
Co-operation: the antidote to isolated misery

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ABSTRACT This is a case study demonstrating the impact the co-operative movement has had on one co-operative school in south-west England. Lipson Co-operative Academy in Plymouth was one of the first schools to convert to become a co-operative school in 2009. The article has been co-written by members of the Academy and focuses on three transformational aspects of co-operative education: co-operative learning; co-operative professional development; and the Young Co-operative movement. It is set within a frame of democratic schooling recently described by Fielding and Moss and Woods, but draws upon Deming, Cole and Dewey in its original reasoning. In it we establish how it is possible to swim against the tide of neoliberal individualism and competition to grow a successful school built on democratic principles and co-operation. By persevering on this journey we are committed to our mission of developing the conscience of the next generation.

A Co-operative Ethos

At a recent Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) conference [1] John Cridland, the director general of CBI, said of education in this country:

but at the heart it is about characteristics, values and habits that last a lifetime. Businesses thrive working with people who are determined, optimistic and emotionally intelligent. And, if young people are to develop these characteristics for themselves, we need an education system which focuses on helping young people to be rigorous, rounded and grounded.

What unites young people and staff in the co-operative movement is that pioneering spirit, sense of social responsibility and determination to make this difference. Co-operative schools exist as a result of the 'freedoms' of successive Education Acts that began with the creation of academies and trust schools

(academies were introduced under the 2002 Education Act and new converter academies under the 2010 Education Act). At Lipson Co-operative Academy, we were one of the schools who, through widespread consultation, exercised these powers to free ourselves to transform. Many people ask whether what we describe in this article could have been achieved without conversion. The answer is 'probably'. However, the new legislative framework gives us an opportunity to review our current philosophy and practice and to build a new and better co-operative model together. The purpose of this case study is to shine a light which will show that co-operative schools, predicated on democratic fellowship, can really offer an alternative to the rise of neoliberal individualism and move beyond the rhetoric.

Under the leadership of the present coalition government, we live and work in a culture of blame, criticism, individualism and regulation. What we need in order to be responsible for developing the conscience of the next generation is challenge, compassion, celebration and co-operation. The rise of democracy in education poses a polemic to the dominant neoliberal discourse described by Marginson (2006), Apple and Beane (2007), Fielding and Moss (2011) and Woods (2011). Works by such thinkers as John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Pierre Bourdieu have helped us to identify the problems posed by 'Govian', undemocratic schools that incessantly short-change the needs of students for the exigencies of the market and the attached interests of the ruling elite. Fielding and Moss describe a radical democratic common school and explain that 'in an increasingly fragmented world' the school is the centre of hope to provide for interpersonal and physical space for learning, teaching, constructing identity and making meaning (2011: 69). This, it is proposed, should be culturally relevant, empowering and globally ethical.

Co-operative schools have their roots in the kind of democratic schooling described above. At Lipson we make a commitment to follow the values and principles described in the International Co-operative Alliance, which were redrafted in 1995. The principles define the structures set up in the Academy, and the values are the barometer with which we measure our day-to-day practice. We describe ourselves as 'democratic'. In outlining a democratic school, Beane suggests:

Democracy is a way we choose of being together with others, a way of living, learning, and making our lives better. Like any other community, a democratic community lives by certain norms regarding how people relate to each other and how certain things get done. (2005: 62)

Although Beane gives this definition for a democracy, it is sometimes difficult for others to define what a democratic school is because specifying democracy itself is a challenge. According to Apple and Beane (2007), a democratic school is much like a democratic society, as described above. For Fielding and Moss, a democratic school is a public place, a place of democratic fellowship emphasised Cole (1944) and enhanced by Woods (2011). They insist that arrangements of

participatory democracy are best met if schools provide means and motivation for people to get to know and care for each other. Beane (2005) explains what happens in a democratic school. Firstly, all those who are involved in the school, adults and students alike, participate in the decision making process. Secondly, teachers and students collaborate in the classroom on concerns, goals, and interests of all in the class. Third, in order for this to happen, schools must operate within democratic principles. Another condition that must exist in a democratic school is faith in the group to be able to come up with solutions to problems. The members of the school or society must be willing to seek the common good for all to gain, and everyone must be willing to develop their voices and multiple views must be heard, regardless of people's position in the group. Voice is not only about quality enhancement – it should be about transformation. A democratic school also prizes diversity. For Fielding and Moss (2011), it starts with a profound interest in respect for otherness. Democratic classrooms use diversity as strength within the group. Aligned with these goals, a democratic classroom also demands that powerful questions be asked. This is because students live in a world with real concerns and questions, which need to be addressed. Finally, students in a democratic classroom also will be expected to do in-depth work and research. Students will be asked and will ask powerful questions to help solve real world problems. As students work collaboratively together, which calls for respect, equal contribution and the creation of a classroom community, schools will help educate the whole person, not just the mind.

In defining our co-operative identity we have drawn on research carried out by Woods (2011) and his expression of holistic democracy. His resultant frame offers an opportunity to apply the ideas to see how a co-operative school is interpreting the holistic democracy he envisages. Figure 1 shows the interplay between expressive democracy (vertical plane) and participatory democracy (horizontal plane). It creates greater discourse around values and interconnectedness not competitive individualism. The holistic element reflects the meaning behind democratic schooling, i.e. the values and principles. The power-sharing element is related to the active contribution to creation of the culture by exercising the right to participate and the discretion to express ideas within the parameters of agreed values. Transforming dialogue describes the exploration of views that transcend narrow interests and promotes a democratic discourse that is professionally engaging. It leads ultimately to a deep change on many levels. Well-being originates from social belonging and interconnectedness, resulting in a mediated sense of empowerment and agency. These elements are most powerful and most radical where overlap occurs. This is the essence of democratic (and co-operative) education. So, democracy here is about equal participation in decisions that creates meaning by aggregating different perspectives and results in new understanding that can be tested against the holistic meaning. Added to the diagram are examples of our interpretational structures.

Our aim during the last three years has been to develop our understanding of democratic education: to interpret the co-operative values and principles, and then to put systems in place to embed them. Primarily our success has been in engaging staff, governors, students and parents in helping us to ensure these values and principles really do make a difference. It is democratic approaches that make the difference and this is exemplified in this article. There are some strong headline figures related to progress and examination performance we could discuss, but not everything is so easily measured. What has been achieved has therefore been captured here in narrative form. The rest is in the public domain.

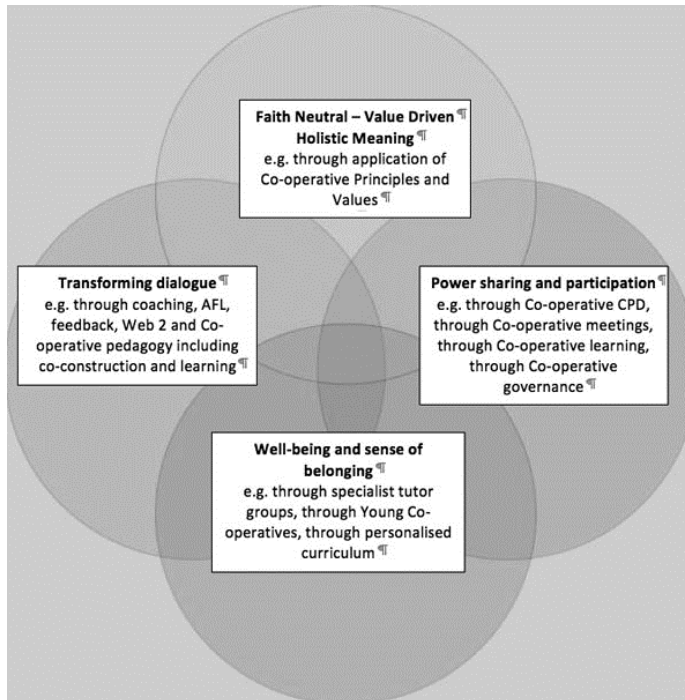


Figure 1. Holistic democracy. Based on Woods, 2011.

The radical change needed to lead this approach cannot be achieved overnight or easily, given the external pressures, which should not be under-estimated. Over the last few years we have begun to define our co-operative academy as one which has not just a single co-operative dimension to its learning, curriculum or governance structure, but one which reflects co-operative values in its whole ethos. Our co-operative ethos will be visible, to a greater or lesser extent through:

- Co-operative Governance and Membership
- Co-operative Pedagogy (teaching and learning)

- Co-operative Curriculum
- Co-operative Professional Development of teachers and staff
- Community Engagement.

We believe we need a system that prepares all school leavers for the world of global competition they will face. We must set high, fixed standards that we expect all children to attain and then work back to determine what rate of progress will be needed to get them there. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) have shown that, on average, a child whose parental earnings are in the bottom 20% will enter primary school 15 months behind their more affluent peers. That child needs to make more progress each year to reach the same point. This is the Lipson Co-operative challenge. We must believe that every child can achieve the level of academic success required to open opportunities for further or higher education.

This is not as naive as it sounds: high expectations matter. Research by Dweck (2006) shows that academic self-concept has a significant and lasting impact on attainment. In short, a child's belief in their own success – and an awareness that that success is based on effort and learning from mistakes, rather than inherent ability – becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. We believe this is best achieved through co-operative education. By:

- Developing high expectations – both for academic success and behaviour that supports learning.
- Developing a clear set of values and norms which every member of the school community must espouse and uphold.
- Achieving high levels of consistency in co-operative pedagogy – classroom routines and behaviour policies are apparent throughout the College, and are maintained by all staff.
- Rewarding effort as well as achievement. Resilience is developed and celebrated.
- Systematically cultivating aspiration through co-operation and emulation so that all children are able to explore the possibilities available to them.

Below a student describes how this commitment to the values and principles has impacted on the experience of the young people in the College.

Being Part of a Co-operative School Described by Year 12 Student, Claudia Marshall

Being a member of the student council in a co-operative school has given me the opportunity to see students establishing the co-operative values and become confident with them through the work we do at Lipson. Robert Owen also encouraged dialogue, honesty and openness. We achieve this through the student council. Using a model of emulation, we have working groups that involve staff and students, looking at a travel plan for the city, activities for young people in the area, further recycling schemes within the Academy, raising

awareness about the co-operative movement and our upcoming summer celebration. As chair of the student council, I regularly run consultations and sessions with small groups of tutor group representatives on what students think of the co-operative values. This really gives me an insight into the forward-thinking attitude and passion that many students show to being proud of such a wonderful approach our school has adopted. When transferring to Lipson from primary schools many of the younger students are unaware of the difference that the co-operative movement has made. However, some of the older students who have experienced school life minus the co-operative movement can specify the differences that the underpinning values and principles can really make to the general attitude and co-operation of young people within the Academy. Young co-operatives that work together, managing themselves ethically and democratically is something that would not have happened without the identity and awareness of the co-operative movement being put in place.

Many people ask me what the co-operative movement is about and its values that have made a difference, when most schools encourage equality, openness and caring for others – they are the basic rules to abide by in a school, so why is Lipson so different? My response to this is that in Lipson, having them discussed, debated, written down and implemented makes the real difference. During morning tutor group sessions, every fortnight, students have the opportunity to explore a value in more depth, taking part in activities and group discussions on the meaning and why it is so important to the progress of our work and the importance it makes to our educational experience. Having the values there, always reminds us of the importance that they do make, and the encouragement by teachers and members of staff is fantastic and inspiring which reflects on the attitudes of the students. If your teacher is passionate about something then it comes across a great deal and, in my opinion, contributes to a healthy student–teacher relationship. We are determined for everyone at Lipson to have the best education and opportunities – we do it together. We describe the co-operative values like this:

Solidarity: We sink or swim together.

Democracy: We are a community that listens to one another, where everyone has the chance to have a say.

Self-responsibility: We consider the consequences of our actions and the legacy that we leave behind.

Equality: The College is open to all. Everyone is encouraged to participate fully in the curriculum.

Equity: We ensure fairness. We are expected to participate, achieve our potential and ensure we support others. We accept that sometimes some people need more help than others.

Self-help: Through helping others you help yourself – we learn to be independent and interdependent learners and develop a positive approach to challenges.

Honesty and openness: We are honest and open about what we do and the way we do it. We don't lie and when we make a mistake we work together to put it right.

Social responsibility: We encourage people to take responsibility for their own community, and work together to improve it. We face challenges together.

Caring for others: We look after one another and we help each other reach our goals. We care for others when they are struggling and help them to remain determined at what they do.

The co-operative movement (through the support of the Co-operative College) in general has given many students in the school the opportunity to set up their own young co-operative businesses and social enterprises which allows them to showcase the values through something that they are passionate about. Young co-operatives that work together are something that would not have happened without the identity and awareness of the co-operative movement. From this I have seen the school transform itself from how it was before, with students showing an obvious pride in the young co-operative group they may be a part of. This has also given students events, competitions, and a real identity to be proud of, and valued life-skills in business and co-operative management to take away from school in this competitive world.

Overall, the co-operative movement in our school has given something extra for people to showcase, further opportunities for working in the community and with feeder primary schools. It has provided the school with something extra students can learn about and be a part of. It has given us an insight into values that are fair, understandable and ethical: moralities students are proud to follow. As the first co-operative secondary school in Plymouth, students can feel unique to be part of such a large community of co-operatives all around the world. It seemed almost like a natural step for Lipson to take in becoming co-operative, and I have never had any doubts that Lipson students would take full advantage of that and inspire and be inspired by other co-operatives, young co-operatives, and the concept of being part of a co-operative community.

My role as a Deputy Member of the Youth Parliament helps me in general with understanding and positively demonstrates that co-operative values are not just around school, but also in other work with young people that I do. It has given me a wider range of knowledge on leadership skills and co-operation when working as a group, and I have generally become more confident in myself when understanding the importance of my and other students' role within the Co-operative Trust. The opportunities that being part of a co-operative school has given me has been so amazing, I cannot begin to think how not making the change would have made a significant impact on my learning, attitude to school, relationships with teachers, and most of all, the pride that I have in my school and what it has become.

In short, as a co-operative, our motto is: we 'live together—learn together—look after each other—and leave a legacy'.

Developing 'Staff Voice' through Co-operation

Staff voice is an important concept at Lipson. It is as important as student voice and parent voice in helping to develop alignment and resonance throughout the College. Through working co-operatively in the school improvement groups (SIGs), we turn innovation to confidence, and confidence to performance. SIGs allow teachers to research and trial new co-operative pedagogies and solutions to seemingly intransigent barriers to learning. 'SIGlets' are sub-sets of these based on W.E. Deming's PDSA cycles (Plan, Do, Study, Act). It is highly collegiate; something that Stoll et al (2003) suggest is one of the most fruitful strategies for fostering teacher development. It takes professional learning further than reflection and beyond dependence from outside experts to a place where teachers develop new ideas together. Over the last few years, we have seen a rise in standards of learning for staff and students, and higher aspirations. The co-operative values have helped us to build social capital and knowledge capital throughout our school improvement groups, and as a consequence we have more 'grade 1' teaching and learning than ever before. We also have more collaboration than ever before. Adults in the Academy work alongside each other, no matter what their role might be. It is commonplace for teachers to run training for other teachers (over half the staff have done this), and it is not uncommon for support staff to do this for teachers.

We have successfully embraced a commonality of perception; so far have we come, in such a short space of time, that we have exhausted the field of experts from outside to help us develop a co-operative pedagogy. The outcome of the way the SIGs work is that we have no one in isolated misery. Rather, by working together, being creative together, and learning from each other, we have developed a sense of solidarity through openness and honesty. Outcomes from this practice include the number of post-graduate qualifications undertaken by the teachers and support staff. A total of 48% now have M-level qualifications, and two teachers are working towards D-level through the research programme in the Academy. This provides excellent feedback in terms of evaluation of our co-operative pedagogy, and has had an impact on empowering other members of support staff to improve and extend their qualifications. We have improved and sustained the motivation for learning amongst our staff.

The co-operative values have played a critical part of the development of the SIGs. These values have driven a high degree of effort and perseverance to be productive in the developments seen in learning across the Academy. The co-operative values are fundamentally about excellence and quality. This is why they are so important in the life of the SIG. However, in extending democratic fellowship at teacher level, it was the use of 'My Big Campus', a cloud based virtual learning environment, that best complemented the work of the SIGs, rather than membership through the Co-operative Forum. The use of Web 2 'Cloud based' technology suddenly led to a profusion of feedback, complaints and collaborative problem-solving through 'Facebook' style threads. Where some staff were still reticent to raise issues verbally, once given full flight in the

virtual world, we had a complete range of opinions. What is interesting is as the debates continued, better moderated solutions evolved. My Big Campus also successfully merges staff voice with student voice and Pandora's box has now been opened.

One of the major impacts of fully adopting co-operative values has been the move away from individual teacher responsibility, where teachers were judged on the external examination results of their 'own' classes, to collective responsibility held by the entire faculty and based on a good knowledge of individual students and their needs. This dramatic change of focus was implemented to eradicate the fear inherent in the individual teacher, but it also meant that the teams were drawn closer together for the good of all students. Students were grouped according to individual need and flexibility became inbuilt into the system.

The end result has been departments where the norm is collaborative working practices: use of carousel teaching, collective planning, high quality professional development and shared planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. In addition, W.E. Deming principles have been adopted to eliminate fear and to encourage success. This opportunity to show leadership skills is vital in building sustainability where leadership potential is identified and fostered in a safe environment. There is no fear of trying new ideas as long as it is within the framework of calculated risks.

We believe that teachers take pride in working in a co-operative school, where teamwork is naturally the order of the day. In this co-operative school, teachers should be free from the fear of the appraisal system based purely on performance management, judgement, or Ofsted ranking. In this co-operative school, appraisal is based on intrinsic motivation, lifelong learning and continuing professional development. It is a developmental and supportive model.

We believe that traditional methods of performance appraisal potentially destroy teamwork and co-operation. We do not want to put teachers in a position whereby they must choose what is good for their own 'rating' or what is of the most benefit to the department or Academy. In looking at core departments such as English, for example, teachers monitor, review, evaluate, moderate and decide on intervention strategies for cohorts of students as a whole team. This often means transactional decisions whereby students or teachers change groups to maximise a student's chances of success. Within such a system, who decides which individual teacher takes the credit or even worse 'the blame'? Co-operation at team level leads to a rich dialogue about what is best. Co-operation within this appraisal system is based on rich one-on-one dialogue, and the co-operative values of openness, honesty, equity, equality and solidarity.

Co-operative Professional Development through the Eyes of NQT, Jennifer Hayward

Professional development at Lipson is very different from experiences I have had at other schools. There are not only many more opportunities to take part and run CPD (co-operative professional development), but there is an emphasis on co-operation. It is a values-based approach that is centred on self-help, self-responsibility, democracy and solidarity. The collaboration that takes part between colleagues and the amount of M-level research that is taking part at any one time in college feeds directly into the development of CPD. It would not work so successfully without these two key components.

As an NQT I have not only been to CPD sessions, but I have had the opportunity to run faculty, as well as whole school, CPD sessions. At Lipson this is not the exception, but the norm. I joined the learning school improvement group (Lipson Learning Co-operative) in the autumn term, which gave me the opportunity to share and shape ideas with colleagues who had interests in developing similar areas of teaching and learning as myself. This provided me with the platform required to push myself to develop strategies and techniques to promote independence in learners. This opportunity had a very significant impact on my practice. I not only met regularly with colleagues to share ideas, but I was driven to develop strategies that would promote independence in learners, so that these could be fed back to the learning SIG. Collaboration within the science department led me to share a strategy that I developed with a colleague during faculty CPD. This time within faculty has helped me to share ideas and develop other people's ideas into my practice. The cycle of research, collaboration, sharing and development that comes naturally at Lipson is what pushes my colleague's practice and myself forward. This provides challenge to learners helping them to progress and achieve. It is an environment where colleagues learn beside each other, feel free to share ideas and where learners feedback ideas to teachers, enabling them to reflect and move their practice forward. This true collaboration is not only co-operative in the strictest sense of the word, but it is what value driven teaching and learning is all about. The power is not in any one person's domain, but rather shared in a way that provides everyone with the opportunity to truly progress and transform his or her practice in a supportive way.

I have also been given the opportunity to complete my PGDip research this year, the topic of which was developed from discussions that took place in the learning SIG. I am researching how inquiry-based teaching methods can be used to promote independence in learners. Completing this in my NQT year has encouraged me to continue to develop as a teacher and discover areas of teaching and learning that I am truly passionate about. The reflective nature of a research project has helped me to highlight areas I need to develop as a teacher. It has made me realise that I can deliver skills-based learning to students in a way that enables them to cover the content they are required to, at their own pace whilst improving rates of progress. This is invaluable to me as a teacher and I value the possibilities co-operative professional development offers me; to

share with others, rather than work alone, in a reciprocally challenging environment that benefits everyone. The co-operative professional development, in all of its forms at Lipson, has provided me with opportunities I do not feel that I would have had at other schools. I feel that I have developed very quickly in a relatively short period of time and I would not have been able to do this without the collaboration of staff and students alike. Being given the opportunity to deliver CPD to colleagues, with colleagues, has made me feel valued as a member of a team. The feedback and development this triggers helps all teachers to develop together. From this I derive a sense of well-being and purpose.

A Co-operative Pedagogy Underpinned by Values-Based Teaching

Democratic fellowship through dialogic learning enhances the collective understanding about the aspirations of the College. It offers a basis for practical decision making, creating a sense of purpose and, in a holistic sense, it impacts greatly on the self-esteem and self-responsibility of its members. It enables a secular school to develop a value-driven hidden curriculum of outstanding SMSC.[2]

A culture of co-construction at Lipson is built on the principle of mutuality with an expectation that everyone has a stake in the College. If everyone has a stake then everyone should have a say in the direction we take and this guiding principle is leading to greater democratic fellowship. Teachers, students and their families are partners in learning rather than providers and consumers of learning. Despite being inspected in the first week of the highly publicised 'newer tougher framework', and facing the challenge of being an inner city school in a highly selective unitary authority, Ofsted concluded:

The happy family atmosphere at the college, where students say they are listened to, means that no-one is left out and everyone is known well as an individual. Students are proud to be part of the college community, say that they always feel safe and that teachers really help them to learn.

The principles of co-operative learning implemented by teachers mean that students work together very effectively in groups and are exceptionally tolerant of one another.

Guild councils and Co-operative Trust members are consulted regularly to elicit student opinions about the quality of teaching and provision, thus developing a good understanding of the democratic process. This system forms an effective conduit for exchange of views between senior managers and students. (Office for Standards in Education, 2012)

They would reason that a dialogic approach in our case – a pedagogy of listening based on the teaching of W.E. Deming – implies a multifaceted

engagement between adults and young people. As we are finding when applied to the education sector, co-operation works.

Countries such as Finland have achieved great results by concentrating system wide leadership on developing equity. Dr Sahlberg explained to a Parliamentary briefing in 2012 that Finland's path was light-years away from the one taken by politicians in England focused on improving the managerial, standardised approach of 'Barberism'. As with our success based on co-operation, he explained that Finland did not set out to become a top-performing country in education. Rather, they addressed the challenges of an inadequate system to make it more equitable. Finland also performs well on a far wider range of societal indicators, for example happiness, economic success and innovation. This should be borne in mind when focusing on the education success, which should not be seen in isolation.

Teachers at Lipson are developing personal mastery of both co-operative learning and assessment for learning. If teachers apply co-operative group learning structures then the academic performance of the whole class will increase. According to the Hattie barometer of influence, co-operative learning increases performance by 0.3 to 0.7 of a GCSE grade (2011). Mastery of this means fewer children left behind, fewer learners disengaged, and fewer left in isolated misery. Co-operative classrooms are based on high challenge and engagement. As McWilliam (2010) explains:

Engagement is a process that involves the learner in a journey towards interaction with their environment including adults, peers, ideas, materials and concepts. Meaningful engagement is when sustained learning occurs.

At Lipson we ensure active participation and engagement in the learning process because it is this that leads to a positive impact on emotional health. However, we have learned from past errors that building self-esteem, whilst important, is not by itself enough. Students get their ultimate reward from rigorous teaching and learning, not therapy and kindness.

We nurture values based on respect for self and others, so that we can learn together. We value co-operation because we achieve more together than we do separately. At the heart of this process, learning together as teachers or in the classroom as students, is dialogical learning related to rich authentic tasks. However, there are 'threats' as teachers need to learn a different role. If they are less in control of the knowledge they must be prepared to transform learning and be prepared to meddle more with thinking. Through more in-depth questioning in a whole class pedagogical approach, teachers may sometimes feel that they are losing control of the discourse and try to do the thinking for the students. There is conflict in freedom to discuss and there are diversions. It is sometimes difficult to know when to intervene to make thinking more rigorous and intellectually challenging. Here the structure of co-operative learning helps. This is especially true where children try to dominate – the co-operative

solution may be a way of achieving more of the democratic ideal that Dewey envisaged.

For us, dialogic learning is:

- *Scaffolded*: dialogue uncovers thinking and interventions are therefore appropriate and challenging.
- *Co-operative*: with teachers and students addressing learning tasks together (predominantly in heterogeneous groups of four).
- *Reciprocal*: teachers and students listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints. This provides a strong framework for assessment for learning.
- *Supportive*: students articulate ideas freely, without fear or embarrassment, helping each other to reach common understanding.
- *Cumulative*: teachers and students build on their own and each other's ideas and change them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry.
- *Purposeful*: teachers plan and steer classroom talk with specific educational objectives in mind.

Dedicated improvement time is fundamental in the co-operative classroom. Feedback provides encouragement, raises self-esteem and evaluates students' strengths and weaknesses. Accuracy and authenticity enables students to see the next step and includes effective and regular diagnosis of individual student learning based on written work in portfolios and examination (module) reports so that teachers can give accurate and timely feedback to students (written and oral) and tailor-made learning activities for individuals and small groups (needing effective and flexible grouping for purpose). At Lipson we are also careful to distinguish between work and learning. Departments have systems in place that enable students to have draft work (e.g. in exercise books) or work that shows their thinking process or skill development. They also have final pieces of assessed work in portfolios.

Peer assessment is a key part of co-operative learning. Students are thus taught to assess their own progress accurately and relate this to success criteria. They talk to and learn from each other as well as reflect on their own progress in co-operative classrooms.

Activities are carefully structured to enable the four conditions of co-operative learning – the PIES (Positive Interdependence; Individual Accountability; Equal Participation; and Simultaneous Interaction). In both co-operative classrooms and tutor bases each student learns to practice their 'voice'. Student voice is therefore a living messy entity at Lipson and cannot simply be pigeonholed into a series of councils and barometer groups. This once again gets to the heart of Deming's constant feedback loops in an inevitably flattened hierarchy.

Impact of Co-operation in the Words of Year 11 Student, Hannah Wills

The change from 'community college' to a co-operative academy was a natural step for Lipson to take. The co-operative values and principles are what our Lipson family is all about. We care for each other, we live together, we learn together and we want to leave a positive legacy. When Robert Owen in 1800 set out to create a co-operative community in New Lanark he introduced an education system that is used in schools across the Western world today. Indeed, the Rochdale Pioneers were so inspired by Robert Owen that they set up the first successful co-operative, and we are proud to be amongst over 1 billion members worldwide today.

When Robert Owen became owner of New Lanark Mill he began to educate the children of the workers in the mill. He banned physical punishment (within his mill, but also campaigned against it as a whole) and stopped the working of children 10 years or under, which for the time was revolutionary as working-class children were expected to be working as this removed any tendencies for developing bad habits. He also provided all children with a good education and improved housing conditions of all his employees. He encouraged social responsibility, and provided infant education (which was essentially a nursery for the younger children of the female workers) – he is now regarded as one of the founders of infant education in Britain. Robert Owen provided health care and a sickness fund which meant that if his workers were ill they could get better and get working again. He believed that people worked better when they work for each other – an ethos that is now reflected within our own school.

Robert Owen required his teachers to be friendly and polite to pupils that created a mutual relationship between the taught and the teacher. This is much like the Lipson family which also enhances one of the co-operative values within the school, encouraging solidarity and working together to reach a common goal. If pupils and teachers work together they cannot only reach and often exceed their expected grades, they can also learn from each other and reach their aspirations. The values unite us in what we do and how we work, not only with each other, but with people from outside of the College, as we take social responsibility and caring for others very seriously. Owen encouraged having a consultation between the teachers and the taught this opens the floor to any queries or question that the pupils may have (Claeyes & Owen, 1991) which is similar to our practice within student voice. This is exactly how life is like at Lipson – we are all important, we are all encouraged to be the best we can be, and we are all conscious of the legacy that we leave behind.

Robert Owen asked his staff to ensure that 'Questions to be always answered in a kind rational manner' (Claeyes & Owen, 1991), which Lipson now recreates by allowing as many resources to be available as possible. He also wanted learning to be enjoyable so the children did not dread coming to lessons. However, now being in the twenty-first century where learning is, to some, more of a hindrance than a help, inventions such as the X-Box and

Facebook can deter from learning goals. Lipson tries to amend this through giving pupils a range of options of what they want to learn and help them achieve what they want to be. Which again is also an example of solidarity and also self-help.

Robert Owen felt as shown by his principles in his school that all children are important no matter what class they are as they make society more sustainable. This statement is practically Lipson's ethos that they try to promote to people and potential students wanting to enter this school. Under the current government this is being lost, so the current generations and the future generations must work together to keep the memory and work of Robert Owen alive – it is co-operative trust schools and co-operative academies that can achieve this.

Ethical Futures: being part of the Young Co-operative movement

At Lipson every student is a member of a specialist Guild (or house). The tutor groups are mixed age and ability and students meet every morning to engage in activities that they are talented at or have a special interest in. Some of the tutor groups draw on their specialisms to extend community responsibility or to set up social enterprises and ethical businesses. Co-operation has been described by Mervyn Wilson, Principal of the Co-operative College, as 'putting community back into community schools' because there is far more discussion and consultation with members having a greater sense of buy in. The Young Co-operative movement has the potential to achieve this.

Moving beyond traditional student voice, leading learning or enterprise through the Young Co-operative movement is student leadership at its pinnacle. Planning for student leadership at this level exploits, builds on and enhances the quality dialogue developed in co-operative learning. Rossi (2006) cites Nystrand et al (1998) in explaining that 90% of the teaching they observed at secondary level in over 100 classes involved no discussion at all. And often what they did see was short lived and therefore not deep involving thought and construction. Students need, according to Rossi, not just thoughtful questions to discuss, but they need to know the rules and expectations for participating in discourse. Dewey (1915) explains that democracy is not limited to government, but actually a 'mode of associated living, of conjoined communicated experience' (cited in Rossi, 2006, p. 112). Schools are ideal places to conduct this interaction and this is what we hope to achieve through engaging in the Young Co-operative movement. For Dewey, preparing students to use their voice responsibly and discuss issues that arise from community problems lies at the heart of democracy and the democratic ideal.

Being Part of a Young Co-operative Group: the Co-operative Big Band by Year 12 student, Tristan Horrell

All young co-operative groups are underpinned by the values and principles of the International Co-operative Alliance. Being a co-operative, the Big Band has been structured so that its members can make choices in how the band is run, therefore creating a democracy. This has meant that everyone within the band is seen as an equal, which has allowed me to get directly involved within the band. This can be about deciding whether we take on a gig, about any fees that may be charged if appropriate or new music that should be added to our repertoire. As a result of this equality my confidence has been built up so that I now feel comfortable to express my opinion about taking on new music and accepting gigs.

The Co-operative Big Band has allowed me to get experience in running a commercial enterprise as the band has progressed into a business. The production of our live album has meant that members have able to get involved in selling the CDs at some of our gigs and within the school. Some of our members have also been involved in running our website; this includes keeping it up to date with a list of upcoming gigs and information about the band. They have also been managing our Facebook page so that our members have information about rehearsal times and new gigs.

The musicality of the Co-operative Big Band has meant that a series of networks have been developed between various organisations. This has allowed the academic gap between grammar or private schools and state comprehensive schools to be bridged. As a result the band has played for Kelly College in their Preparatory School Summer Ball and their Staff Christmas Ball. Our connections with the music industry have led to us playing on Plymouth Hoe for the start of the America's Cup. This was an excellent way of showing how the band has advanced in its musical ability and is now being treated as a professional organisation. The exposure to the musical profession has meant that the band has been taken beyond the school context. This has resulted in professional musicians working with the Co-operative Big Band during our principal gigs.

Being part of the Co-operative Big Band has not only built up my confidence to play within the music industry, but has also meant that I will persevere so that the music that I play is to the best of my ability. The band has given me more determination so that I can be better; this has allowed me to play some of the more advanced music that the band has undertaken. This has meant that I feel committed to the band so the music that is produced is at the highest level possible. On top of all of this is that the Co-operative Big Band gives a feeling of pleasure to its members as the music that we are creating is at the level needed to perform professionally.

The older members of the Co-operative Big Band have had an impact on others in the band; this is because the experience that we have gained during our time in the band can be passed onto the younger members, so that they can progress through the band. This has also allowed the band to progress so that it

can continue to perform its repertoire to a high standard even when the older members have left. This is their legacy and how we show our commitment to the co-operative values.

Conclusion

The experience of aligning with the co-operative movement has been a success story for all of us at Lipson. We find that the values of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) give agency and self-efficacy through social interactions created through language and experience. This article has illuminated some of the aspects that have impacted on our school community. We hold a vision and a set of values based on our pioneering position at the heart of the new franchise of co-operative schools (a membership driven solution). Underpinning both the Lipson pedagogy and structures of governance, is deep moral purpose. The G100 communiqué (NAEA, 2006) defined moral purpose as:

a compelling drive to do right for and by students, serving them through professional behaviours that raise the bar and narrow the gap and through doing so demonstrate an intent to learn with and from each other as we live together in this world.

At the heart of our democratic fellowship are a set of membership 'activists' groups. These represent students, parents, staff, alumni and community voice, committed to doing right by and for our community. And community matters to us because it is part of human interaction.

In a school trying to compete in a city that supports selective education, free schools and University Technical Colleges (UTCs) (despite a falling population), we are only too well aware of the numbers game. If we do not achieve ubiquitous and somewhat arbitrary floor targets by 2014 we will be at the mercy of a hostile take-over from a predatory chain. Within this co-operative academy we believe that such results are best achieved by people working co-operatively, whereby the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts. We will not achieve such challenges by concentrating purely on our most 'outstanding performers', but by improving standards of learning, attitudes, behaviour and attendance across the whole College. Achieving this means a continuous effort by leaders to establish trust, openness, honesty and solidarity. We will continue to rail against the discourse of 'no alternatives'. To those who tell us otherwise, we say: there is a co-operative solution.

Notes

- [1] The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is a professional association representing school leaders and bursars.

- [2] SMSC is the term used in the curriculum that covers all aspects of citizenship and non-subject based learning. It is the spiritual, moral, social and cultural part of schooling.

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