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Co-operative Learning: The Distinctive Contribution of the Woodcraft Folk

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The Woodcraft Folk was formed in 1925 and from its earliest days it developed close working relationships with the co-operative movement. Societies such as the Royal Arsenal in South London gave financial support to some of the earliest groups that were established. This close relationship has survived to the present day despite various hiccups on the way, including an attempt by the co-operative movement to set up a rival organisation, the Co-operative Youth Movement, in the 1940s and 1950s. This article, whilst noting this close relationship, aims to review the extent to which the Woodcraft Folk has seen co-operation and co-operative learning as an essential component of its educational practices. Reference will be made to the assumed ethos of co-operation throughout its history and how in the 1980s, influenced primarily by external forces from progressive educational movements, co-operation became recognised as a more central element of, not only its ethos, but also its educational practices.

Introduction

Throughout the history of the Woodcraft Folk, co-operation has been a constant theme through its educational programmes, its philosophy, and organisational relationship to the consumer co-operative movement. This article situates a review of the Woodcraft Folk engagement in co-operative learning within broader debates in education around the usage of the term. Whilst co-operation has been central to the organisation's philosophy since its foundation in 1925, the article identifies the 1980s period as marking the beginnings of a significant change within the Woodcraft Folk in how the term was applied in its educational activities. It discusses these changes within the broader context of a growing movement for co-operative learning, particularly in North America and Europe. Finally, it reviews how the Woodcraft Folk International Camp of 2011 could be seen as the culmination of how co-operation has become central to the organisation.

What is Co-operative Learning?

Whilst the term co-operative education has been around for over 200 years, going back to the writings and times of Robert Owen, the concept of co-operative learning has perhaps a more recent history. You can see elements of a distinctive pedagogical approach in a range

of publications and programmes by co-operative educationalists that refer to themes such as mutuality, equity, and justice. But it is only in the last thirty to forty years that the term has become part of educational discourse in response to the challenges of individualistic and competitive based education systems. The emphasis within this educational discourse has been on encompassing a sense of positive interdependence, interaction, recognising individual accountability, and working as a group (Gillies, 2007; Johnson et al., 1994). Within this discourse there is also a recognition that co-operative learning includes a process of socialisation, of learners working together to achieve common goals, and group-based tasks (Gillies et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2000).

Slavin (2015) does bring in some important contextual factors that are relevant to any discussion on co-operative learning. The first is the important role that motivational perspectives bring. The second is social cohesion and the extent to which a group's interactions are influenced by a sense of cohesion. The third is the developmental perspective, where interaction and working together can enhance and deepen understanding of a topic. The fourth is the elaborative perspective where ideas that have been retained are elaborated upon, particularly through peer tutoring. Whilst all these approaches have some validity, they are all focused on improving the quality of learning within a school context. They are also proposed as being relevant across education systems and despite the reference by Slavin (2015) to motivation, they do not appear to be linked to broader social and economic questions about society, nor to addressing the impact of individualistic forces within education. They are seen as techniques that teachers and educators could consider. These approaches to co-operative learning, particularly in North America, could be seen as part of a broader approach to groupwork within formal education (Solomon, 2024).

A broader perspective on co-operative learning can be seen in the work of Bash (2014), commenting on the writings of Gundara and Sharma (2013), who states that co-operative learning could be seen as a device for expanding children's horizons. Bash however raises concerns that co-operative learning can sometimes be seen as no more than a gloss on a process orientated towards pre-determined learning outcomes, a tool for effective classroom management. Bash also notes that in western societies, competition appears to stand out as a characteristic embedded in the lives of children, both as individuals and in their collective existence (Bash, 2014). Gundara and Sharma note that the "role of cooperative learning in educational institutions is to help learners to adapt to a changing world" (Gundara & Sharma, 2013, p. 243). They go on to state that co-operative learning strategies need to deal seriously with the issue of autonomy of learners and constructively engage with the competitive impulses amongst learners.

It is the extent to which co-operative learning is an adaptation of the competitive ethos or whether it is a conscious alternative that perhaps poses some of the biggest challenges to the field. Bash (2014), in commenting on the work of Gundara and Sharma, notes that if a fundamental dimension of co-operative learning is one that is "based on mutual trust" and "a shared vision of learning" (p. 182), this cannot be divorced from a recognition of the tensions and potential conflicts inherent in the diversity of the classroom.

A focus within a lot of the literature has been related to games and it is not therefore surprising that the focus has been on developing more co-operative approaches, particularly within physical education in schools. Fernandez-Rio (2016) refers to three phases: building group cohesion, co-operative learning as the content, and co-operative learning as the framework. His approach recognises that if the educator wishes to move beyond just co-operative games to a framework of co-operative learning, this requires long-term planning and building upon games and forms of group activities.

Much of the discussions around co-operative learning have come from psychological perspectives or in more recent times linking the term to mathematical based games.

Wilkins (2011) in his review of the different forms of co-operative learning identified the following themes:

- As a learning philosophy linked to the ideas of Robert Owen, John Dewey, and Holmes as linked to humanistic and democratic forms of education.
- As a form of experiential learning which is group based and interactive with a process that includes elements of reflection.
- Effective group working.
- Learning in a co-operative group.
- As a distinctive pedagogy.
- Part of a social movement.
- Expression of values and educational beliefs.
- Agent of change.
- Social capital and self-actualisation.

What is evident from the literature referred to above is that co-operative learning is related to developing models of learning, of ways to work together, of techniques to use within the classroom to encourage greater interaction, but not necessarily seeing them as challenging dominant social ideologies. Much of the literature does not directly address the relationship of co-operative learning to challenging dominant social, economic, and ideological norms that emphasise competition, individualism, and neoliberalism. What the literature on co-operative learning also tends to ignore is that co-operative education is not new and has been linked to an international movement for many years.

Consumer Co-operative Movement and Co-operative Learning

Although the consumer co-operative movement emerged as an economic model to challenge the dominant capitalist one, it has since its founding fathers, the Rochdale Pioneers, had a strong educational component. This has been reflected not only in its support of educational programmes but also in promoting co-operative values of responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity (International Co-operative Alliance, 2018).

Co-operation may have been based on a form of social and economic organisation, but through the co-operative movement's broader work, it has also become a vision of how people and communities work together, learn from each other, and aim to secure a more just and equitable world. This has meant that in the UK and in many other countries as well there has been a close linkage between consumer co-operatives and the promotion of education principles which are seen to be different to the dominant economic model of competition and individualism.

Noble and Ross (2020) refer to the importance of considering how we learn, what we learn, where we learn, and how we learn when discussing co-operative learning. They suggest that active learning must be at the heart of the pedagogy which leads to critical thinking and reflective practice. Co-operative learning spaces, they suggest, should be collaborative, solidaristic, and shared (Noble & Ross, 2020). MacPherson (2009) raises similar themes in posing the dichotomy between individualism and communitarianism and suggests that key is the ways in which individual development takes places within co-operative communities. His work is however primarily focused on relevance of the debates to co-operatives in general rather than learning as such.

Woodin (2014) has noted that co-operative education historically has been built upon the twin themes of developing a “co-operative character” and contribution to civic and educational life. He went on to state that co-operative education has been much more than individual improvement and acquisition of knowledge, and includes the development of “collective awareness and social action” (p. 7). An example of this within the formal education system in the UK in recent years has been the co-operative schools model (Woodin, 2014). This means seeing co-operative learning as posing a different approach to education than which is dominant in most societies. This therefore suggests that co-operative learning should be as much about being a pedagogy of learning, an ethos based on some clear values and principles. If co-operative learning is more than just playing a few games, then it has been part of a distinctive educational approach.

Whilst the work of the Woodcraft Folk has been acknowledged in some of the discussions on co-operative education (Woodin, 2014), there has been little discussion of its importance in putting into practice a form of co-operative learning that moves beyond the perspectives outlined by Gillies, Johnson, and Slavin, to one that situates it within broader social and educational debates. This article now turns to how historically the Woodcraft Folk has always promoted a form of co-operative learning, but how in the 1980s this became much more explicit within its educational activities.

The Woodcraft Philosophy

The founder of the Woodcraft Folk, Leslie Paul, in one of his earliest publications for the organisation, stated that the aim was to work for peace and co-operation. This emphasis on co-operation was based on an anti-capitalist ethos and opposition to competitive ethos (Paul, 1938). Paul declared in an article in 1930 that the Woodcraft Folk is avowedly co-operative and for co-operative education, stating that its task is to build a new co-operative commonwealth (Paul, 1930).

In Paul’s *Republic of Children* (Paul, 1938) the reference to co-operation was also seen as being part of a child’s personal and social development. To act in a co-operative manner was seen as being part of how one lived and this was articulated in the way Woodcraft Folk activities, particularly its camps, were organised. Everyone had to play their part in creating a co-operative community.

There was also another side to the Woodcraft Folk’s support for co-operation and that was linked to its social and political philosophy. Paul saw the Woodcraft Folk as a working-class movement and this led to close ties with the consumer co-operative movement. The ethos of the Woodcraft Folk in the inter-war period had a clear socialist and co-operative ethical basis. Much of this was based on a rejection of capitalism. All groups during this period had to sign up to a Charter which included the following: “We ... declare that the welfare of the community can be assured only when the instruments of production are owned by the community” (Paul, 1938, p. 48). The declaration for Pioneer aged children, ten- to thirteen-year-olds, included “to work for world peace and co-operation” (Paul, 1938, p. 57).

Co-operative principles were implied, however, rather than being explicit in the educational activities of Woodcraft Folk in the 1920s and 1930s. Co-operation was emphasised through outdoor activities with camping seen as an ideal co-operative community, with adults and children working together on an equal basis. Both group night activities and camps were highly structured, and this enabled everyone to work together for a common purpose. A symbolic feature of both group nights and camps was, and remains, the circle. Tents at Woodcraft camps have always been organised around circles and group nights always begin and end with a circle. This ensures there is no hierarchy, children are not situated in rows like at school. As Paul wrote, “the circle creates a sense of community by making the camp a unity” (Paul, 1938, p. 173).

Palser (2020), in his review of the politics and pedagogy of the Woodcraft Folk in its first twenty-five years, notes the linkages in ideas between the organisation and those of Robert Owen. The similarities he said were in terms of co-operative communities, especially in the case of the Folk camping. The Folk had elements of a counterculture, of a different lifestyle based on ceremonies, rituals, customs, and songs. There were also linkages in terms of internationalist outlook, progressive educational approaches, and the seeking of social change.

Relationship with the Consumer Co-operative Movement

In the 1920s and 1930s, the consumer co-operative movement had a strong educational ethos. In his *Republic of Children*, Leslie Paul (1938) states that he saw in the co-operative movement the basis of how to organise children on working class lines. This meant ensuring that the movement incorporated cultural and organisational approaches that were less hierarchical and more democratic than many organisations at that time. When Paul established the first ever Woodcraft Folk group in South East London in 1925, he quickly found in the local co-operative society, the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, a willing supporter (Attfield,1981). Gradually as Woodcraft Folk groups emerged around the country, support from local co-operative societies enabled them to purchase camping equipment and cover the costs of hiring halls for weekly meetings. Support from the national body of the co-operative movement came in 1933 with a £10 grant by the Co-operative Union. In 1938, the Co-operative Union set up a committee to create a national co-operative youth organisation with two sections, one for youth, the British Federation of Co-operative Union, and one for children, the Woodcraft Folk (Woodcraft Folk, 1941).

The plans broke down as it became apparent that the Co-operative Union wanted to take over the Woodcraft Folk. The results were a breakdown in relations in the immediate post-war period (Davis, 2000). As a result, for much of the 1940s and 1950s the co-operative movement whilst giving support to the Woodcraft Folk, did so reluctantly. There were also criticisms of the Woodcraft Folk from some members of the co-operative movement for the organisation's more political stance on many issues and the development of its Pioneer links with youth groups in Eastern Europe.

Gradually during the 1950s and 1960s, the relationship between the Folk and the co-operative movement improved. More and more, Woodcraft Folk leaders become involved in co-operative educational work and as co-operators saw through their visits to Woodcraft Folk international camps during this period, the organisation was practising co-operation. The culmination of this change in attitude was the Woodcraft Folk's fiftieth anniversary camp in 1975, which was held in the grounds of the Co-operative College at Stanford Hall near Loughborough in Leicestershire.

Learning About Co-operation as a Body of Knowledge

Whilst the Woodcraft Folk's philosophy continued to mention co-operation, it was not developed as a skill within its educational programmes. There was reference to co-operation within its ceremonies and declarations such as the one for Pioneers (10-13 year olds) including "to work for world peace and co-operation" (Rawson, n.d., p. 11). Co-operation was clearly part of its approach to camping. Instead, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the focus was on learning about co-operative societies, how they were organised, and the national structure of the movement. This can be seen in *The Woodcraft Way* (Woodcraft Folk, 1973), the booklet for leaders of pioneer groups which sees this learning as part of a broader badge of activities on citizenship.

The 1978 edition of the *Woodcraft Folk Leaders Manual* still emphasised co-operation in terms of knowledge about the co-operative movement. There was, however, at least a recognition of the importance of co-operative principles:

> The very word co-operate — which means to work together — sums up the essential characteristics of all Woodcraft activities. We teach our children that 'no man is an island sufficient of itself', that individuals are inter-dependent and that this must apply to nations as well as to individuals if life on this earth is to survive. (Woodcraft Folk,1978, p. 17)

The discussion on co-operation goes on to state that co-operative principles have always been relevant to the Folk and that its aim is to "educate young people for cooperative living" (Woodcraft Folk,1978, p. 17).

Emergence of Co-operative Learning as a Distinctive Educational Approach

By the late 1970s, the impact of societal changes in North America and parts of Europe were beginning to have an impact within education. The emergence of a counterculture in the late 1960s led to a rise of movements such as de-schooling and challenges to the dominance of an individualistic, competitive, and exam orientated education system. A series of academic studies in North America in the early 1980s showed the effects of co-operative versus competitive goal structures on pupils' learning. Evidence showed "that cooperation was more effective than interpersonal competition and individualistic efforts; cooperation with intergroup competition was also superior to interpersonal competition and individualistic efforts" (Gillies, 2016, p. 39).

Some of these themes were having an impact within the co-operative movement in the UK through the impact of several education and member relations officers in societies and the work of the Co-operative College. There was also the growth of different forms of co-operatives be they in forms of businesses, housing, or ways in which voluntary groups came together. Co-operation and co-operatives became a popular term and was seen to become associated with an alternative to right wing ideological thinking in the 1980s. At the time, Watkins (1986) linked the development of co-operative principles to social progress. The Woodcraft Folk during this period also began to work more closely with the member relations and education officers of co-operative societies, particularly in terms of the role of methodologies of learning. It was this closer alignment that led to several aspects of the co-operative movement giving increased funding to the Woodcraft Folk for a range of projects including one on its history, its work on development education, and in the development of co-operative games discussed below. It was during this period that there was a major expansion in the membership of the Woodcraft Folk with the number of groups almost doubling. This led to a considerable number of new leaders becoming interested and involved in the co-operative movement. In 1988, a meeting of co-operative activists in the Folk identified there were over fifty Folk members who were either on boards of societies or on relevant committees (Woodcraft Folk, 1988).

Games Became the Catalyst for Change

In the 1970s, there was the emergence of a New Games movement which aimed to promote a more co-operative and communal approach to games and play. *The New Games Book* (Fluegelman, 1976) became the catalyst for a new social movement that eventually had a major impact upon the Woodcraft Folk. This movement was inspired by the work of Stewart Brand and the opposition to the Vietnam War in America and to pose different forms of games that were not based on aggression and competition (New Games, n.d.).

The most influential publication for the Woodcraft Folk to come out of this movement was Terry Orlick's book *The Cooperative Sports and Games Book*, published in 1978. Orlick (1978) stated that competition was irrational and is linked to an excessively goal orientated society. He suggested that children nurtured on co-operation, acceptance, and success have a much greater chance of developing strong self-concepts (Orlick, 1978). Orlick was a psychologist and in looking for examples of alternatives to goal orientated societies, he found the play activities of indigenous communities in North America as his inspiration.

Orlick saw the need to reduce the emphasis on winning and losing, the fear of failure, and the promotion of self-esteem. In co-operative based games, Orlick saw that they promote inclusion rather than exclusion, promote problem solving, and foster positive student interactions such as communication, understanding, sharing, and trusting (Orlick, 1990).

Throughout the 1980s, a series of publications appeared which developed this thinking including Pax Christi's *Winners All* (McMullan, 1980) and Weinstein and Goodman's (1980) *Playfair*. Weinstein and Goodman (1980) stated that competition can lead to exclusion, it disconnects people, and that people need to feel and be part of a group and this was the first step in active participation. Perhaps the most influential of all was Mildred Masheder's (1997) *Let's Co-operate* (originally published in1986). Masheder's book, although aimed at practitioners, is more than just a volume listing a series of games. It links the games to broader social skills such as developing a positive sense of oneself, creativity, communication, getting on with others, and peaceful conflict solving. Within these themes are examples of activities that deal with areas such as fairness and justice, positive gender roles, anti-racist attitudes, and love of nature.

Many leaders in the Woodcraft Folk welcomed these new publications. Masheder's (1997) book, for example, became recommended as part of a pack for new leaders. It became the focus of numerous leader training sessions in the 1980s and provided leaders with a clear philosophical and educational basis to group night and camping activities through play.

The culmination of these developments on the Folk was the publication in 1989 of its own co-operative games book, *Games Games Games*, which was funded by the co-operative movement (Dewar et al., 1989).

A symbol of this interest in co-operative games was the popularity of parachute games. First outlined in the New Games publications, the use of old parachutes became a focus for circle-based games. Woodcraft Folk groups throughout the country started to get their hands on old parachutes and they became very popular not only for group nights but camps. An article in the Woodcraft Folk's *Focus* magazine, reproduced from a Canadian pamphlet demonstrated the value of parachute games in promoting a sense of co-operation: "The very dynamic of moving the parachute means that co-operation must be the goal for the group and a parachute reinforces this idea by being demonstrably more fun when everyone cooperates" (Olsen, 1986, p. 3).

The focus on co-operative games reflected the interest in society more generally from progressively minded families who were seeking alternatives for their children to the dominant competitive nature of other youth organisations or what was happening in schools. A leader in Leicester in 1984 noted how by promoting "an alternative to competition and strife", she was able to secure support from several local parents to start a group in the city (Craven-Griffiths,1984, p. 4). She noted that one of the successful early activities of the group was co-operative games: "At first some of the children asked who had won after we played the games, but they all seemed to approve of playing games for fun not winners" (Craven-Griffiths,1984, p. 5).

Co-operative values therefore became an important selling point to the Woodcraft Folk in the 1980s and 1990s. Its constitution was revised in 1979 and updated several times in the 1980s to take account of increased reference to areas such as co-operation:

> We believe that to further our aims it is vital to educate young people through the principles of co-operation. To achieve this we will provide a programme which ensures that our members practise co-operation through all the activities in which they participate. (Woodcraft Folk, 1983, p. 1)

This renewed emphasis on co-operation reached its culmination in 1980 when the organisation decided to change its strap line from the "progressive alternative" to "co-operative children's and youth organisation". This change was the result of discussions within the leadership of the time about the dangers of being seen as an 'alternative' when there was a desire, at the time, for it to be seen more as a mainstream organisation and one that worked alongside other youth

organisations. There was also a recognition that the term ‘co-operative’ was now becoming a positive term within society.

Its policy statement on *Education for Social Change* (Woodcraft Folk, 1986) pronounced that the Woodcraft Folk was the children’s and youth organisation for the co-operative movement. This policy statement also re-iterated the growing theme within the organisation of emphasising its distinctiveness in terms of a co-operative outlook:

> The philosophy upon which the Woodcraft Folk was founded is as relevant today as it was in 1925. We live in a society which is increasingly competitive, individualistic and inequitable. We show children that by cooperating together and sharing resources and skills, we can improve ourselves and society. (Woodcraft Folk, 1986, p. 2)

Revisions to educational handbooks for group leaders during this period reflected this change of emphasis. The theme of co-operation was reflected in many aspects of the *Pioneer Leaders Handbook* of 1991 (Woodcraft Folk, 1991) including games, craftwork, music making, and educational projects. This handbook for leaders working for ten-to twelve-year-olds stated that “games should be conducted in a spirit of co-operation and fun” and craftwork should encourage members to “co-operate together” (Woodcraft Folk, 1991, p. 24). A similar handbook for leaders of slightly older children, thirteen to fifteen, the *Venturer Book*, linked co-operation to democracy and rights and responsibilities (Woodcraft Folk, 1993). What was signification about this publication was that it reflected a move away from traditional badge-based activities, such as craftsmen and music making, to more theme-based approaches that included co-operation, democracy, addressing sexism and racism, peace, and health issues (Woodcraft Folk, 1993).

Co-operation as a Skill

The emphasis on co-operative learning within the Woodcraft Folk was part of a broader trend within progressive educational initiatives. The Woodcraft Folk’s own Development Education Project from the 1980s, which had involved working closely with development agencies such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, led to two very influential resource packs, *Getting on with Others* (Woodcraft Folk, 1987a) and *Images* (Woodcraft Folk, 1987b), both of which had strong co-operation themes.

A major progressive educational movement in the 1980s was the world studies movement which aimed to encourage all schools to recognise the need to bring in global themes into all aspects of the curriculum. One of the major outputs of the world studies movement was a publication *World studies 8-13* (Fisher & Hicks, 1985) which made several references to activities that proposed working together and encouraging co-operation. It referred to the need to foster “more just and co-operative human relationships” (Fisher & Hicks, 1985, p. 66). It goes on to suggest that activities should promote co-operation through fostering self-respect, communication, and empathy.

In a later publication by Hicks and Steiner (1989), co-operation is suggested as one of the key concepts within world studies. Here it is discussed as not only working together, but to do so to tackle common problems. They also suggest co-operation is essential to resolve conflicts, however to be effective and rewarding, it requires a high level of communication and sensitivity to others.

A leading figure in this movement was Robin Richardson who saw co-operation as a skill alongside critical thinking, empathy, assertiveness, conflict resolution, and political literacy. Co-operation, he said, is seen as young people being able to appreciate the value of co-operating on shared tasks and be able to work co-operatively within other individuals and groups to achieve a common goal (Richardson, 1976). It was this emphasis on co-operation as a skill that becomes influential in the Woodcraft Folk.

Another volume by Miriam Steiner, *Learning from Experience* (1993), linked co-operation to groupwork and critical thinking. Her work had been very influential with a group of teachers in Manchester, where she was based, who came to see the Woodcraft Folk as an ideal organisation to put these ideas into practice. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, inspired by these approaches, the Woodcraft Folk in Manchester grew from just a couple of groups to more than fifteen.

What was significant about this world studies movement and why it resonated with some Woodcraft Folk leaders, was that it situated co-operative approaches to learning alongside issues such as peace, which were major political issues in the 1980s. Co-operation was much more than learning about the co-operative movement. It was even more than how you organised your camps or your vision of a future society. It was an approach to learning, part of a distinctive pedagogy, but what made the way the Woodcraft Folk engaged with the co-operative principles different from say the New Games movement was the explicit connections between co-operation, peace, and a more just society.

These developments not only had an impact upon the Woodcraft Folk but on the co-operative movement in general, particularly in its work with schools. The Co-operative College's (1987) *Studies Manual for Secondary Schools* in the 1980s, for example, connected this approach to co-operation alongside understanding the movement's organisational structure. It referred to the themes of democracy, equity, trust, mutual interest, and participation, but stated the goal was a common identifiable goal of being co-operatives.

It was from these developments within the Woodcraft Folk, influenced by the world studies movement, the linkages with the peace movement, and the beginnings of changes within co-operative education in general, that led to a bringing together of a range of progressive educational traditions. From the 1990s onwards within the Woodcraft Folk, co-operation was much more of a central theme in its educational practice. It was much more than how to organise camps or learn about the co-operative movement, it was part of a distinctive pedagogical approach.

The culmination of these developments was the 2011 Woodcraft Folk International Camp, called Co Camp.

Co-operation as both a Process and an Organisational Structure: Co Camp 2011

Co Camp was seen as a way of bringing together the increased focus on the theme of co-operation in its educational programme with a closer association with the consumer co-operative movement. Added to this was, for the first time at an international camp, an attempt to consciously organise the event on clearly co-operative based lines.

For the first time, the Woodcraft Folk organised its camp on a co-operative model.

This was done by participants in the camp becoming members of Co Camp which turned the whole camp process into that of running a co-operative. The members elected the board for the camp which included young people as well as leaders. This organisational structure and roles were agreed well in advance of the camp itself. The camp board worked closely with the broader consumer co-operative movement and there was close involvement from representatives from the Co-operative College.

In addition to these structures, the camp included a range of educational activities on the theme of co-operation, including how to set up a co-operative enterprise and discussions with leading people from the consumer co-operative movement. One successful example was Co-opville, a specially devised simulation game for up to fifty players which introduced the concept of co-operatives and allowed participants to try and run a business on co-operative principles (Woodcraft Folk, 2011).

This example is perhaps the clearest within the practices of the Woodcraft Folk that brings together principles of co-operative learning with those of co-operatives. Running a camp as a co-operative and bringing in the themes of co-operation into the programme of the camp was a considerable achievement and aspects of this approach continued in its Common Ground Camp in 2022.

Conclusion: Co-operative Learning — A Distinctive Pedagogy for Youth Work

This article has outlined how the term ‘co-operation’ evolved within the Woodcraft Folk and how its interpretation mirrored progressive educational traditions. What made the Woodcraft Folk’s approach distinctive in the 1980s and still does today, is the interpretation of co-operative learning which goes beyond working in groups to a whole pedagogical approach and ethos that brings in themes of social justice, peace, and social change. Whilst there continues to be a range of articles and books on co-operative learning, they are dominated by an approach that is about accommodation within dominant educational discourses. The ways in which co-operative learning have been taken within business management and mathematical education as a form of group work suggests that the Woodcraft Folk’s pedagogical approach remains distinctive and closest to some of the ideas espoused in the consumer co-operative and new co-operative movements. To the Woodcraft Folk, co-operation is much more than having links to the co-operative movement, important though this is. It is about a distinctive educational approach that challenges dominant orthodoxies about the value of competition.

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