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16 Apr 2009 02:25 pm

Despite my reservations about the term, at least as used by [Bill Gates](#), "creative capitalism" pretty well encompasses two new and notable books I would draw to your attention.

The first is [The Beautiful Tree](#) by James Tooley, an unsung hero of development policy. Tooley is a teacher and a professor of education, who these days spends most of his time in Hyderabad, India. His speciality as both scholar and practitioner is ultra-low-cost private education in the world's poorest countries. Given the pitiful standards of most state-run schools for the poor in the third world, this is a crucial sector, and in many cases a thriving one. Yet its existence was denied in official aid circles until Tooley began publishing his findings. In fact, such was the reluctance to accept the implications of his work, the role played by such schools was denied even after he began describing it in detail.

Orthodox opinion on developing-country education for the poor holds that parents are too ignorant to know a good school when they see one, and that a decent education is impossible to provide on the minimal budgets available to private schools serving poor students. In country after country, Tooley found that both claims are false. Official attitudes are now changing, he says, but slowly. The book is a memoir of his travels and researches, and a thorough examination of the issues. Everyone interested in development should read it. (Try the [first half-dozen pages](#) on Amazon and see if you aren't hooked.) In the US it is published by the Cato Institute.

Tooley's book is about entrepreneurial education in unpromising conditions, not philanthropy. In contrast, [Philanthrocapitalism](#) by Matthew Bishop (a former colleague of mine at The Economist) and Michael Green is about marrying entrepreneurial methods to charity. That of course is what Gates has done with his foundation (though he appears to mean something different again by "creative capitalism"). The book describes how an emphasis on results, cost-effectiveness and accountability, backed by billions of philanthropic dollars, is changing the way charity works--and the way much official aid works, as well.

Shame that the book launch gatherings in DC clashed last night; I turned up for the one that invited me first. Sorry, Matthew.

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Xpaperboy

April 18, 2009 4:14 AM

Mr. Crook -- The sad thing is, this statement --

"Orthodox opinion on developing-country education for the poor holds that parents are too ignorant to know a good school when they see one, and that a decent education is impossible to provide on the minimal budgets available to private schools serving poor students." -- could also describe the attitude of many who oppose school choice for the people in the US of A who need it most -- inner city black families.

It's also false -- In Pittsburgh I have met and reported on uneducated or working-class single black mothers who were smarter consumers of education for their kids than the wealthiest suburban parents, whose "choices" about education usually begin and end when they move into one school district or the other. The women I met were Baptists and even Muslims who carefully shopped around for education for their kids and didn't care if it cost them money they didn't really have or that it came in a Roman Catholic package, as long as it delivered the goods.

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