



Journal of Co-operative Studies

Free, open learning and teaching portal on co-operatives

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How to cite this article: Hancock, E. (2021). Free, open learning and Teaching portal on co-operatives. *Journal Of Co-operative Studies*, 54(2), 62-63. <https://doi.org/10.61869/QWBY1784>

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<https://www.ukscs.coop/pages/journal-of-co-operative-studies>

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Background

The Cooperative Educators Network (CENET — <https://ed.coop>) is a North American initiative launched in 2018 with financial support from the CHS Foundation — one of the largest agribusiness co-operatives in the United States (see <https://www.chsinc.com/about-chs>), as an online hub to provide educational resources and materials for teaching and learning about co-operatives. The Association of Cooperative Educators (ACE) stewarded the development of this project along with partners, Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO) that specialises in community mobilisation, and the TESA Collective (Toolbox for Education and Social Action).

From 2016 to the launch, over 200 partners and participant organisations across several continents helped to develop this curated space for co-operative education resources; taking part in surveys, interviews and in conversations at conferences to find out how to meet educational needs. The aim was not to 're-invent the wheel' but to bring together existing resources and tools, to extend their reach and impact, and to provide an easily accessible portal for anyone wishing to learn or teach about co-operatives.

Connecting live is still so important to the co-operative system, but the partners wanted to generate an online space that supports education throughout the year, to be accessed conveniently by anyone interested at whatever level of expertise from little to no previous knowledge of co-operatives to areas for co-operative directors; for post-secondary and university educators; worker co-operative start-ups and conversions, and for those wanting to impact public policy around co-operatives. And the collection continues to grow.

Key Partners

ACE (ace.coop) has been in existence since the 1950s to connect educators in Canada, United States, and the Caribbean. ACE promotes co-operative research, develops links between universities and co-operatives, and supports capacity building and strengthening of the co-operative movement by promoting innovative educational responses to social and economic issues. It brings together academics, consultants, community organisers, and co-operators to drive effective co-operative education (Hancock, 2019). Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO) is a collective of educators, researchers, and grassroots activists and amongst other activities publishes educational and organisational resources including the GEO newsletter, now a web-based publication (www.geo.coop). The TESA Collective (tesacollective.com) works with groups and organisations to create and build cause-related tools, games (e.g., Co-opoly — see Birch, 2012), and programmes, including online training and workshops for Cooperation Works! (<https://cooperationworks.coop>) and, in partnership with the Cooperative Fund of New England, the Boston Center for Community Ownership, and The National Community Reinvestment Coalition, developed a programme to start an academy for launching worker-owned co-operatives inside of the Franklin County House of Corrections in Western Massachusetts (TESA Collective, 2016).

How Ed.coop Works

There are several curated learning paths in English, French, and Spanish, designed to help someone self-teach to increase their awareness, knowledge, or skills, or for someone in an educator role to gather materials to use in the teaching of others. The site also offers a “library of libraries” — link to 50+ digital co-operative libraries, a listing of co-operative events, and a blog to showcase new learning resources.

Individuals can embark on a learning path (articles, videos, podcasts, and presentations) suited to their current role or level of knowledge; some are focused on particular topics such as employee on-boarding or agriculture. For example, “Co-op Curious” is the learning path that introduces the co-operative concept and process, so it is a useful place to start, and the free resources include videos ranging from a couple of minutes to introduce an idea or concept, through to webinars of an hour or more, and to kits (facilitator guides and materials) to run half day or full day workshops.

Ed.coop will continue to develop and curate education materials to develop this one stop resource for co-operators and educators, working in co-operation with others, including the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation and members of the Association of Cooperative Educators.

The Author

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Further information

For details on resources, events, and learning paths visit <https://ed.coop/about-ed-coop/>