

Education as the life-blood of Co-operation

Lynda Baloché

I used to teach ten-year-olds. One year, on the first day of school, in a bit of over-enthusiastic simplicity, I told my young students "This year, we are really going to work at learning co-operation. Who can tell us what that means?" Greg raised his hand, eager to answer. His answer was not what I had expected or hoped for as he earnestly said, "We are going to do things your way." A minute of follow-up and I knew what he meant. He and his Mom go shopping; she has plans to go one way and he wants to go another. Impatiently she says to him: "Why can't you co-operate with me?" Thus, Greg, his classmates, and I began our journey as we defined co-operation and worked to develop the skills to co-operate - together. As Ian McPherson said in his plenary address: "Education is the life-blood of co-operation." And, as I asked Greg's class long ago: "Who can tell us what that means?"

In this issue, *The Journal of Cooperative Studies* brings you the four plenary papers from *Co-operative Learning and Responsible Citizenship in the 21st Century*, a conference jointly sponsored by the Co-operative College and the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education, and held in Manchester England, in June 2002. Each of these papers, in its own way, describes "what co-operation means" and each examines education as it relates to cooperation. Fortunately, none of the plenary presenters suggest that we need to do co-operation "their way." The purpose of this brief introduction is to examine these papers and to suggest how they might be viewed, and used, together.

Cheryl Turner, in her address *Co-operative Learning, Citizenship and Current Adult Learning Policies*, describes an increasingly diverse citizenship in the UK and Europe; Elizabeth Cohen begins her paper, *Co-operative Learning and the Equitable Classroom in a Multicultural Society*, with a similar description - a description which fits well the populations that have focused her extraordinary body of work of the last 30 years. Both note that the "newcomers" tend to experience considerable struggle - economic, social, and educational. If past patterns are any indicators of the future, these struggles will persist, from generation to generation of families and communities, in a seemingly endless maze of underprivilege. This maze is fed by economic struggle that leaves parents and communities unable to provide stimulating learning environments for themselves and their children, by economic

instabilities that increase stress in homes and communities,¹ and by discrimination, prejudice, and rejection that may actually reduce IQ and the ability to reason analytically while simultaneously increasing aggression.²

Researchers have repeatedly told us that how children are perceived in schools and their communities will effect how and what they learn and that these perceptions are often based on race, social class, perceived ability, and preferred cognitive style. For instance, studies describe upper-middle-class, adolescent white boys who are treated more leniently than lower-class white boys in the same school,³ an all-black kindergarten, where children with "better" clothes and more "standard" speech patterns are given more attention and privileges than their peers;⁴ classes where children with more convergent, linear styles of thinking are preferred and ranked as "better students" than their more divergent, creative peers even though the achievement of both groups is essentially equal.⁵ In such situations, it seems likely that education will be the life-blood of disaffection, anger, and disillusionment.

Cohen has spent her career in careful examination of how the forces of differentiated status and perceptions influence life in classrooms and what can be done about it in daily curricular and instructional practice. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to review this work (and Elizabeth provides some useful references for those readers who want to know more) but it is important to note that it is co-operative learning that is recommended by Cohen and others as preferred pedagogy.⁶ Those of us who have been studying and teaching co-operative learning know that merely putting students into groups and telling them to co-operate is not co-operative learning; we know that such arrangements are more likely to replicate and reinforce the inequities of the larger social structure than to help loosen their grip. Students must be taught to co-operate, students must experience the benefits of co-operation - this is related to the notion of associative intelligence described by Ian McPherson, and students must understand and believe that co-operation is valued and important to their success in the larger culture.

But, is co-operation really valued?

Some would say yes and, indeed, a recent study even indicates that acts of cooperation stimulate pleasure pathways in the brain (not unlike chocolate!).⁷ But, look around. Where is co-operation valued and where is co-operation rewarded? Ian McPherson, in his paper *Encouraging Associative Intelligence: Co-operatives, Shared Learning and Responsible Citizenship*, and Stephen Yeo, in his investigation of the question *What value do Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises in general,*

and the co-operative movement in particular, add to the Citizenship agenda?, describe the co-operative movements in England and Canada. This is fascinating for those of us whose whole idea of co-operatives is a credit union which offers free checking and an easy, long-distance way to manage a paycheck. Some of my more enlightened (and busy) friends have co-operative arrangements with neighbors for "getting the kids" to daycare and soccer practice. But, co-operative enterprise - that's a whole different idea and a very powerful one indeed.

In her plenary address, Cheryl Turner describes a crisis in civic engagement - a crisis in the kind of activity that helps develop associative intelligence and a crisis in activity that looks beyond immediate individual and family benefit towards social good. Putnam, in his book *Bowling Alone*,⁸ describes the same crisis and these descriptions do not provide a resounding affirmative answer to the question "Is co-operation valued?"

So, in these addresses I see three major themes: The powerful potential for the use of co-operative learning in the education of children, the history and potential of the co-operative movement both to better the lives of communities and provide education and experience in associative intelligence, and a concern about a lack of civic engagement, social trust, and connectedness.

First, co-operative learning:⁹ We know so much about how co-operation can positively influence achievement, inter-group relations, and satisfaction with school, teachers, and learning itself. We also know how difficult it is to implement quality co-operative learning - to teach co-operation to students, to educate parents and communities so that they understand that cooperation is valuable, to convince tax payers and funding agencies (in spite of rhetoric such as the US Government's slogan "No Child Left Behind") that all children must be given equitable opportunity. Second, co-operative enterprise:¹⁰ This is a grand idea and, in the United Kingdom, has a strong and proud tradition. But it is not easy. As with co-operative learning, it is necessary to teach the skills of cooperation, to educate communities so that they understand that a co-operative enterprise has value, and to convince financial systems that co-operative enterprise is viable. Third, civic engagement and social trust: As with co-operative learning and co-operative enterprise, it is necessary to teach the skills of co-operation - to develop enough associative intelligence so that people "feel good" about, and are "good at" civic engagement, to educate communities so that they understand that co-operative engagement in civic and social life may actually have positive effects on their physical¹⁰ and psychological health,¹¹ and to educate citizens about the need for interdependence for viability in the ecological age.

There is powerful potential in exploring the supportive connections in these three themes. For instance: parents and communities are more likely to support teachers and schools that use co-operative pedagogies if they experience the benefits of co-operation in their own lives. Children are more likely to believe that learning co-operation is valuable if they see co-operation as a positive and powerful force in their community. Children taught co-operation are more likely to seek out opportunities to co-operate in their communities (poor readers just don't find libraries to be fun places!) because they feel confident in their associative intelligence. Adults involved in co-operative enterprise in their communities are more likely to believe in their own economic efficacy and their power as citizens, thus tending to provide more stimulation and encouragement to their children plus participating more fully in the rights and responsibilities of civic practice.

This seems so obvious and at the same time, it is a challenge. It is a challenge to ourselves - to our commitment, to our energy, to our ability to collaborate; it is also a potential structural challenge to educational systems that serve as sorting machines for future workers, to huge corporations which appear to thrive on disparity of opportunity and compensation, and to the political elite who may prefer a disinterested and uninformed electorate. I do not mean to sound disheartening or disheartened but we should not be naive or blinded by our own good intentions. Force-field theory¹² always reminds us to examine the forces that restrain change as well as honouring those that motivate it.

I have been energised by the Manchester Conference and I hope you find reading these plenary addresses to be stimulating. Unlike the ten-year-old Greg, I think we know what co-operation is - and even if we can't define it, we certainly know when we experience it. I agree with Ian McPherson that education is the life- blood of co-operation. I think we might also say that cooperation is the life-blood of education. In the long run, it will be what can sustain our collective lives.

Lynda Baloche is the Co-President of the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education and is Professor of Education at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, USA. She can be contacted at lbaloche@wcupa.edu.

Notes

- 1 Yeung, W J , Linver, M R , & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2002). How money matters for young children's development: Parental investment and family processes. *Child Development*, 73(6), 1861-1879.

- 2 Baumeister, R, Twenge, J & Nuss, C (2002). Effects of social exclusion on cognitive processes: Anticipated aloneness reduces intelligent thought. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83,(4), 817- 827.
- 3 Chambliss, W (1993). The saints and the roughnecks. In W Fingelman (Ed), *Sociology full circle* (pp. 450-462). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- 4 Rist, R (1971). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 40, 411-451.
- 5 See, for instance: Getzels, J, & Jackson, P (1962). *Creativity and intelligence. Explorations with gifted students*. New York: Wiley. and Westby, E & Dawson, V (1995). Creativity: Asset or burden in the classroom? *Creativity Research Journal*, 8,(1), 1-10.
- 6 See, for instance: Baloche, (1998). *The cooperative classroom: Empowering learning*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. and Banks, J (1993). Multicultural education: Progress and prospects. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 75(1), 22-28.
- 7 Rillings, J, Gutman, D, Zeh, T, Pagnoni, G, Berns, G, & Kilts, C (2002). A neural basis for social cooperation. *Neuron*, 35, 395-405.
- 8 Putnam, R (2000). *Bowling alone*. New York: Simon and Shuster.
- 9 For information about cooperative learning, links to additional sites, the full texts of past newsletters, and all the abstracts from the Manchester conference, please visit the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (IASCE) website at www.iasce.net.
- 10 For information about co-operative enterprises and education for associative intelligence, please visit the website of the Co-operative College at www.co-op.ac.uk.
- 11 Goleman, D (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York: Bantam.
- 12 Lewin, K (1935). *A dynamic theory of personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill. See also Baloche.