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Seminar Monograph

Beyond Entrepreneurship: Cooperative Values and Practices in Education

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1. Background

On 20th February 2009 the International Labour Organisation and the Department of Trade and Industry hosted a seminar entitled: *Beyond Entrepreneurship - Cooperative Values and Practices in Education*. This was the second seminar in a series on cooperatives hosted by the ILO and DTI.

The seminar drew in co-operators, policy experts, sector stakeholders and academics into a common space to think about cooperative development as part of an approach to address wider development challenges facing the country.

The seminar series on cooperatives is intended to achieve the following:

- Provide a platform for in depth debate about key policy and development issues facing cooperatives in South Africa;
- Generate new ideas, innovative thinking and insights about the role of cooperatives, the cooperative sector and cooperative economy;
- Identify opportunities and challenges facing cooperative development in South Africa;
- Provide a learning and sharing space for cooperative practitioners, policy actors, support ngos, and mass organisations;
- Generate knowledge about cooperative practices and experiences at the frontline of change;
- Enhance the capacity for knowledge based leadership around cooperative development in South Africa.

2. Problem Statement

The high fiscal spend on South Africa's post-apartheid education system is not achieving the appropriate outcomes. Many policy and institutional challenges constrain the delivery of education. Many of these problems have grabbed headlines and include: poor teacher training, high student-teacher ratios, delinquency and violence in schools, abuse by teachers, poor resource management and failing governance systems. Civil society is also alive to these challenges and various voices are calling for immediate and concerted action to resolve the crisis of the education system. Beyond these constraints South Africa's education system is challenged by the need to produce a literate and highly skilled population. For many young people, life after leaving school simply amounts to joblessness. At a policy level this has led to various initiatives to introduce entrepreneurship training into schools as part of an effort to equip young people with capacities for the labour market. Many efforts are being made to ensure school curricula take on board entrepreneurship training. Is entrepreneurship training the only approach to building the capacities and life skills for children in schools? Are there alternative ways of ensuring values and capacities are built amongst children in schools? Is there a cooperative solution for our education crisis? What are the current practices on the ground, both international and national, that we can learn from? What is the role of the state? What is the role of a cooperative movement? What role can civil society play in championing a cooperative approach and solution to our education challenges?

3. Co-operative Values Make a Difference – In the Curriculum and the Governance of Schools.

Mervyn Wilson

Chief Executive and Principal, the Co-operative College UK

3.1 Introduction

As democratic, membership based bodies, co-operatives have always recognised the need to renew and re-energise themselves by attracting new generations of co-operators into membership. That is one of the reasons why education has always been one of the underpinning principles of the movement. Today, exciting initiatives in the UK are simultaneously addressing the historic invisibility of co-operatives in schools by bringing co-operation into the curriculum and giving young people an opportunity to actively engage in a co-operative at their school.

The importance of working with schools and teaching co-operation was recognised from the birth of the co-operative movement. Robert Owen was passionate about the need for education. His pioneering idea of sending children to school, ‘Centre for the Formation of Character’, rather than to work in the cotton mill was one of the triumphs of New Lanark. In the first half of the Nineteenth Century, Owen’s journal *A New Moral World* and Dr William King’s *Co-operator* advocated co-operative schools and carried exchanges of correspondence on early experiments to establish them. Following the success of the Rochdale Pioneers and the creation of co-operative societies across the UK, most societies set up their own classes. The emerging Co-operative Union helped by the provision of a central syllabus, and later examination classes to support them. At least one co-operative society in the North East of England established its own school, maintaining it for a number of years.

But overall the British co-operative movement felt that the established school system was hostile to the ideas of co-operation. Education provision was through evening and weekend classes run by co-operatives. This feeling of exclusion from the state education system was well reflected in a debate in the House of Commons in 1928. Conservatives were proposing a national holiday for ‘Empire Day’ but a Co-operative Member of Parliament, later First Lord of the Admiralty in the 1929 Labour Government, and again in Churchill’s wartime coalition Government, A V Alexander told of a recent visit to a school:

“I asked them if they could tell me how many wives Henry VIII had and what were their names? The majority of the boys in that class could answer that question straight away, but when I asked if they could tell me who was Robert Owen and when he was born, or on what date the British Co-operative Movement was founded, they could not give me any answer.”

Regretfully, little changed after that, and whilst co-operation continued to grow globally, frequently introduced by British Government agencies into parts of the then burgeoning Empire, it remained invisible within schools.

3.2 Bringing Cooperatives into UK Schools

Over the last three decades various efforts were made by the British co-operative movement to see if it could access and engage with young people through the state education system. Whilst highly creative projects engaged schools, they struggled to embed within the system, and for the overwhelming majority of young people in schools, little had changed from A V Alexander's experience.

That position started to change from the late 1980s with growing policy support for enterprise education. The Government became more and more concerned about the need for young people to be 'more enterprising' and develop a range of enterprise related skills seen as essential for a successful economy. This provided new opportunities for co-operatives to engage with schools, particularly through the introduction of a co-operative model for mini enterprise activities.

Today Young Co-operatives provides hundreds of young people with the opportunity to run their own mini co-operative enterprise. These enterprises sell Fair-trade products, enabling members to learn about fair and unfair trade, and their impact on communities at the sharp end of the supply chain. Young Co-operatives members also learn how producer co-operatives are contributing to lifting and keeping people out of poverty as they engage in the running of a co-operative enterprise.

In 2003 the Co-operative Group, Britain's biggest co-operative, decided it was time for a more strategic approach to working with schools and young people. It agreed to sponsor a network of secondary schools (generally 11-16 year olds) specialising in Business and Enterprise. Specialist schools are a feature of the UK education system, with every secondary school encouraged to specialise in one of a range of ten areas. Business and Enterprise was chosen because of the invisibility of co-operatives in the curriculum, with the Society's democratic structure used to select schools resulting in a geographically dispersed network, from the North of England through to the South West.

3.3 The Impact of Cooperative Values and Practices in Schools

The Co-operative Group provided funding for the Co-operative College to work with the schools to build an effective network and explore ways in which the global co-operative movement could be used as a learning resource across the curriculum. This project quickly revealed that opportunities for co-operative values and examples of co-operative practice were not restricted to Business

Studies, but that the movement's rich history was directly relevant to a range of topics for differing age groups. The global spread of the movement, and diversity of sectors made it a rich resource for Geography; the role of faith-based leaders such as Coady and Tomkins with the Antigonish movement, Arizmendiarieta with Mondragon and Don Guetti with the Trentino co-operative movement in Northern Italy provided wonderful examples for use in Religious Education. Business activities such as recruitment processes provided the basis for far more realistic materials on human resources processes, and real data provides the basis of IT Statistics and Mathematics.

Most important of all, the programme showed the resonance of co-operative values with those of schools:

“Schools are not just about examination results they are about developing the whole person. Because we have been able to base our Citizenship and Personal Social and Hygiene Education on co-operative values, we are developing very good skills for young people. When Ofsted (the body responsible for inspection of schools in the UK) came to judge us on Citizenship they said it was the significant reason why attainment in this school had increased dramatically. I was proud of that, because although we believe in these values, for an outside organisation like Ofsted to say ‘yes’, this has really improved things at the school and knew we were beginning to get there.”

Dave Boston, Head Teacher, Sir Thomas Boughhey Co-operative Business and Enterprise College

The Ofsted's report provided powerful recognition of the value of the co-operative approach in working with schools:

“The school's specialist status and the strong link with the co-operative movement have had a major impact on standards and achievement, which have improved considerably over the last two years.”

The work with the Business and Enterprise Colleges demonstrated clearly the transformational power of working within a framework of co-operative values, and how those values could directly impact in raising achievement:

“I would like to think as well that our ethos has been strengthened by our connection with the co-operative movement and that students themselves are really seeing the value of working together in order to achieve well. I think staff and students have really worked hard in recent years to create a culture of achievement, of working together to achieve.”

Nick Bowen, Head Teacher, St Benet Biscop Catholic High School

The network of Business and Enterprise Colleges established wider links, with exchange visits leading to networks of schools working with co-operatives in Europe. One project aims to link twelve schools working with co-operatives in

seven European countries, and creating the basis of annual European Young Co-operatives Congresses. Younger members of teaching staff participated in the Co-operative Futures Programme, linking with co-operators in North America. Links have been made with schools working with producer co-operatives in Tanzania with young people from two of the schools that participated in the Youth and Student Co-operative Forum in Lesotho in December 2008.

Chief Executive of the Co-operative Group, Peter Marks emphasised the important role that the consumer co-operative movement is playing in developing the engagement with schools:

“Our business has a role to play in working with schools to develop the social and community skills and behaviour that young people need to become confident individuals and responsible citizens as well as successful learners.”

3.4 Embedding the Cooperative Ethos in Schools

The successes in embedding the culture of co-operation into the schools, and demonstrating the transformational power of co-operative values, led the partners to look for ways of embedding that co-operative ethos in the long-term. The opportunity came through education policy reforms in England in 2006. These reforms were designed to bring about fundamental change in the way education is delivered, in particular transforming the role of the state at a local level from being a provider of education, to a commissioner of services. The reforms encourage schools to become Charitable Trusts with a range of local partners committed to raising standards and achievement.

The Co-operative College immediately applied to collaborate with one of the schools it had worked with on a Pathfinder Programme to develop a co-operative model for trust schools. The result is a multi-stakeholder co-operative model that empowers learners, staff, parents and the local community through membership.

In becoming a trust school, the lands and assets transfer from the local state to the Charitable Trust, who also set the ethos and vision of the school for the long-term. There is an extensive consultation period, with the final decision to become a trust resting with the school’s governing body, ensuring that decisions are not taken lightly. Reddish Vale Technology College, a 1,400 pupil secondary school in Stockport, on the outskirts of Manchester, was one of the 30 Pathfinder schools in the UK investigating trust status. It started out wanting to explore how it could set up subsidiary trading activities as co-operative or social enterprises, but quickly recognised that there was a better solution, to run the trust as a co-operative:

“The advantages of the co-operative trust come through the democratic engagement of the local community, with mutual benefits derived from co-

operative values and principles, and the partnership dividend provided by long-term sustainable relationships.”

Jenny Graham, Head Teacher, Reddish Vale Technology College

Chris Hill a pupil at Reddish Vale added:

“The trust allows parents to become more involved in the school and gives more of a voice to pupils.”

Andrew Marvell Business and Enterprise College in Hull, one of the network of co-operative sponsored Business and Enterprise Colleges that had already worked extensively with the Co-operative College and the Co-operative Group on co-operation in the curriculum also adopted the model:

“To us it was a natural choice to look for a co-operative solution when the trust school option became available. We saw the Pathfinder Programme as a unique opportunity to both research the benefits of becoming a trust, and in particular to explore ways in which we could build on the relationships with the co-operative movement and our local community, and see if it was possible to embed these in a trust with a distinct co-operative ethos.”

Barry Jacob, Chair of Governors, Andrew Marvell Business and Enterprise College, Hull

The model received strong political support. The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (the UK Ministry of Education), Ed Balls MP visited Reddish Vale as the first co-operative school in the UK, commenting:

“Moving to a co-operative model will give everybody with a stake in the school success – parents, teachers and support staff, local organisations and, even, pupils the opportunity to be involved in the running of their schools.”

He added:

“It is about embedding a collaborative culture into the school, building on existing strong local relationships, and providing a platform for those interested in the school’s success to work together.”

The political support for co-operative schools was widespread, with the Leader of the Opposition, David Cameron speaking in Manchester stating:

“I want to explore how we can create a new generation of co-operative schools in Britain, funded by the tax payer, but owned by parents in the local community.”

3.5 Conclusion

By January 2009, over 60 schools were in discussions regarding the forming of co-operative trusts, with ten completing the consultation process to become co-operative trusts by Easter 2009. The Co-operative College which has led the development of co-operative trust schools is confident that, with support from Government, they can achieve at least 100 trusts with over 250 schools in membership over the next two years.

Many of the next generation of co-operative trusts are cluster models, involving all schools in a local community, enabling young people to learn co-operation as they progress through the education system from early years of education to when they leave secondary school for further or higher education.

Sutherland School in Telford are leading efforts to establish a multi-school trust with the support of Midcounties Co-operative Society and the Co-operative College. Nicola Scott, a Governor at the school is clear of the benefits the trust can bring:

“I am confident the trust will build and improve on the way that we all work together and improve the quality of life for our school, our community and its residents.”

It is a view shared by student Vicky Lindsay who said:

“You can achieve much more if you work together than if you don’t.”

This is a view strongly shared by the Chair of the Co-operative Group, Len Wardle who added:

“A co-operative trust offers an inspirational opportunity for pupils, staff, service users, community members and partners to collaboratively share the strong values and principles which have underpinned the co-operative movement for more than 150 years.”

But perhaps the most powerful testimony came from 14-year old Damian Fowler from Sir Thomas Boughy Co-operative Business and Enterprise College in Staffordshire. Speaking at Co-operative Congress, Damian spoke of the impact of working in the framework of co-operative values and principles in the school, commenting:

“Having a co-operative dimension to our school has not only enriched the curriculum, but has also allowed us to develop and grow as individuals. The

school's results have dramatically improved, the co-operative values have also helped the wider community we serve.”

Damian made a powerful plea to Congress to share that experience more widely.

“We would like to share the benefits that the co-operative ethos has brought to our school. In today's throw away society, co-operation in the curriculum is one thing that must not be discarded, so let's all aim for a national network of co-operative schools – that gives you two years.”

That challenge is now being taken up by the co-operative movement in the UK, with a real opportunity to transform part of the education system to co-operatives, and provide tens of thousands of young people with an opportunity to learn about co-operation, and learn about it by being a part of a co-operative school.

4. Why Co-operatives For Children

Marcus Solomon

Executive Director, Children Resources Centre

4.1 Introduction

Children constitute approximately 40% of South Africa's population, that is, more than 20 million children, half of whom are girls. Twelve million of these children are located in approximately 26 000 schools, 16 000 of them being primary schools. Millions go to Sunday Schools; thousands attend Madrassas; thousands are members of cultural, sports and various types of children's organizations such as girl guides, boy scouts, and our own children's movement.

For us at the Children's Resource Centre (CRC) and in the Children's Movement, all these children, through the institutions and the organizations they belong to, can play an important role in the setting up and running of co-operatives and a co-operative movement.

But before I share with you what our experience with children's co-operatives has been, I first need to give a brief overview of the context in which this came about.

4.2 The Children's Resource Centre (CRC)

The few co-operatives we have established and tried to sustain over a three to four year period, are located in our Children's Movement, a social movement of children we started in 1979, thirty years ago. In 1983 the Children's Resource Centre was set up to give the children's groups an infrastructural and physical presence in the community.

The idea of starting a social movement of children emerged during the community struggles of the late 1970s and early 1980s in particular around the struggle for an alternative system of education. At the time there was much talk about the need for a new social order; and from many working class organizations there were calls for the creation of a socialist South Africa. The role of the organized working class, regarded as the main change agent to bring this about, was going to be vital. Socialism, it was believed, would provide the conditions for the coming into being of a new person, the new socialist man/person.

But questions were also being asked about who constituted the working class? Only adults who are working? Only males? What about the mothers tending to the home front? And finally, what about the children who constitute the majority, not only of the working class, but of society at large?

There was generally a belief that it is during childhood that indoctrination mainly takes place; and this is when attitudes such as individualism, competitiveness, racism, sexism take root. At this time we also studied the writings of Gramsci and became familiar with his ideas on how the capitalist system is perpetuated through a process of coercion and persuasion; about commonsense, “popular” consciousness and higher forms of consciousness; and how higher levels of consciousness can help people change and in turn help change the world. These and many other ideas were discussed and helped us in making decisions about strategies to be used in our political and community work.

For some political and community activists like ourselves, the question arose: when does the process on creating this new person, the “socialist man” commence in the life of a person and of communities? And how does it take place? And where do children fit into the scheme of things? At what stage do children then become conscious co-constructors of their social environment so to say?

We increasingly came to realize that the earlier we started working with children the better. It was not long before our political work was extended to include children of primary-school going age (i.e., 7 to 14 year olds).

But this new area of work confronted us with new challenges. What sort of programmes, projects, and campaigns needed to be created/designed to attract children, retain and keep their interests and have the effect of changing their ways of seeing things, of thinking about what is happening around them. And eventually, what would make them change their ways and help change the world around them? In short, what would help them to become change agents so to say.

With the birth of the new South Africa in 1994, we realized that we needed to look broader than just the children of workers as potential members for our children’s movement.

4.3 The Children’s Movement

With the setting up of the CRC in 1983/4, the building of a national Children’s Movement gained more purpose and momentum. The mission of the CRC, to help build and sustain a social movement of children, became concrete; and it provided children with a vehicle through which they could become active participants in the building and sustaining of a qualitatively better world. Out of these early efforts our slogan emerged: FOR CHILDREN THE FUTURE IS NOW!

In 2005 the CRC initiated a network of children organizations. Today the network, although still at the initial stages, is established with Sunday Schools and a range of children’s organizations.

Over the years the CRC has developed and implemented a number of programmes. These are intended to help create an environment in which the members can find

new ways of growing up but also to help them become active participants in all matters affecting their lives. These programmes include: culture (dance, drama, song, etc.); health (school-based Child-to-Child health centres); media (a newsletter, a radio and TV); projects (education and training, environment and gardening, the co-operatives, etc); campaigns: Anti-Bullying campaign (ABC), the Anti-Racism and Anti-Xenophobia Campaign (ARC/AXR); etc.

All these activities are implemented in an integrated and holistic manner. Each one only finds meaning within the context of the broad children's social movement as a whole. For us then, the co-operative project forms part of our efforts to create such an environment.

4.4 The emergence of the co-operatives project within the CM

The need for and discussion about co-operatives arose in the context of the need for the organization to become self-sustainable and self-reliant. However, we have come to realize that for many of the child members, there is also a great desire and longing to satisfy needs that go deeper than the material and the physical, great as these are. They hunger for a sense of belonging; for warmth, love and care of the people around them –parents, teachers, and other children. They do need and desire to have the basics such as soap, a face cloth, a sanitary towel, and, yes, water to wash and just feel running through the fingers or toes; going to the movies and the disco; a ball to kick or hit around; some money to go to the beach.

We have come to realize that our co-operatives have deeper meanings for our child members than what we as adults realize. For us as the adults managing and coordinating the organization, initially, was about the sustainability and self reliance of the organization. Gradually we came to realize that for the children it went deeper. Not that the project met all, if any, of the wished for needs and desires.

In about 1998, we started a savings co-operative for our adult members of staff (dormant at the moment), and in about 2004 we decided that it would be worth trying to set up co-operatives for and with the child members. The matter was raised with them, work-shopped with the support of somebody from the National Co-operative Association of South Africa (NCASA), Western Cape. After much discussion, the decision was made to go ahead.

The first children's co-operative was started in 2005 at the W.D. Primary School in Factreton, an Afrikaans-speaking working class residential area of Cape Town. It was started by the members of Girl Child Movement (GCM) branch at the school; and was intended to provide material support for the approximately 50 members of the branch in the form of sanitary towels when they got their monthly periods. This co-operative grew out of a simple participatory research programme that found that many girls did not have sanitary towels when they got their monthly periods. So, one of the immediate goals of the co-operative was to get the resources to provide the members with their monthly needs.

The members decided that the service would also include and be accompanied by a regular awareness raising programme on the issue of the sexuality of girls.

The fifty members elected an executive committee and approached the principal with the request to take-over the running of the school tuck shop. The request was granted and within a short space of time, with the money made through the sales of the tuck-shop, the co-operative was able to provide each member with a little bag, the contents of which included a regular supply of sanitary towels, shampoo and other items the members felt they needed. The members organised a public launch of their co-operative to which teachers, parents, and representatives from other children's groups in the Western Cape were invited.

A year later the second co-operative was established at the Luleka Primary School in Khayelitsha. This co-operative arose out of the immediate desire of the organisation's members at the school to make some material contribution to the running costs of our Schools In Motion (SIM) programme and that of our Child-to-Child health centre, two of our programmes at the school.

But we were becoming more ambitious. So the national executive of the Girl Child Movement organized a national workshop on co-operatives. As a practical session for the workshop, a bead-making programme was included to demonstrate what can be done to generate income. But the bead-making was also used to show where bead-making fitted into the cultural heritage of African societies.

This workshop sparked off a number of initiatives nationally to get co-operatives off the ground in the provinces/regions where we have a presence.

The present situation is that we have four to five children's co-operatives operating at different levels of effectiveness and stages of development and several others in the process of being planned.

4.5 Achievements

Amongst some of the more visible and notable achievements of our co-operative project are:

The co-operative project is now one of the accepted projects of the movement that will become part of our long-term activities. But like many of our programmes, projects, campaigns, etc. it will take time and much effort to get it going and functioning well across the organization nationally.

Many of the members who have participated in the activities of this project have come to realize their potential to improve the quality of their own lives but that this was only really possible within the context of a broader collective with other children and the within the movement.

4.6 Some difficulties and problems experienced

Some of the difficulties and problems experienced included:

A scarcity of skilled youth and adult members to assist in keeping the co-operative project alive.

An attitude amongst adults and authorities in general that co-operatives are for adults and not for children.

How and where to keep co-operative monies in safe-keeping.

The membership is mainly of the older children/learners, so there is a big turnover of membership because the older ones pass on to higher grades and other schools, making sustainability and continuity difficult.

4.7 Lessons learned

The most positive lesson we have learned is that children have the capacity to start and sustain co-operatives. But like any sector of the community wishing to undertake a project of this nature, they need support with education and training, resources, etc. They in turn bring much to the initiative in the form of their natural creativity and boundless energy.

Most importantly, our experience shows that a new approach to education /learning is needed. An approach that is practical and relevant to the lives of the children, such as education with production.

More importantly, the co-operatives we initiated provided those children who participated with some insight into what they are capable of doing through their own efforts and with the help of other children, to improve the quality of their own lives. This, for the long-term, is one of the most interesting and positive lessons of our co-operative project.

We do not as yet see how the co-operative project can provide the organization as a whole with the basis for long-term sustainability and the self-reliance. But this is not important right now.

4.8 The way forward

As an organization and a movement, we believe that a co-operative project for children needs to be firmly located in a social movement. The need for government support is essential. Our little co-operative initiative needs to link up with and get support from the broader co-operative movement within the country and beyond.

In conclusion, I need to say that the work we as the CRC and the Children's Movement have done over the years falls within the broad range of the politics that Michelle Williams calls "counter-hegemonic politics (i.e., struggling to construct new institutions for civil society initiatives)." Michelle Williams, *The Roots of Participatory Democracy*.

For us, therefore, it is about what we are for rather than what we are opposed to.

5. Summary of Main Discussion Points

The deliberations at this seminar raised the following important points:

- The cooperative solution in education cuts across class lines and wealth distinctions between countries. It is a solution that can be embraced by children from varied backgrounds and from different countries. In this sense the cooperative solution in education assists with building social cohesion and fostering human solidarity.
- The cooperative solution in education is much broader than entrepreneurship education. First, it is values based. Second, it can inform all aspects of the curriculum. Third, it can provide a model to run a school. Fourth, it can provide opportunities for cooperative experience and practice in schools through child run cooperatives.
- The approach to bringing in the cooperative solution into education should involve the state but should be driven from below. The cooperative movement approach like in the UK and social movement initiative in South Africa through the children's movement all demonstrate the importance of this top down and bottom up synergy. Various other social forces in South African civil society can also be brought into champion the cooperative solution in education.
- In the South African context important education policy and legal reform should be championed to bring the cooperative option into education. There is a need to strengthen the existing child movement initiatives and to broaden out into other pilot projects with the Children's Resource Center.
- Transnational linking between South African based cooperative initiatives in education and initiatives like in the UK, Spain, Lesotho, Canada and any other places that have such experiences should be encouraged. The use of new information and communication technologies, particularly the web, should be harnessed to facilitate mutual learning and cooperative-to-cooperative links of education based cooperatives.

