

NEET Solutions - Using Co-operative Values to Re-engage the Disillusioned and Disaffected Learner

John Holland

Pale, tired face. Much sleep but little rest. Lost, suspicious, frightened and angry. This is how many young people present themselves only a few weeks after leaving full-time education. They are NEET, not in employment, education or training. Not just a statistic that returns to haunt their schools but a real problem for society. Research by the Department for Education shows that up to 15% of long term NEETs die within ten years. The lifetime cost of 16 -18 year old NEETs is estimated at £12 billion according to research at York University (2010).

I have worked as an educator for over thirty years and identify my educational values as being co-operative values. The quest for equality and equity in the learning experience has driven my practice. The ten co-operative values inform all of my lesson plans as quality control. My experience both in schools and as director/practitioner with CLADA (Co-operative Learning and Development Associates) gives me insight into the issue of NEETs.

The current education system has become adulterated. When the National Curriculum was introduced, the main focus soon became testing, with published results. The learning needs of individuals and local communities were sidelined leading to a narrowing of the curriculum and less experimentation with teaching and learning styles. Sir Ken Robinson, a leading thinker on creative education certainly supports this view (Robinson, 2010). Throughout the school system there have never been more inbuilt, systemic opportunities for failure.

NEETs are victims of a poverty of opportunity. Typically they achieve below average examination results; many have missed school time through truancy or exclusion. In all cases their life plan has fallen through. Their social and co-operative skills quickly diminish. They are exposed and feel rejected at this crucial milestone with the least support they have ever had. Latest government figures show they will be part of over one million unemployed young adults this year.

A forward-looking partnership school in Yorkshire has employed me as the Further Support Programme tutor. One day per week in the autumn term I visit the NEET cohort and begin to engage them. Traditional views of co-operative learning might suggest group work but these one to one sessions, small co-operative groups of two, offer the opportunity to re-build social skills. An open and honest appraisal of their status is made and using co-operative values as a template for action, we begin to form a plan. For example, we meet in a variety of venues, the finding of which leads to a degree of self-help and responsibility. To increase equality in the jobs market, I coach the students in basic literacy and numeracy and an online qualification is possible. I accompany them on interviews for college or jobs. I have seen this solidarity empowering reluctant students to success.

The inequity of access to the internet is now a recognised feature of underachievement. I ensure that we use all the latest technologies in our sessions to give further currency to the programme. Perhaps the most powerful impact of my work is 'caring for others'. This I model relentlessly. A huge part of the work is listening and counselling. The whole scheme is socially responsible, helping individuals, families and the local community.

The success rate has been impressive with 35 out of 36 students 'unNEETed' this year; a modest investment for a huge effect on young people's futures and the wider community. We are developing a 'pre-NEET' course for those identified as at risk and still at school. I hope to coach the staff involved in developing more co-operative, inclusive teaching methods - the students could plan their futures together and support each other.

The methodology is content-free and could be used throughout schools. I have used the same NEET methodologies with A level students, headteachers and business managers all to great success.

The co-operative pioneers refused to accept adulterated goods and services. Their principled response became the model for a worldwide movement. NEETs need to re-engage with a

society that has let them down and I believe the same co-operative values can provide a solid framework on which to rebuild their aspirations.

The Author

John Holland became an active, founding director of CLADA (Co-operative Learning and Development Associates) after thirty years in the state education system. He is also a consultant educator with particular interest in the disaffected learner and teacher. He spends his time equally on empowering young people and coaching teachers in developing co-operative, inclusive curricula. He is currently involved in innovative projects addressing NEETs, under-achieving boys, teaching staff development and citizenship. John advocates co-operative methodologies and learning styles throughout the educational system.

References

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