security for order and stability in which economic activity can flourish. This approach is useful for contributing to the connection between economics and the knowledge base of civic education. However, it is limited to mention of the economy in political documents and neither encompasses the development of civic virtues nor does it engage with knowledge and functioning of the actual economy.

Despite the prominent role of the social economy, there are indications that high schools economics and business textbooks continue to under-represent it in favor of the private, corporate sector (Hill, 2000). Economics textbooks in the U.S. and Canada predominantly emphasize competition in terms of the “perfectly competitive market” to the extent that “supply and demand has become almost synonymous with economics itself” (Hill & Myatt, 2007, p. 59). This has been the case since the 1930s, when business and government leaders attacked progressive era history textbooks that examined the unequal distribution of wealth, escalating commercialism and the practices of laissez-faire capitalism (Yarrow, 2008). The ensuing emphasis on economic literacy in the American free enterprise system and the meta-narrative of U.S. economic progress has helped to obscure the mention of economic aspects that are not based on profit in economics education.

However, the scant literature on the social economy comes primarily from other nations, such as Canada, and there is little such research in the U.S. The existing research shows the disproportionate attention to this topic in respect to its current role as an economic sector. For

example, in a 1995 study of business and economic textbooks in Ontario, Canada, the coverage of the social economy was less than 1% of the total content (Quarter, et al., 1996). Furthermore, existing textbook research on the social economy typically analyzes only one category of organization, such cooperatives (Hill, 2000) or a related topic such as entrepreneurship, (Kent & Rushing, 1999), rather than the sector.

The exclusion of the social economy from textbooks also needs to be understood in the context of an overcrowded economics curriculum. One critique of the National Council on Economic Education Voluntary Standards is that it is unfeasible to expect teachers to include all of the economics content, whether in discrete economics courses or infused across the social studies curriculum (Walstad, 2001). Little time is devoted to economics and business at the high school level in comparison with history, usually only as an elective course. Thus there is a serious practical concern with the introduction of new topics in the economics curriculum.

However, another explanation is that textbooks and textbook companies, in omitting or minimizing the social and non-competitive forms of the economy, are in effect “selling” to students the free market values of competition and profit rather than representing the economy as a complex system with multiple forms. Because textbooks are powerful influences on the curriculum, the result is the reinforcement of the human capital approach to schooling that conceives of students as future employees and education as skills training for the job market (Schultz, 1961). Indeed, in secondary education, preparing students for the global economy has been linked with neoliberal school reforms that make schools subservient to economic needs and market mechanisms (Apple, 2001).

Defining the social economy

Neoliberalism, an economic and political model that emphasizes private sector control of the economy and unregulated markets, is the prevalent economic model in the U.S. (Harvey, 2005). In this context, legitimate economic knowledge is based on neoclassical theories that emphasize individualism, competition, and consumption. Milton Friedman expressed this view in his famous maxim that “the business of business is business,” which asserts that a corporation’s sole responsibility is to increase profits (Friedman, 1970). This view, however, is increasingly criticized for separating business from society and social concerns (Vogel, 2006). The social economy contradicts neoliberal economic beliefs and is distinct from the competition-driven private business and public government sectors in terms of placing social improvement over profits, valuing workplace democracy, and protecting members’ interests (Gaudiani, 2003).

The emergence of modern-day conceptions of the social economy lies in the 19th century appearance of collective forms of organization and enterprise such as the historic birth of the worker’s movement and the co-operative and mutual movements (Van Til, 2000). Despite its historical roots, the social economy has been largely ignored by economists and it has been given little attention in the history of economic thought (Schumpeter, 1956). The development of the current form of the social economy has been in step with globalization, which some predict will displace large numbers of workers and push them toward the social economy sector (Rifkin, 1995). Yet the social economy is increasingly recognized by federal governments and other key actors as providing an important function in national market economies, especially in terms of producing social capital (Gaudiani, 2003).

The social economy is distinct from both the public (governmental) and private (business) sectors that is comprised of a diverse range of organizations owned and run by those who work in them. Due to its position vis-à-vis these two primary sectors, the social economy is

also called the “third sector” and “nonprofit sector,” which are more commonly used terms in the U.S. (Gunn, 2004). The term is typically used across Europe and Latin America. Its key distinguishing features are that, in contrast to the public sector, it is largely grassroots and independent of government budgets and agendas. Also, in contrast to the private sector, it is oriented toward the common good rather than competition and profit. In this regard, social economy organizations exist primarily to protect their members’ interests and to make a social contribution (Gunn, 2004). If these organizations make a profit, then the surplus is channeled back into the company or the workforce. Such organizations are economically valuable because they “produce and market services, employ people, may own valuable assets, and generate social value.” (Mook, et al., 2007, p. 17). Critics, however, point out that the social economy is a less effective and haphazard approach to achieving the same benefits as a welfare state (for an overview of this debate, see Amin, et al., 2002).

There are four main types of social economy organizations: 1) cooperatives, 2) mutuals, 3) associations, and 4) foundations.² We used these as the analytical categories for our study of textbooks. The categories include a range of organizations, such as credit unions, non-profit organizations, volunteer organizations, and charities. Their participation in the social economy, however, is not fixed; organizations can exist partly in the social economic sector and they can move in and out of it as they change their goals and structure (e.g., if private investors purchase a cooperative). Organizations can also move between the different categories of organizations within the social economy, such as from a volunteer organization (e.g., a housing association) to a social enterprise business (e.g., a cooperative).

The social economy in the U.S. has grown dramatically since the 1970s and scholars predict that it will make up a larger economic sector in the future (Rifkin, 1995). As a whole,

social economy organizations are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. economy (Gunn, 2004; Van Til, 2000). From 1977 to 2001, the number of employees in this sector doubled and by 2001, there were a total of 12.5 million employees in this sector comprising 9% of all employment (Independent Sector, 2004). The social economy represented almost 8% of total employment in the U.S. in 1995 and it grew 11.2% between 1990 and 1995 (Pérotin, 2001). The employment growth rate of the third sector was 2.5% between 1997 and 2001, in contrast to 1.8% for the private sector and 1.6% for the government sector (Independent Sector, 2004). Presently, there are nearly 1.3 million charitable and philanthropic organizations in the U.S. that employ approximately 11.5 million people (Panel on the Nonprofit Sector, 2005). In New York City alone, there were over 9,000 nonprofits in 2000, which accounted for \$65 billion in annual revenues, over 500,000 jobs (14% of total city employees), and a collective payroll of about \$23 billion (Seley & Wolpert, 2002).

Methods

We conducted a thematic content analysis to investigate the extent that the social economy is portrayed and the patterns of meaning given to it in secondary level business and economics textbooks. Content analysis determines the use of certain concepts and terms in a written text or other forms of communication (Krippendorff, 2004). Researchers often favor the thematic approach because it allows for the analysis of qualitative latent content, or underlying meanings, as well as manifest content, or the apparent, quantifiable portions within the texts (Roberts, 1997). We believed that a thematic approach was most appropriate for this study because we were interested in depicting the common and dissimilar ways that the textbooks characterized the social economy.

Admittedly, content analysis of textbooks does not address or provide empirical evidence of what is actually taught for economics education in the classroom. The curriculum is thus only one aspect of the teaching process although it has been shown to be a very important influence on teaching. Curriculum materials play an important role in teachers' instructional decision making, especially in social studies education, in which there is a strong reliance on textbooks by teachers (Patrick, 1997; Torney-Purta, et al., 2001; Zevin, 2007). Teachers use textbooks to make decisions about the inclusion of topics, sequencing, and the classroom time spent on topics. This is especially the case for social studies classes, for which teachers often do not have content area expertise in some subject areas, such as economics. Another rationale for the importance of curriculum content analysis is the emphasis on the exclusion of topics in research on social studies textbooks, which indicates the significance of examining textbooks as part of the broader debate over which values and knowledge does the official curriculum represent. In the case of this research, the key question is "What economic knowledge and understanding are essential for effective citizenship?" (S. L. Miller & VanFossen, 2008, p. 287). As an essential component of classroom instruction, the curriculum shapes what students learn and how teachers' teach and present the material and is thus a necessary preliminary step for improving pedagogy.

Textbook sample

The sample consisted of 13 of the most popular secondary economics and business textbooks used in the U.S. (see Table 1). We selected these books by consulting social studies catalogs and contacted publishers directly in order to determine which books are currently being marketed to schools. We also consulted the list of economics and business textbooks that were approved for classroom use by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.³ Because we wanted

to examine the textbooks used in general level economics and business courses, we eliminated textbooks that were targeted to specialized courses, such as advanced placement, special needs classrooms, or English language learners. The 13 textbooks were published by the main academic publishers of secondary level textbooks and were the most recent editions available at the time of the research. Although all of these textbooks are used at the secondary level, it is important to note that they have a range of reading levels and depth of content.

Insert Table 1 about here

Data analysis

To assess the representation of the social economy, we developed a set of codes for inductive analysis. First, we wanted to know if the textbooks referred to the social economy as a distinct economic sector and, if so, how it was portrayed. This aim was challenging because there is not an agreed upon definition for the social economy or for the types of organizations that it includes, and there are a range of terms used for it. Also, we did not expect the textbooks to use the term social economy because the terms third sector and nonprofits sector are more commonly used in the U.S. We were also careful to distinguish the social economy sector from related concepts, such as the social responsibility of businesses and corporate philanthropy, which are activities occurring with traditional businesses in the private sector.

In order to strengthen the validity of our analysis we developed a set of terms to use as subcodes in our analysis. The term social economy was the explicit variable (or code) and “third sector,” “nonprofit sector,” “independent sector,” “voluntary sector,” “charity sector” and “social enterprise” were the implicit codes that also signified the concept of the social economy in terms

of a distinct economic sector oriented to improving society (see Salamon & Anheier, 1997). Although not identical, these subcodes show strong, or direct, inclusion of the concept of the social economy by recognizing a separate sector based on social purposes. We also recorded any recognition in the textbooks of organizations devoted to the common good instead of profits, although not explicitly as a distinct sector, which we coded as a weak reference. Thus, a weak reference occurred if a textbook mentioned that the purpose of some economic actors is to improve society, even if none of the terms represented in the subcodes were used and if it was not explicitly identified as a distinct sector. This code typically required the recognition of nonprofit organizations because nonprofit is the primary concept for understanding the social economy in the U.S., is the largest subsector of the social economy, and because some social economy organizations (e.g., social enterprise) are linked with the private sector, such as cooperatives, of which some types are similar to traditional businesses that work together for financial incentives and to minimize costs.

Second, based on our review of the literature, we developed codes for the primary categories of social economy organizations. We consider these variables to be nested under the broader concept of the social economy. However, there is not a consensus on these categories and scholars organize them differently. For example, some scholars group all associations together as a single category and others consider credit unions to be a form of cooperative. The four basic categories that we started with were cooperatives, mutuals, associations and foundations. However, after a preliminary review of the textbooks, we decided to exclude foundations from the analysis because this category was not covered in any of the textbooks. We also created subcategories in some cases. For example, under the mutuals category we distinguished between credit unions and mutuals, and under associations we distinguished

between unions and nonprofits. This approach allowed us to gather more detailed information about the different organizations and it aligned with the content of the textbooks.

We also wanted a quantifiable account of the overall attention paid to the social economy in each textbook that would be comparable. For this purpose, we analyzed each text page-by-page with regards to the amount of space dedicated to the social economy and measured it in increments of one-quarter of a page. We took note of the number of chapters in which the social economy and each category of organization was discussed in order to provide a picture of the concentration of the topic across the textbooks, such as whether it was mentioned in several chapters or concentrated in only one section.

The analysis consisted of both authors reading each text and marking where the social economy is mentioned according to the codes and subcodes that we developed. Using a coding sheet, we marked whether each code appeared in each text, listed definitions for the categories of organizations, the number of pages, and recorded any use and meanings of the concept. Lastly, we also documented any references to the social economy in an international context, such as references to fair trade nonprofit organizations or other international-oriented organizations.

Both sets of coding were compared for inter-rater reliability (Krippendorff, 2004). All of the codes (i.e., there was not a subset of codes used as a separate reliability sample) were checked for whether a particular segment of text referred to social economy and, if relevant, whether it was coded for the same category of organization. The same steps were repeated for the measurements of the amount of space dedicated to the social economy. After the initial check, we reviewed all discrepancies to see if agreement could be reached. This was an important step because, as other researchers have noted, inter-rater reliability is particularly important in content analysis because it purports to document the objective qualities of texts

(Neuendorf, 2002). Our checks yielded 98% inter-rater agreement, which is above the accepted standard. These results suggest that our coding scheme and variables were relatively valid and stable.

Findings

The social economy

Our analysis revealed that in general the social economy was not a significant part of the curriculum of the textbooks in our sample. We found that none of the textbooks in our sample used the terms social economy or any of the terms that we adopted as implicit codes for this study (see Table 2). Yet we coded three textbooks for strong representations of the social economy and seven for weak representations. Four of the 13 textbooks were coded for lacking direct or indirect allusion to the social economy as an economic sector although all of the textbooks covered some organizations.

Insert Table 2 about here

Three textbooks in the sample contained strong references to the social economy. The closest reference to the social economy as a sector was made in *Business and Personal Finance*, which included a discussion of “social entrepreneurship” as individuals and organizations “driven by a social mission, a desire to find innovative ways to solve social problems that are not being or cannot be addressed by the market or the public sector.” (Kapoor, et al., 2007, p. 521). It is significant that this passage contrasts social entrepreneurship with both the market and public

sectors. Although it was not one of the implicit codes that we began with, the inclusion of this term constitutes the strongest and most explicit reference to the social economy that we found.

The other strong references were in *Business Principles and Management*, which used the term “nonprofit corporations,” and in *Contemporary Economics*. These were the only textbooks that presented statistics on the sector. *Business Principles and Management* highlighted the size of the nonprofit sector in comparison with other nations: “In this country, nonprofit corporations provide nearly one-third of the GDP. However, in most other countries, nonprofit corporations contribute much more to the GDP” (Everard & Burrow, 2004, p. 155). Despite this recognition of its significant contribution to the economy, the textbook did not devote further attention to the topic. One reason is that, like several other textbooks in the sample, the authors focused on the similarities of social economy organizations and minimized the differences. For example, they stated that “the principles of business and management provided in this text apply equally to managers who run profit-making as well as nonprofit corporations,” (Everard & Burrow, 2004, p. 155), suggesting that it is unnecessary to distinguish between the sectors.

Contemporary Economics also focused on nonprofits. The textbook stated that “There are about 300,000 not-for-profit organizations in the United States. They employ about nine million workers, with hospitals accounting for about half of these jobs.” (McEachern, 2005, p. 246). Despite its recognition of the size of the social economy sector, the textbook only committed 0.5 pages to nonprofits.

The seven textbooks that we coded for weak representations implicitly recognized a sector committed to the common good through the discussion of nonprofit organizations. For example, *Economics: Principles in Action* included nonprofits under the section “Other

Organizations” and stated that they “do not operate for the purpose of generating profit” and are “usually in the business of benefitting society” (O'Sullivan & Sheffrin, 2007, p. 203). Under this section, the authors addressed a range of social oriented organizations, such as professional organizations, community-serving organizations, trade associations, and labor unions, which imply a broad and connected economic sector. Although cooperative were listed separately, they were presented under the same section adjacent to nonprofit organizations in the text, which also suggests their connection. Nevertheless, in its discussion of economic sectors, the textbook only mentioned the public and private sectors (p. 63). Also, in a discussion on the limits of the laissez faire doctrine, discussion of responsibility for the provision of social needs was limited to the public (government) sector and ignored social economy organizations (p.41).

Although it could be included within other topics, nonprofits were the most frequent way that the common good was addressed and in this regard served as a gateway to inclusion of the social economy in most of the textbooks. One reason is that nonprofits best express the social orientation that is fundamental to the social economy in terms of contradicting the principles of competition and profit. Other organizations, such as credit unions and some cooperatives, have qualities of the private sector (e.g., banking services and profit-seeking) and thus are introduced in the texts as versions of private organizations. For example, *Economics: Principles and Practices* used the topic of nonprofit organizations to include a range of organizations that some other textbooks separated, such as cooperatives, labor unions, and professional and business organizations. Although it does not specifically describe nonprofits as a sector, this grouping of organizations indirectly suggests such a sector.

There was an overall lack of internal consistency of the terms and location in the textbooks for the social economy. This situation reflects conceptual confusion that could be

resolved by explicitly referring to the social economy as a sector. We are not, however, recommending that there should be an identical template for how this topic is presented in textbooks. Instead we believe that these findings call attention to the need for greater clarity and explicit recognition of the social economy.

Associations

The textbooks contained more comprehensive portrayals of associations than of any other category of social economy organization. We coded associations in terms of two categories, labor unions and nonprofits, due to their fundamentally different characteristics and because textbooks differentiated between them. All 13 textbooks portrayed some type of association and eight textbooks covered both labor unions and nonprofit associations (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

Nonprofits

Ten textbooks covered nonprofit associations, which averaged 1.1 pages (ranging between 0.5 and 3 pages) and accounted for less than 1% of the total pages in each book. Nonprofits were typically defined in descriptive terms as lacking a financial motive. For example, *Holt Economics* described them as a “business organization that does not focus on financial gain for its members” (Pennington, 2003, p. 163) and *Introduction to Business* stated that “Because it doesn’t make a profit... it doesn’t have to pay taxes” (Brown & Clow, 2006, p. 90). However, the textbooks typically portrayed these associations as alternative forms of businesses and deemphasized their social purpose by focusing how they are managed and

organized. For example, *Introduction to Business* affirmed that “Like a corporation, a nonprofit organization has to register with the government and might be run by a board of directors” (Brown & Clow, 2006, p. 90).

Only three of the nine books—*Intro to Business*, *Business and Personal Finance*, and *Contemporary Economics*— explained that nonprofits are not guided by the profit motive because they aim to serve the common good by providing services that are not fulfilled by the private sector. Probably the best explanation for the purpose of nonprofits was in *Contemporary Economics*:

public goods cannot be provided through the market system because of the problem of who would pay for them. Once produced, public goods are available for all to consume, regardless of who pays and who doesn’t... As a consequence, for-profit firms cannot profitably sell public goods (McEachern, 2005, p. 76).

The text then explained that nonprofits and the public sector provide these goods and services where the market is unable. Similarly, *Intro to Business* remarked that nonprofits are “a group of people who join to do some activity that benefits the public” (Dlabay, et al., 2006, p. 112).

Eight textbooks contained teaching activities about nonprofits that connect them with students’ experiences and provide concrete case studies. Although none were particularly developed or detailed, they support critical thinking about nonprofits and their position in the economy. For example, a sidebar in *Holt Economics* asks students, “What is the purpose of a non-profit?” (Pennington, 2003, p. 164). This type of open-ended question allows for the discussion of larger societal benefits and principles of social economics. *Contemporary Economics*, which we coded for a strong reference to the social economy, asked students in a sidebar entitled “Investigate Your Local Economy” to identify a local nonprofit and explore how

it affects the local economy. It also suggested that students find out “what services the organization provides and how many paid employees and volunteers work for the organization” (McEachern, 2005, p. 246). This activity focused on the local economic role of cooperatives.

There were few examples of international nonprofits (also referred to as international non-governmental organizations, or INGOs) and their innovative market-based approaches, such as fair trade, that promote sustainability and reducing worldwide poverty. Only one textbook, *Intro to Business*, listed fair trade in its index. This textbook provided one of the best examples of international nonprofits in a sidebar entitled “Coffee and a Conscience,” which describes the case of Green Mountain Coffee and its involvement in the fair trade movement. The owner of the company aimed “to operate a company that demonstrated a concern for the environment, for the people who grow and supply the coffee, and for the local and global community” through the creation of an international nonprofit, Coffee Kids, and involvement with organizations such as the Fair Trade Partners, Businesses for Social Responsibility, and Community Action for Employees (Dlabay, et al., 2006, p. 195). Green Mountain Coffee was described as committed to providing a positive benefit to the world through its work. The only other example was in *Economics: Principles in Action*. A sidebar entitled “Nonprofits on a Global Scale” described the way that nonprofits increasingly act at a global, in addition to local, scale (O'Sullivan & Sheffrin, 2007, p. 203). It highlighted the efforts of the Conservation International Foundation to sell environmentally friendly coffee across the world.

Labor Unions

Ten of the 12 books covered labor unions to some extent (see Table 3). The quantitative analysis indicated that the textbooks devoted more space to labor unions than any other social

economy organization in our study. There was an average of 7.8 pages that ranged between 0.25 and 17 pages, which represented from less than 1% to 3% of the books' total pages. One reason for this comparatively extensive coverage is that the labor union and labor movement have a more prominent history in the U.S. than other organizations. The coverage included a description of collective bargaining, strikes, the right to work, and union tactics. For example, *Economics: Today and Tomorrow* defines labor unions as an “association of workers organized to improve wages and working conditions for its members” (R. Miller, 2005, p. 321). A more detailed definition in *Business* explained that they are “A group of individuals working together to achieve shared job related goals such as higher pay, shorter hours, more job security, greater benefits, better working conditions” (Griffin & Ebert, 2004, p. 235).

Two textbooks provided alternative portrayals of unions. *Intro to Business* described labor unions from a business manager's perspective and discussed how to facilitate good relations with a union (Dlabay, et al., 2006). *Economic Education for Consumers* did not include labor unions, instead discussing consumer unions (Miller & Stafford, 2006).

Eight of the 13 textbooks contained critical thinking and problem solving activities on labor unions. The questions focused on the controversial aspects of labor unions, particularly in terms of different perspectives on their legitimacy and economic effect, as well as their history. For example, *Economics: Today and Tomorrow* asked students, “What is your opinion on the influence of unions today?” (R. L. Miller, 2005, p. 333) and *Holt Economics* asked “How has the bias in the United States against labor organizers affected the development of the labor movement?” (Pennington, 2003, p. 183). Another textbook, *Economics: Principles and Practices*, questioned the basic purpose of unions in asking whether unions serve the best

interests of workers (Clayton, 2005, p. 220), perhaps reflecting the comparatively weak status of labor unions in the U.S.

Cooperatives

Ten of the 13 textbooks (77%) covered the topic of cooperatives (see Table 4). On average, only 0.5 pages were devoted to cooperatives in these textbooks, which ranged from 0.25 to 1 page. In terms of the total pages, this coverage was less than 1% in all of the textbooks. The textbooks provided general definitions of the concept focusing on them as business organizations that are formed to benefit their members. For example, *Economics: Principles and Practices* defined a cooperative as “a voluntary association of people formed to carry on some kind of economic activity that will benefit its members” (Clayton, 2005, p. 76). *Intro to Business* further specified its fundamental member-serving characteristics, stating that “It is owned by members, serves their needs, and is managed in their interest” (Dlabay, et al., 2006, p. 113). Furthermore, five textbooks (*Contemporary Economics*, *Economics: Principles and Practices*, *Economics: Principles in Action*, *Holt Economics*, and *Intro to Business*) provided more specific categories of cooperatives, such as producer, service, consumer, and agricultural cooperatives.

Insert Table 4 about here

The definitions pointed out the social enterprise quality of cooperatives, of which some are more similar in function to traditional businesses (especially producer cooperatives) than other social economy organizations in terms of seeking profits, such as farmers sharing cost of expensive agricultural machinery. *Business Principles and Management* emphasized the

business-like qualities of cooperatives in stating that its members are “much like stockholders in a corporation with the protection of limited liability” (Everard & Burrow, 2004, p. 156). Social enterprise organizations have social missions but also typically generate a larger percentage of their operating costs from profits rather than from contributions. However, the social function of cooperatives was minimized in these definitions, which narrowly construed their purposes and benefits. Only two textbooks associated cooperatives with the common good, such as providing needed services and products at reduced costs to consumers. *Economics in Our Times*, for example, pointed out that a cooperative “is not run for profit” (Arnold, 2001, p. 151) although they provided little further information about its social goal.

Two textbooks discussed the role of cooperatives in the economy although not as a separate sector. *Business Principles and Management* stated that cooperatives represent a small part of the 19 million businesses in the U.S. although it nevertheless asserted that “This small number... does not reduce their importance” and states their role in agriculture, money lending, insurance, and apartment rentals (Everard & Burrow, 2004, p. 156). *Business*, in its brief description of cooperatives, also emphasizes their role in agriculture (Griffin & Ebert, 2004, p. 81).

The textbooks provided few opportunities for more in depth thinking about cooperatives. Four textbooks contained critical thinking questions although most questions were descriptive in asking the student to summarize information. For example, *Economics: Principles and Practices* and *Holt Economics* asked, “What are advantages to membership in a co-op?” (Pennington, 2003, p. 164) and *Business Principles and Management* contained the question, “What is the purpose of cooperatives?” (Everard & Burrow, 2004, p. 159).

Mutuals

The primary types of mutuals covered in the textbooks were credit unions, savings and loan associations, and mutual savings banks, sometimes collectively referred to as thrift institutions. We focus on credit unions because they are the most common form of mutual. Credit unions were covered in 11 of the 13 textbooks (85%) (see Table 5). The coverage averaged 0.3 pages and ranged from 0.25 to 0.75 pages, which was less than 1% of total pages for all textbooks. This coverage was the least extensive of any of the social economy organizations. The majority of the coverage was limited to basic definitions. For example, *Business* described credit unions as a “Financial institution that accepts deposits from, and makes loans to, only its members, usually employees of a particular organization.” (Griffin & Ebert, 2004, p. 526). In these cases, there was little discussion of their social purpose and role in the economy as an organization that does not seek profit.

Insert Table 5 about here

The textbooks typically emphasize that credit unions are financial institutions having characteristics of both cooperatives and nonprofits that often serve members of labor unions. For example, *Business and Personal Finance* defines a credit union as “a nonprofit financial organization that is owned by its members and organized for their benefit” (Kapoor, et al., 2007, p. 130). Another textbook, *Economics: Principles and Practices*, categorized credit unions as a type of cooperative: “a nonprofit service cooperative that is owned by, and operated for, the benefit of its members” (Clayton, 2005, p. 303).

The data showed that credit unions were not discussed as part of the social economic sector, but as an alternative to commercial banks that provide better interest and loan rates. Their macroeconomic role was only mentioned in two textbooks. *Business* stated that the assets of credit unions were valued at \$442 billion in 2001, although without further details. *Holt Economics* provided the most detailed information on credit unions in a chart comparing them with commercial and savings institutions for the number of financial institutions according to asset level. The textbook noted that there were more credit unions than the other two categories of institutions combined and that they are concentrated in the lower and mid asset levels.

The textbooks included few opportunities for critical thinking about credit unions. Only one book provided critical questions about credit unions, in a review section that asked, “Why might a credit union be a good choice for people who qualify to be members?” (Miller & Stafford, 2006, p. 266).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that there is minimal coverage of the social economy in these 13 secondary economics and business textbooks, which corroborates previous studies on this topic in other nations (Quarter, et al., 1996; Schugurensky & McCollum, 2009, forthcoming). There were two key dimensions to this finding. First, there was little recognition of the social economy as an economic sector. None of the textbooks contained the term “social economy” or any of the terms that we used as subcodes in our analysis (third sector, nonprofit sector, independent sector, voluntary sector, charity sector and social enterprise). The only approximate term was “social entrepreneurship” in *Business and Personal Finance*, which we counted as a strong reference. As a result, the social economy at best appears as a weak and

inferred concept in the textbooks and was not an accepted part of the official economic knowledge.

Second, there was fairly consistent coverage of social economy organizations in the textbooks although it lacked depth and little attention was paid to their social purpose. All of the textbooks covered some social economy organizations and 12 textbooks covered more than one type of organization. Only *Business Management: Real World Applications and Connections* covered just one type of organization. The depth and quality of coverage of organizations, however, was weak and partial. Most significantly in our eyes is that the relationship between the organizations' purposes and the common good, which is one of the fundamental characteristics setting them apart from traditional business organizations, was rarely explained with the type of detail, critical thinking, and enthusiasm that is afforded to the profit-seeking and competitive organizations.

Explaining the minimal coverage of the social economy

Besides documenting the coverage of the social economy in these textbooks, it is also important to explain the lack of in depth coverage. However, there are not clear answers for this question. We suggest two reasons for the minimal coverage outlined in this study: 1) emphasis on profit and competition as accepted economic knowledge, and 2) lack of knowledge of the social economy.

All of the books reflected to some extent the prevailing view expressed by Milton Friedman that companies should focus exclusively on generating profit and creating shareholder value; in other words, if it isn't about profit, then it isn't "economic." In this sense, the social economy is not part of the official knowledge and societal values that textbooks represent (Apple

& Christian-Smith, 1991). The social economy contradicts Friedman's profit view by showing that there can be social- and public-oriented approaches to business. Similarly, the profit view has generated criticism to the trend toward corporate social philanthropy, which marginalizes social economic organizations as socialist or non-business. It also privileges neoclassical economic principles that are the basis for the neoliberal model and that do not accept the common good as part of the economics and business vocabulary. For example, the textbooks focused on the similarities of social economy organizations, especially nonprofits, to businesses rather than the differences (e.g., *Contemporary Economics*, p. 246). Also, little explanation is provided about why such organizations do not focus on profits or their significance specifically because the market does not fulfill all needs effectively (see Gunn, 2004), only those that are profitable.

Another explanation is that economics and business textbook authors are unfamiliar with or ignore the social economy scholarship and thus do not yet recognize the diverse social economy organizations as a distinct economic sector. This view would explain why there was broad, although inconsistent and largely superficial, coverage of social economic organizations in the textbooks yet virtually no recognition of a third economic sector. However, works such as Rifkin's (1995) *The End of Work*, which claims that the loss of jobs due to technological advances will advance the growth and significance of the social economic sector, have helped to justify the important role of the social economy and the likelihood that this role will increase in the near future. From this perspective, it is imperative that economics and business textbook authors become more aware of the role of the social economy and incorporate current scholarship.

These limitations make it highly unlikely that students are acquiring an understanding of the social role of this economic sector and the important public contribution that these organizations make. Instead, the continued portrayal of the economy as exclusively competitive and profit-drive polarizes the competitive and social sectors of the economy. Such a situation leaves the majority students with an inaccurate understanding of the economy. Furthermore, the weak and disconnected portrayal of the social economy in curriculum materials limits teachers' ability to support the development of civic virtues in the pre-collegiate economics classroom. In light of the reliance on textbooks, the lack of curriculum materials presenting the social economy as a distinct economic sector and the philosophical connections between its diverse organizations makes it highly probable that this topic will remain marginal in the economics classroom.

Comparing business and economics textbooks

We did not find major differences between the business and economics textbooks in their coverage of the social economy (see Table 6). Both groups of textbooks had minimal coverage of the social economy as a sector and of the organizations comprising it. One difference is that the business textbooks were more likely (83% to 57%) to make either a weak or strong reference to the social economy as a sector. Five of the six business textbooks recognized this sector and we coded two of these as strong references. One explanation for this notable difference is that the business textbooks focused more on existing practices and therefore were more likely to recognize the present role of the social economy than the economics textbooks, which focused more on traditional economic scholarship.

Insert Table 6 about here

The economics textbooks devoted more content to social economy organizations than the business textbooks. However, except for labor unions, the differences were small. The considerable attention paid to labor unions in the economics textbooks (9.93 pages vs. 2.06 pages in the business textbooks) included detailed accounts of the history of labor unions. Again, this can be explained by the business textbooks' attention to current practices rather than to economics and business history. Labor unions in the U.S. today have a less prominent role than during the twentieth century. Furthermore, a larger percentage of the business textbooks covered the social economy and its organizations in three of the five categories (Social Economy, Nonprofits, and Cooperatives) and was nearly identical in the category of Mutuals (83 vs. 88%).

In conclusion, our analysis showed that the business textbooks had broader overall coverage of the social economy and, significantly, more recognition of it as an economic sector. In particular, the coverage of three business textbooks stood out: *Business and Personal Finance*, *Business Principles and Management*, and *Intro to Business*. More business textbooks than economics textbooks covered the two central topics: the social economy as a sector (83 vs. 57%) and nonprofits (83 vs. 71%). Two of the business textbooks had strong references to the social economy, which was the single strongest indicator of recognizing it as a sector. Also, as we mentioned in the analysis, nonprofit associations seemed to be key to the extent of coverage and the business textbooks were stronger in this category. Nevertheless, these differences were small and several economics textbooks also provided comparable coverage, especially *Contemporary Economics*, *Economics: Principles and Practices*, and *Holt Economics*.

Conclusion

This research showed that the social economy is weakly represented in economics and business textbooks in respect to its role in the U.S. economy. However, we are not claiming that the social economy is the most important economic concept for high school students or that it is a clear path to becoming active democratic citizens. Instead, we believe that the weak representation of the social economy in business and economics textbooks is disproportionate to their role in the U.S. economy and limits the development of civic virtues in the pre-collegiate economics classroom. Determining the extent and nature of topics for the economics curriculum ultimately falls to teachers, school districts, textbook authors, and curriculum standard writers. Our hope is that this research provides useful information and insights into the ways that the social economy is currently represented and the need for designing curriculum materials that facilitate teachers' incorporation of more extensive and in depth coverage of economic topics related to civic education.

A key rationale for increasing coverage of the social economy is that it provides a strong link between the economy, employment, and the common good, which is a powerful component of education for democratic citizenship. Many schools already connect students with social economy organizations through the increasingly widespread graduation requirement that students volunteer for a certain number of hours in their local community. Scholars such as Rifkin have been strong proponents for strengthening service learning in nonprofit organizations to prepare adolescents for professional and civic life. Including the social economy in the economics curriculum can help to achieve these aims by strengthening students' knowledge of and interest in public service. Furthermore, such an education can help to foster economic literacy that includes all economic sectors and is more closely tied with the development of civic virtues.

Table 1: Textbook Sample

Business Textbooks	Economics Textbooks
Brown, B. J., & Clow, J. E. (2006). Introduction to business. Woodlands Hills, CA: Glencoe McGraw-Hill.	Arnold, R. A. (2001). Economics in our times. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.
Dlabay, L. R., Burrow, J. L., & Egglund, S. A. (2006). Intro to business: Thomson Learning.	Clayton, G. E. (2005). Economics: Principles and practices: Glencoe McGraw Hill.
Everard, K. E., & Burrow, J. L. (2004). Business principles and management. Mason, OH: Thomson.	McEachern, W. A. (2005). Contemporary economics. Mason, OH: South-Western.
Griffin, R. W., & Ebert, R. J. (2004). Business. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.	Miller, & Stafford. (2006). Economic education for consumers: Thomson Learning.
Kapoor, J. R., Dlabay, L. R., & Hughes, R. J. (2007). Business and personal finance. Woodland Hills, CA: Glencoe McGraw Hill.	Miller, R. (2005). Economics: Today and tomorrow: Glencoe McGraw-Hill.
Rue, & Byars. (2006). Business management: Real world applications and connections: Glencoe McGraw Hill.	O'Sullivan, A., & Sheffrin, S. M. (2007). Economics: Principles in action. Boston: Pearson.
	Pennington, R. L. (2003). Holt economics. Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Table 2: Coverage of the Social Economy

Textbooks	Coverage in Textbook	Term Used
<u>Economics</u>		
<i>Contemporary Economics</i>	Strong	Not-for-profit organizations
<i>Economic Education for Consumers</i>	None	N/A
<i>Economics in Our Times</i>	None	N/A
<i>Economics: Principles in Action</i>	Weak	N/A
<i>Economics: Principles and Practices</i>	Weak	N/A
<i>Economics Today and Tomorrow</i>	None	N/A
<i>Holt Economics</i>	Weak	N/A
<u>Business</u>		
<i>Business</i>	None	N/A
<i>Business and Personal Finance</i>	Strong	Social entrepreneurship
<i>Business Management: Real World Applications and Connections</i>	Weak	N/A
<i>Business Principles and Management</i>	Strong	Nonprofit corporations
<i>Intro to Business</i>	Weak	N/A
<i>Introduction to Business</i>	Weak	N/A
Totals	Strong: 3	
	Weak: 6	
	None: 4	

Table 3: Coverage of Associations

Textbooks	Coverage in Textbook		Number of Pages		Percent of Total Pages		Problem-solving Content	
	Unions	Nonprofits	Unions	Nonprofits	Unions	Nonprofits	Unions	Nonprofits
Economics								
<i>Contemporary Economics</i>	Yes	Yes	10	0.5	1.59	0.08	Yes	Yes
<i>Economic Education for Consumers</i>	Yes	Yes	0.25	1	0.04	0.16	No	Yes
<i>Economics in Our Times</i>	Yes	No	9	0	1.33	0	Yes	No
<i>Economics: Principles in Action</i>	Yes	Yes	8.25	0.75	1.39	0.13	Yes	Yes
<i>Economics: Principles and Practices</i>	Yes	Yes	11	3	1.95	0.53	Yes	Yes
<i>Economics Today and Tomorrow</i>	Yes	No	17	0	2.91	0	Yes	No
<i>Holt Economics</i>	Yes	Yes	14	0.75	3.09	0.17	Yes	Yes
Business								
<i>Business</i>	Yes	No	5	0	0.82	0	Yes	No
<i>Business and Personal Finance</i>	No	Yes	0	0.75	0	0.10	No	No
<i>Business Management: Real World Applications and Connections</i>	Yes	Yes	2.5	0.75	0.49	0.15	Yes	No
<i>Business Principles and Management</i>	No	Yes	0	0.5	0	0.07	No	Yes
<i>Intro to Business</i>	Yes	Yes	0.5	0.5	0.08	0.08	No	No
<i>Introduction to Business</i>	Yes	Yes	0.25	2.25	0.04	0.39	No	Yes

Table 4: Coverage of Cooperatives

Textbooks	Coverage in Textbook	Number of Pages	Percent of Total Pages	Problem-solving Content
Economics				
<i>Contemporary Economics</i>	Yes	0.5	0.08	No
<i>Economic Education for Consumers</i>	No	0	0	No
<i>Economics in Our Times</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No
<i>Economics: Principles in Action</i>	Yes	0.75	0.13	Yes
<i>Economics: Principles and Practices</i>	Yes	1	0.18	Yes
<i>Economics Today and Tomorrow</i>	No	0	0	No
<i>Holt Economics</i>	Yes	0.5	0.11	Yes
Business				
<i>Business</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No
<i>Business and Personal Finance</i>	Yes	0.5	0.07	No
<i>Business Management: Real World Applications and Connections</i>	No	0	0	No
<i>Business Principles and Management</i>	Yes	0.75	0.10	Yes
<i>Intro to Business</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No
<i>Introduction to Business</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	Yes

Table 5: Coverage of Credit Unions (Mutuals)

Textbooks	Coverage in Textbook	Number of Pages	Percent of Total Pages	Problem-solving Content
Economics				
<i>Contemporary Economics</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No
<i>Economic Education for Consumers</i>	Yes	0.75	0.12	Yes
<i>Economics in Our Times</i>	No	0	0	No
<i>Economics: Principles in Action</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No
<i>Economics: Principles and Practices</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No
<i>Economics Today and Tomorrow</i>	Yes	0.50	0.08	No
<i>Holt Economics</i>	Yes	0.25	0.06	No
Business				
<i>Business</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	Yes
<i>Business and Personal Finance</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No
<i>Business Management: Real World Applications and Connections</i>	No	0	0	No
<i>Business Principles and Management</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No
<i>Intro to Business</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No
<i>Introduction to Business</i>	Yes	0.25	0.04	No

Table 6: Coverage by Type of Textbook

	Percent of Textbooks (13 total: 6 Business and 7 Economics)		Average Number of Pages (for textbooks with coverage)		Range of Total Pages		Avg. Percent of Total Pages	
	Business	Economics	Business	Economics	Business	Economics	Business	Economics
Social Economy	83	57	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Associations								
<i>Unions</i>	67	100	2.06	9.93	0.25 to 2.50	0.25 to 17.00	0.36	1.76
<i>Nonprofits</i>	83	71	0.95	1.20	0.50 to 2.25	0.50 to 3.00	0.16	0.21
Cooperatives	83	71	0.40	0.60	0.25 to 0.75	0.25 to 1.00	0.06	0.11
Credit Unions	83	88	0.25	0.38	0.25 to 0.25	0.25 to 0.75	0.04	0.06

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Notes

¹ Although there are many different terms, we use the “social economy” because it is the most comprehensive concept and best illustrates the “social” nature of this sector. It is also the most commonly used term across the world.

² Several typologies have been developed to map the social economy. One alternative to the categories of organizations that we employed in this study proposed the following three categories: 1) entrepreneurial, 2) mutual associations, and 3) financially dependent nonprofits (Quarter, 2000).

³ In Pennsylvania, teachers are not mandated to use a state-selected text for secondary social studies courses for business and economics courses. Instead they select from an approved list of textbooks with a range of selections.