

# COOPERATIVES IN EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL SKETCH

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Cooperators in the cooperative movement consider education as an integral part of the cooperative practice. Cooperative education for them is not only education *about* co-operation, but education *through* participation in the co-operative movement. (Facer, K. Thorpe, J and Shaw, L., 2011).

A study on the educative processes and adult learning experiences of three lead cooperatives in the country--the San Dionisio Credit Cooperative, SorosoroIbaba Development Cooperative and the Lamac Multipurpose Cooperative—revealed the many ways these cooperatives provided social learning opportunities and contributed to transformative learning of their members, leaders and staff. Such findings and the common awareness of the multi-sided benefits of cooperation are compelling reasons why cooperatives as enterprises should be mainstreamed, and cooperativism as field of study should be advocated and promoted especially among the young.

## **Lessons from the Rochdale Pioneers**

For the forebears of cooperativism in Rochdale, knowledge and information were craved for like they were staple food that had to be available to all like tea and coffee. The Rochdale Experience was not just about pooling of capital and modeling the most successful business operations of the modern-day cooperative era. The Pioneers were the first to dedicate 25% of its net surplus to education. They had the biggest library collection in Manchester in 1876 and paid a fulltime librarian. In 1897, the Pioneers in three localities alone maintained 376 reading rooms and its libraries had an aggregate collection of 350,000 volumes including thousands of original works of Robert Owen.

Most of the original members of the Rochdale Pioneers were with the first cooperative community established by Owen in New Lanark. Education and character formation for both children and adults were central to Owen's cooperative community. His New Lanark Cooperative

Village was opened to public tours for people to learn from his experiment. Reports have it that at least 100,000 visitors from all over the world had their *lakbay-aral* in Owen's New Lanark Coop Community in Scotland during the first 20 years of its existence.

### **Cooperative Education's Changing Concerns**

Together with the growth and diversification of the business concerns and services of cooperatives in the 1900s, educative events and support systems likewise took many forms—putting up schools and newsrooms and libraries, involving as school administrators, holding reading and discussion groups, and coming with periodicals and documentaries. As coop businesses and operations became more sophisticated and expansive and increasingly faced capitalist competition; efficiency and productivity became priority concerns. Training of employees in the workplace was introduced. In more advanced workplace settings such as in the UK, formal education and certifications through examinations were even enforced, from the technical skills to higher level of theoretical knowledge on cooperativism. For example, the Cooperative College of Manchester established in 1919 started developing materials to support coop education in the localities, conducting adult education programs for coop leaders covering social and economic subjects, coming up with curricula for formal training and certification programs, and maintaining the archive of co-op educational materials including the 3,500 original documents of Robert Owen. This model was widely adopted by other countries in Europe, US and in other British colonies in Africa.

In Spain, the neglect of the Franco government resulted to the flourishing of schools run by cooperatives. Led by the Mondragon Cooperative System in the Basque Region that has 47 schools under the system, there is a total of 600 cooperative schools from the pre-school up to university levels employing a total of 20,000 teachers in Spain. The Spanish model include the cooperatives, parents, workers (as in the case of Mondragon) and teachers as co-owners of the schools.

There is a dearth of information or empirical data when it comes to the trend in the cooperatives' educational practices and the cooperatives' involvement in promoting education in the Philippines. The study made by the Cooperative Foundation of the Philippines, Inc. (1987) which made use of the existing data on the status of Philippine cooperatives cites that among the major causes of failure of cooperatives was lack of education and training. Tayko and Santiaguel (2004) on the other hand cited that among the milestones in the cooperative movement are the creation of institutions for education and training of cooperatives. They are the establishment of the Agricultural Credit Cooperative Institute at the University of the Philippines-Los Baños and the designation of the Philippine College of Commerce (now Polytechnic University of the Philippines) as the training center for non-agricultural cooperatives in the country that later became the Institute of Cooperatives.

### **Divergent Directions, Interrelated Streams of Aspirations**

Facer, et.al (2011) pointed out the ambiguity or openness in the understanding even among cooperators of what cooperative education is or what kind of cooperative education should be carried by the cooperatives, the cooperative schools and the curricular programs. The authors attribute such divergence to the kind of historical development the cooperative movements in most countries took which is far from smooth. As in the Philippines, cooperatives in other countries were "used" for varied purposes—those of pure intentions of addressing commonly felt needs and those of conflicting or questionably-motivated motivations of agencies and/or individuals. Cooperatives worldwide were often born out of difficulties and struggles, and within the groups that wanted change were also the varying ideologies and ideas on how to concretely go about cooperativism and the application of the principle of continuing education as "the answers" to the cooperatives' here and now and to their long term future of far-reaching goals.

From the varied development directions of the cooperatives' involvement in education, Facer, et. al. cite the following interrelated aspirations and activities that can be drawn to characterize the rich experiences and to guide the present educational initiatives within the cooperative movement:

- a. Teaching about cooperation was accompanied with a critique of the capitalist forms so that the cooperatives' potentials as alternative mode of economic organization shall be visible.
- b. Training for cooperation went hand in hand with building the cooperative institutions which ensured that there was proper and efficient structural support and adequate competences of individuals that run them.
- c. Learning through cooperative practice meant developing the cooperative identities, that is, providing opportunities to:
  - experience and to benefit from mutuality, equity, and solidarity;
  - develop capacities for self-reliance and self-help.

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