

**History, citizenship and co-operative education, c. 1895–1930****Keith Vernon**

A strong sense of the past pervades the co-operative movement. With the origins of the modern movement traced back to 1844, discussions of the nature and principles of co-operation routinely return to their foundations in the grim industrial conditions of the hungry forties.<sup>1</sup> Aspects of this historical culture have been analysed, primarily through selected writings on the history of co-operation, such as by G. J. Holyoake (see Yeo, this volume). The crop of jubilee histories written at the beginning of the twentieth century were also an opportunity for local societies to record, and reflect on, their several pasts, achievements and struggles.<sup>2</sup> Another important component was the educational activity that grew enormously from the turn of the century. It was recognised at the time, and has been acknowledged by historians subsequently, that educational work within the movement embraced a diverse set of activities.<sup>3</sup> Among key educational spokespeople of the movement, however, increasing emphasis came to be placed on the more formal and structured classes and courses on the history and development of co-operation. Although accepted as having a place in the formation of co-operative culture and identity, these more formal classes have not been considered at any length by historians. So, while not wishing to downplay other elements, this chapter focuses on this feature of educational activity. It seeks to show that these classes operated on a remarkable scale, reached a substantial number of people and, arguably, constituted a significant form of historical education in Britain in the early twentieth century.

From the early ideals of the Rochdale Pioneers, a commitment to education has been presented as a central feature of the co-operative movement.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, much endeavour was devoted to broadly educational purposes and several auxiliary organisations, such as the

Women's Co-operative Guild, also saw education as a central concern. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, the central educational department of the Co-operative Union, responsible most directly for education within the movement, felt that there was more lip service than real effort afforded to education among local consumer societies. Funds designated for education were being diverted into miscellaneous, and often largely social, occasions, ostensibly for propaganda purposes, rather than serious study. It was more than an academic interest, the co-operative movement faced significant new demands, and a return to the core principles of co-operation was seen as fundamental to revivifying the membership. Thus, from the mid-1890s, there was a concerted campaign to re-launch educational activity, and set some clear guidelines and standards, especially through diligent study in taught classes. An Herculean effort, sustained over several decades, resulted in an impressive array of courses on a range of subjects.<sup>5</sup> At the heart of the educational programme were courses on the nature and principles of co-operation, designed to encourage and enhance the commitment of co-operators to the movement. Courses were geared to all age groups and abilities from juniors of about ten to advanced level instruction for adults. The approach was essentially an historical review of the emergence of co-operation and some of the key figures of social reform through the nineteenth century. Alongside, were courses specifically on industrial history, citizenship and complementary social sciences, intended to fit co-operators for positions within the movement and as informed and engaged citizens in modern municipal society.<sup>6</sup>

These initiatives within the co-operative movement paralleled a wider national concern to promote good citizenship through education, particularly, historical teaching.<sup>7</sup> In 1900, the Board of Education stipulated that elementary schools should include history in the curriculum, primarily to instil moral and civic virtue, and enhance character development among the working classes. Teachers were advised to present a predominantly Whiggish tale

of national progress, increasingly infused with aggressive imperialism and militarism. Through a triumphalist narrative, revolving around heroic leaders and daring exploits, children would be imbued with a sense of patriotism, obedience to those in authority and duty to the state. It was intended as an homogenising story, avoiding or glossing over social and political friction, in which all might share in the benefits and glories of England. Where ordinary people featured at all they were at best supporters to leaders, at worst actively denigrated. What exactly elementary school children took from these lessons is uncertain, but the aims were pretty clear, and not necessarily to the liking of committed co-operators.

This chapter seeks to explore a series of issues around the nature and place of history and citizenship within formal co-operative education around the early twentieth century. We begin by considering the emergence of an educational campaign at the end of the nineteenth century, which put the teaching of the history and principles of co-operation at the core of the movement's educational endeavour, supplemented by complementary historical, civic and social science subjects. We then examine the kind of history being expounded in the movement during the early years of the twentieth century. To get some appreciation of the scale and significance of co-operative historical education we move on a generation to the middle of the interwar years when the educational programme had expanded considerably and was reaching substantial numbers, especially of young people. Juxtaposing these figures with their contemporaries studying history in school raises some potentially interesting issues, with which we conclude.

### **New directions in co-operative education**

Through the 1890s, there was growing concern around education within the movement, and a conscious reorientation of its aims and emphasis. The movement itself was quite different from the pioneering days; it was much larger, more complex and more successful, and the

end of the century naturally prompted some introspection about priorities and direction. On education in particular, significant changes in state involvement led to some important rethinking.<sup>8</sup> Almost all aspects of education were under state review, elementary provision had been reviewed by the Cross Commission and Bryce was leading an investigation into the expansion and reorganisation of secondary education. Coming out of these inquiries was the fundamental revision of national education through the 1902 Education Act. In addition, state sponsored technical education was growing and more working class people had access to literature through free public libraries. While this expanding provision raised questions about the necessity for co-operators to continue to provide education, the nature and orientation of state education raised considerable qualms about its implications for co-operators as working people.

By the mid-1890s, co-operative education was in the doldrums. Although committed in principle to education, and having done a great deal to promote and provide the resources for working class self-education, practice had rather drifted away. At the 1895 annual congress, the Committee on Education reported that only nine societies had held formal classes on the history and principles of co-operation, with 104 students taking examinations, while 14 societies ran courses on bookkeeping with a total of 146 examined.<sup>9</sup> Bemoaning a general lack of interest in educational matters, the committee lamented that few even turned up to debate their report. A recent controversy, however, had begun to raise the profile of education.<sup>10</sup> When the President of the Board of Education, Arthur Acland, advocated the study of co-operation in evening continuation schools, there was a wave of protest from private shopkeepers, who successfully banned the teaching in some areas. Margaret Llewellyn Davies took up the issue of education in a strongly worded speech to the Women's Co-operative Guild, to which the Education Committee gave much attention.<sup>11</sup> She argued that the movement's whole educational apparatus was out of date and ineffective. There

needed to be a much stronger and vigorous central organisation to support local activity. In visionary mode, she suggested that educational bodies could investigate a range of economic, industrial and municipal questions, ultimately perhaps resulting in a National School of Industrial Science analogous to what was being established as the London School of Economics. Although intrigued, the Education Committee felt that these ambitions were somewhat beyond their remit in promoting co-operative education within the movement. Nevertheless, the committee seized the opportunity to launch a full scale review of the current state of affairs. Llewellyn Davies offered her support and her services, 'we need a training ground in our movement, so that members may be educated to do the duties of citizenship as well as possible.'<sup>12</sup>

A special committee on education was appointed, which sent a circular enquiry to every local society, followed up by visits to a selected number.<sup>13</sup> Responses were received from 402 societies, of which 133 had no educational fund at all. From the rest, a total of £36,336 was spent on educational activities, of which £16,500 went towards maintaining reading rooms and libraries. A little was spent on lectures, classes and local publications, and some societies offered scholarships, but most of the remainder, some £17,000, paid for entertainments, concerts etc., ostensibly for propaganda purposes. Closer inquiry suggested that it was not mere apathy gripping the local societies, but that wider educational change had overtaken them. Local authorities routinely provided technical education, which in any case was becoming beyond the capacity of co-operators to provide. Other organisations now had extensive programmes of talks and lectures, and several co-operative societies actively worked with neighbouring cultural and literary societies to promote these activities. Free libraries had to a large extent rendered co-operative libraries and reading rooms redundant, although in some cases co-operative libraries had flourished alongside municipal ones. In other instances, however, it appeared as if local societies continued to maintain a library as a

convenient and appropriate outlet for their educational fund, in the absence of any other ideas of what to do with it.

Out of their survey of the markedly changing educational landscape, the special committee recognised the need to enunciate a new policy and direction for co-operative education with clear objectives for local societies. With laudable insight and ambition, it fixed on the absence of any positive teaching about industrial and municipal subjects, not only within the co-operative movement, but by any other body and pronounced: 'Here, in *the teaching of industrial economics and of the duties of citizens*, is the new pioneer work lying at the doors of co-operators.'<sup>14</sup> To put the new mission into effect the administrative structure managing and co-ordinating co-operative education would have to be overhauled. Once this was achieved, its work would be to promote the study of Economic Theory and Practice, which would, naturally, be based on the detailed, scientific teaching of co-operation, including the history, theory and practice of co-operation and its context. Secondly, Citizenship was presented as having always been the essential aim of co-operative education, which now needed to be addressed more directly. Lastly, co-operative societies would continue to have a role in Technical Education, but in conjunction with other local bodies. Although the Educational Committee was initially rather cautious about Llewellyn Davies' vision presented to the Women's Guild, there was a good deal of her ethos in their proposals. While firmly based on co-operation, the scheme was outward facing; co-operators needed to take their part in the great contemporary debates about citizenship, labour and democracy.

From the end of the nineteenth century, the Education Committee put a huge effort into devising courses, writing syllabuses and developing organised programmes. As will be discussed further below, an impressive Educational Programme was issued each year with a progressive series of offerings in a diverse set of subjects.<sup>15</sup> Giving substance to its announcements, the Education Committee worked hard to establish citizenship as central to

co-operative studies. One interesting innovation was to set a special subject in the educational programme on 'Aspects of Citizenship' that could serve as a focus for meetings, lectures and discussions at local societies.<sup>16</sup> The first one was 'The Housing Question', which was carried over into the following year. Subsequent topics included 'The Land Question', 'National Education', 'Co-operation and the Poor', 'Municipalisation' and 'The Temperance Problem'.<sup>17</sup> A list of recommended speakers was circulated and the topics were discussed at the annual educational conference. More familiarly, a syllabus and reading was devised for a course on citizenship.<sup>18</sup> Various incentives were offered to encourage engagement with the more advanced classes in Co-operation, Industrial History, Bookkeeping and Citizenship. Scholarships were offered in all four subjects and arrangements were made with the Oxford Delegacy to examine those students taking the higher level classes. As with many other aspects of the educational work, however, the committee was somewhat disappointed with the take up. The special subject in aspects of citizenship lasted until 1904 then disappeared from the programme. Classes in citizenship continued but, for many years, struggled to muster more than a handful of classes or more than a hundred students.

These initiatives were aimed at adults, and this was the main focus of attention through the latter years of the nineteenth century. From the beginning of the twentieth, there was something of a shift in direction with several interrelated strands. One was to move away from general training for active citizenship to refocus more explicitly on co-operation as the chief object of education within the movement, with a notably more historical approach. There was also a greater concern with reaching children. At the educational conference of 1901, W. R. Rae, one of the most vigorous spokespeople on co-operative education maintained:

Co-operators ought to be conversant with the evil conditions of the past and the lives of men and women who strove to better social and industrial surroundings . . . We

must keep the record of the past before our members, many of whom know nothing of the history of co-operation, which had an important bearing upon the success of the present undertakings.<sup>19</sup>

This statement was made in the midst of the bitter and protracted debates surrounding the introduction of the 1902 Education Act.<sup>20</sup> The political, religious, social and cultural implications of the Act were far reaching and profound, and only those elements pertaining to co-operative education can be outlined here.<sup>21</sup> Most directly, the Act abolished the locally elected School Boards, replacing them with a uniform system of Local Educational Authorities, and made rate support available to voluntary, primarily church-led, elementary schools. Although some aspects of the Act were welcomed as progressive measures, such as the first state support for secondary education, the co-operative movement, alongside most other working-class organisations, deprecated the new Act for undermining the democratically elected School Boards and allowing rate support to religious education without local authority control. Other measures restricted access to evening classes for adults. Thus, state education had been distanced from popular control, made less accessible to working people who had missed out earlier in their lives, and efforts to liaise with other municipal bodies to promote popular engagement with issues of the day had been dealt a considerable blow. Moreover, a lifeline had been offered to predominantly Tory supporting Anglican educational bodies, at a time when labour movements generally were under increasing assault. Not for the first time, the co-operative movement would have to look to its own resources to shore up their organisation and maintain a sense of cultural identity.

In the wake of the Act, Rae returned to the current situation and future direction of co-operative education.<sup>22</sup> In many respects, it was a reprise of his mid-1890s review, but issued with rather more force and thrown into relief by the national educational reconfiguration. Fundamentally, he thundered, despite strenuous labour over the last decade the amount of

education taking place within the movement remained lamentable for an organisation ostensibly committed to it. For him, education meant the study of co-operative subjects in organised classes. The structures were there, and a great deal of effort had gone into the revision and development of syllabuses, textbooks and classes but, when, in the whole of Britain, only 1,200 adults were taking a course on co-operation, the movement could hardly congratulate itself on its educational ethos. He was scathing of the lack of serious commitment in local societies who preferred to spend their educational funds on ‘tea, buns and the funny men’. Moreover, what funds were spent on educational activity were increasingly misdirected. There was no need any more for local societies to maintain libraries and reading rooms, which were now freely available. Nor was it the role of co-operators to supply evening, or science and art classes, which were properly the responsibility of local authorities. The real priority for the movement was classes in co-operation; ‘Here there is no doubt – no hesitation. These deal with our very existence, and are as valuable to us as a knowledge of the principles of truth and honesty.’ And the key to understanding the nature and importance of co-operation was to know more of the ‘Story of the Past’:

We have been compelled to admit that co-operation has been more virile and valuable where its votaries have known most of the history of its founders. . . surely there is nothing more inspiring than the lives of those who were faithful enough to struggle through a darkness we know nothing of, and to rejoice at a dawn which, in the brightness of today, seems to us dim. Co-operation will retain its coherence just so long as it is imbued by the spirit of the past.<sup>23</sup>

In the new context, the key was to provide for children, when minds were more readily formed. Junior classes were growing, but there was scope to do so much more. Rae thought that adult classes would only really succeed with a more receptive audience. Thus, it might be more effective simply to initiate discussions in ordinary social situations why (other than the

divi) people became co-operators before moving onto formal courses. Only after an initial course in co-operation, should people be encouraged to pursue further study of industrial history, citizenship or economics.

From the late 1890s, a renewed impetus was given to education within the co-operative movement, especially formal classes. The educational committee put a great deal of effort into reorganising the programme, commissioning textbooks and promoting the place of education within the structure of the movement and among local societies. Although the committee continually bemoaned the lack of interest in 'solid educational food' (and the disappointment was never to go away), a great deal was achieved, to be built on in succeeding years. In part, and in particular, the initiative was a reaction to developments in state education; as local authorities did more, societies were doing less and there had to be a rethink about what co-operative education was about. The maturity of co-operation, the wider growth of the labour movement and debates about the relationships between labour, democracy and education also set changing and challenging opportunities. Initially, the tone was optimistic, co-operators should engage with debates about pressing social and economic issues, municipal development and the nature of citizenship. There was a need to train up people who could contribute to these discussions. The early twentieth century sounded a more defensive note, the movement's priority was to shore up its own identity and cohesiveness; to explain to its own members the proper basis and importance of co-operation. Most effectively, this was through reaching the children.

### **Co-operative history in the Edwardian period**

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the Education Committee defined the key aims of co-operative education as:

primarily, the formation of co-operative character and opinion by teaching the history, theory, and principles of the movement, with economics and industrial and constitutional history in so far as they have bearing on Co-operation; and secondarily, though not necessarily of less import, the training of men and women to take part in industrial and civic life generally.<sup>24</sup>

Although co-operative education ought to contribute to general civic life, the main aim was more insular, to form character and opinion within the movement. This was to be achieved largely through the study of history, and a broad and progressive range of courses were devised for both children and adults. How, then, was the programme organised and what kind of history was being taught? Historians of the Edwardian school curriculum have shown that it was suffused with narratives of the great and glorious progress of nation and empire through wise and benevolent leadership and heroic military exploits.<sup>25</sup> It was usually an homogenising story that glossed over social, political or religious conflict and enjoined working-class children dutifully to follow their leaders in supporting and sustaining nation and empire. For the most part, citizenship was conflated with patriotism; when many men, and all women, were still denied full political rights, citizenship was presented primarily as loyalty to the national/imperial state. Although sharing many of the prevailing pedagogical assumptions about the nature and purpose of historical teaching, unsurprisingly, co-operative education took a somewhat different tack.

To consider the nature of co-operative education in the Edwardian period, and the place of history within it, the 1910 Educational Programme will be used as an example, by which time there was already an extensive series of courses available.<sup>26</sup> For each one, there was a suggested syllabus, with supporting textbooks and an examination. Classes could be run locally using the recommended materials, and the education committee published a register of teachers if local societies felt they did not have sufficient expertise. Many of the

courses could also be taken by correspondence. Courses on co-operation were divided into those for juniors and for adults, with each kind split into three sections – preliminary, elementary and advanced. There was also a small section of intermediate level courses. For juniors, the three sections roughly corresponded to age groups of ten to twelve, twelve to fourteen, and fourteen to sixteen, although it was envisaged that they might subsequently be arranged more by ability. There was no set syllabus for the earlier sections, but some suggestions were made regarding the principal elements to be covered for those studying Junior Stage III. The syllabus was organised in an historical sequence from the social and industrial conditions of the eighteenth century through to the ideal of brotherhood still to be strived for in the future. There was no rosy nostalgia for a bucolic past. Preindustrial life was presented as brutish and limited with severe and unjust laws, widespread ignorance and no compassion between rich and poor. Although cottage industry had its freedoms, village life was very isolated and restricted. The factory system brought no respite, with further cruelty towards workers and children, stolen land and no unions. Against these conditions, however, reformers such as Owen and Shaftesbury made a stand and co-operation began to emerge. Cautiously, it was noted that the story of the French Revolution might be told at this point. The second half of the syllabus dealt more specifically with the emergence of co-operation. Pride of place went to the Rochdale Pioneers and their model of the distributive store. The contrast between these and private stores were highlighted as the Dividend, Source, and Purity of goods, but teachers were advised to '[k]eep "divi" in background, make "conditions" chief thought'.<sup>27</sup> Examples from the natural world would show how co-operation was a natural condition. Similarly, the CWS and productive co-operation were presented as natural developments from the distributive stores. The course concluded with an optimistic look to the future.

Admirable advice was given on how to engage youngsters in the lessons. They should not be more than an hour long, with the course spread over twelve weeks. It was emphasised that the method of teaching should not be to the textbook but 'should be rather that of picture making. The conditions of the industrial classes at the beginning of the last century, and the story of the Pioneers, should be made the subject of a series of graphic picture lessons' and classes should be livened with song, recitations and lantern slides.<sup>28</sup> Blackboards should be used and the children's illustrations and writings used to decorate the classroom. Marks should be awarded for contributions, suggestions and answering questions, and the mark list exhibited. Examinations were a prominent feature of co-operative education. For juniors, there were no papers for the first two sections, but there was for Stage III. It was a formal printed paper with strict instructions to do no more than eight of the twelve questions in the allotted two hours.<sup>29</sup> Sample questions covered the meanings of key terms, the lives of Owen and Shaftesbury, the opening of the Toad Lane store, and the differences between co-operative stores and private shops. Many of the questions were leading, for example, candidates were asked to define co-operation and competition and to give reasons as to which was better. Papers done by juniors were marked locally, although a crib sheet was distributed to advise teachers on how to allocate marks.<sup>30</sup> To encourage participation, societies were invited to submit their best papers to the educational committee for re-marking and awards were made for the best nationally. In 1910–11, 117 of the Stage III junior co-operation papers were submitted for central remarking.<sup>31</sup> The examiners were cautiously pleased with the standard although complained that, despite all admonishments, there was still a heavy reliance on the textbook. In general, the children did best on the narrative questions on people and place, their own societies and memorising co-operative songs. The more conceptual questions on the differences between co-operative and private shops posed more difficulties and there was much misunderstanding over the nature of co-operative productive societies.

Altogether, however, the examiner was quite pleased. There was ‘abundant evidence that a good foundation in co-operative knowledge and principles has been laid by these young students – the co-operators of the future.’<sup>32</sup>

Through the first decades of the twentieth century, the standard text book on co-operation for children was *Our Story* by Isa Nicholson.<sup>33</sup> Written at the request of the Education Committee and first published in 1903, it went through numerous editions, selling in huge numbers. By 1907 it had already sold 31,000 copies and been translated into six languages.<sup>34</sup> It was the principal resource for teachers and young co-operators alike, and so set the parameters for understanding the nature of co-operation. It was a mixture of history, moral story and basic guide to the main components of the movement. The first two thirds of the book described a narrative arc from ‘The Darkest Hour’ to ‘The Day of Success’, very much underpinning the syllabus for junior co-operators. It was slightly more optimistic about preindustrial times, when conditions for handloom weavers might not have been good, but they had some independence, could combine weaving with other occupations and, being not so far off a master workman, could hope to rise in the world. Factories, however, reduced men to hands, or undercut them with women, children or pauper apprentices, enriching the masters and impoverishing the workers. Light began dawning with Robert Owen, who provided better conditions for his employees, especially children, but failed to establish co-operative ideas on a large scale. The other key figure was Shaftesbury who strove for better conditions for children. Although he objected to the socialist basis of Owen’s ideas, his commitment to peaceful change for the good of all classes demonstrated that he was effectively a comrade to Owen.

The pivotal point was the Rochdale Pioneers and the opening of the Toad Lane store. In the turmoil of the mid 1840s, the ‘totally uneducated class’ resorted to rioting and, while some masters were kind-hearted, there was always a gulf; ‘[t]he masters gave, but the

workers wished to share! The rich believed in charity, the poor asked for justice.’<sup>35</sup> The Pioneers struggled to raise sufficient capital, supporters struggled to get to the store and pay the relatively higher prices, and the initial provisions were decidedly meagre, so the colourful account of the opening night highlighted the achievement. Contrary to the advice of the education committee, however, for Nicholson the ‘Day of Success’ was the first ‘divi day’, when supporters of the store were able to get new clothes, or new teeth or even a piano! The rest of the book provided an account of the main features of the modern movement. What was involved in establishing a distributive store was set out. She was critical of the trend towards imposing town edifices, arguing that a network of smaller, more modest stores were better. Stores, however, depended on customer loyalty and healthy retail trade was the foundation of all the other worthy activities a society might sustain. Although logically prior, productive co-operatives came after the stores and an account of the emergence of the CWS and SCWS was given. The book concluded with a homily on the benefits of co-operation, materially and physically, but also the opportunity for self-improvement. This was not just an insular benefit, but the foundations of healthy citizenship, which prompted a greater interest in local society, welfare and governance. The book was romantic and heroic and progressive, but also described the hardship, struggle and achievements of working people.

For adults, there were further courses in co-operation, and more specific courses in industrial history, economics and citizenship, also available by correspondence. They were intended to be the ‘training ground of a future generation of members, committeemen, officers and employees of the society.’<sup>36</sup> The syllabuses followed the concentric model of reprising the main elements of earlier courses in greater depth. This had the practical benefit that students in more than one stage could be taught together. Thus, the preliminary stage was largely a revision of the upper level of the junior classes, while the elementary and advanced stages each began with an historical section, but then moved onto more contemporary issues

such as the differences between consumer and producer associations and the role of education and propaganda. At the highest level, there was greater depth on the economics of co-operation and a section on contemporary problems of co-operation, including relationships between the movement and trade unions or municipal authorities and the possible limitations of voluntary co-operation.

The course in industrial history had a much longer time span, beginning in Anglo-Saxon England and ending, somewhat paradoxically, in the early nineteenth century. In many respects it provided a chronological background to the emergence of factory industry. Study of the medieval period focused on economic aspects of towns and markets, the development of the woollen trade and social aspects such as the Black Death and the Peasant's Revolt. The social and economic upheavals of the Tudor period, and discovery of the New World were considered, before going on to the industrial and agrarian revolutions of the eighteenth century. The elementary course concluded with 'The Gloomy Opening of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century'. The advanced course covered much the same topics, but with additional material on the Roman and Danish invasions, the manorial system and the guilds, medieval commercial policy and mercantilism, the struggle for colonial supremacy, the Old and New Poor Laws, and Free Trade. For those more interested in contemporary economic problems there were specific courses on economics, including topics on the growth of free industry, the meaning of wealth, production, consumption, capital, labour and income, supply and demand, value, and trade unions. An alternative syllabus was based more on the study of classical authors such as Adam Smith, Malthus, Ricardo and Mill.

Although the educational programme was geared overwhelmingly towards enhancing the co-operative movement, the course on citizenship remained. Guiding the syllabus was an analysis of the meanings of 'Citizen', 'Nation' and 'State.'<sup>37</sup> For the most part, the course covered the principal components of national and local government – as elected and

administrative bodies and the history and principles of their organisation, roles and responsibilities – from the nature of representative government to the arrangements for roads, streets and buildings. A section on the ‘Duties of Citizens in Relation to Local and Central Government’ confirmed the duty of voting and the importance of exercising independent judgement. There was also discussion of associations of workers, the struggle between capital and labour and the relationships between labour and the state. Given the context of our sample year of 1910, with the increasingly dangerous debates around unionisation, labour representation and female suffrage, discussions of governance and citizenship were potent and radical.<sup>38</sup> Less inflammatory and more personalised, a section on ‘The Industrial and Social Duties of the Citizen’ considered the physical and moral conditions of success in life, the importance of training and the uses of machinery. Equally, the extent and advantages of empire with the importance of the colonies and imperial defence were included. The recommended text book, not written in house, was Oscar Browning’s *The Citizen: His Rights and Responsibilities*. The numbers studying in adult classes were not large, with approximately 400 taking examinations in co-operation and about fifty each in industrial history and citizenship.<sup>39</sup> They seemed to take it seriously and the examiners were largely content with the standard achieved and the levels of intelligent, independent thought displayed.

By the outbreak of the First World War, the basic structures of co-operative education were in place, centred on inculcating the principles and ethos of co-operation, especially to the young, primarily through the study of the history and development of the co-operative movement with supplementary adult courses specifically on history and citizenship. To a large extent this followed contemporary thinking about the nature and purpose of history and citizenship teaching. The Board of Education favoured an historical approach for teaching on moral principles, the development of personal character and the duties of citizenship.

Similarly, co-operative history was progressive and drew on romantic stories of heroes to inspire the young. Although espousing the highest ideals of engaging teaching, all too often, the classes seem to have been wedded to the recommended text books and the prominent place of examinations constantly undermined the exhortations not to see examination success as the key criterion. In content and context, however, co-operative history was wholly different to that peddled in the elementary schools. An emphasis on recent urban and industrial history was quite different from the medieval and early modern rural focus of most school readers. Character and citizenship were not expressed solely through patriotic duty to nation, empire and authority; there was conflict in modern society and established leaders could be challenged. Most importantly, working people had historical agency, tackling the problems they faced and constructing a new form of industrial organisation.

### **The extent of co-operative history in the interwar period**

In the aftermath of the First World War, the movement, once again, seemed to be under threat. As with almost every other aspect of national life, co-operatives were affected by the war, but the movement worked with the coalition government on food production, retailing and rationing. Relationships soured when the government chose to classify co-operative dividends as profits and imposed the swingeing excess profits tax. The response to sell at cost evaded the tax, but ate into societies' resources. A further, dramatic consequence was the formation of the co-operative political party to seek to defend the interests of co-operation in government.<sup>40</sup> The need for new initiatives and directions had been seen even before the war when a full scale survey of the movement's activities had been put in train.<sup>41</sup> Playing a significant part in the review was the recently appointed Director of Education, Fred Hall. Echoing Rae's position a decade earlier, Hall felt that the response of ordinary co-operators to the serious forces affecting the movement was somewhat lacking, which he ascribed to a

failure to appreciate sufficiently the core values and principles of the movement.

Consequently, more education was required to create a better informed, and more committed, membership and workforce. Through the interwar period, then, Hall and his colleagues further expanded the co-operative curriculum.<sup>42</sup> Building on solid foundations, an ever wider range of syllabuses was devised to explore different aspects of co-operation, social and industrial history, citizenship and social sciences. Increasing numbers took up the opportunities, particularly of young people and especially adolescents. The main part of this section considers how the educational programme had developed by the middle of the interwar period. A speculative discussion then raises the possibility of making comparisons between the place of history in co-operative education and history in the schools.

By 1930, there were almost seventy separate courses listed in the programme.<sup>43</sup> Although often with only a handful of attendees, very few did not attract any students at all. Almost half were for the training of employees or society officials to meet the requirements of a growing and increasingly complex and professionalised organisation. Co-operation remained the chief subject, and the opening statement on the objects of co-operative education remained the same as in 1910, with the emphasis firmly on the formation of co-operative character and opinion through teaching the history, theory and principles of the movement. The syllabuses were also much the same, with a strong historical dimension, and it was affirmed that '[a] right understanding of the past and the present is necessary for those who would fit themselves for building a better future.'<sup>44</sup> Following new progressive educational ideas, there was more careful advice on how the junior classes should be run. A session of 90 minutes should open with a song or recitation, feature only about forty-five to fifty minutes of actual class time and finish with more games and social activity. Lesson evenings could be broken up with lighter weeks as well. Classes should not exceed thirty and the teacher should not talk down to the children. Adult classes in co-operation built a

progressive understanding of the movement through three stages. Alongside the standard courses in co-operation, there was now a wide range of more specialised syllabuses on various aspects of the movement. Students could study current problems of co-operation, and the connections between co-operation and general social issues. The more outward looking could focus on the nature and development of co-operation in Ireland or Denmark. In the uncertain relationships between the Women's Co-operative Guild and other parts of the movement, a series of three courses on co-operation and citizenship was constructed specifically for women.<sup>45</sup> Designed to be taken consecutively, the first dealt with women in relation to their own store, the second with the movement as a whole and the third with wider questions, thus gradually broadening their horizons. It was emphasised that there was no admission fee and no examinations, unless there was a demand for one. For those who successfully passed through the three basic courses, there were more advanced options including on social history, women in industry, hygiene and physiology, or women reformers.

History and economics as they related to co-operation was taught and an important, though still secondary function of co-operative education was to train men and women to take part in social reform and civic life more generally. To this end, there was a number of courses on history and social science subjects. History was central:

To the student of social questions, or the member of a working-class organisation, few subjects of study are of more importance than history, particularly Industrial History and Constitutional History. A study of these subjects gives him knowledge of the past, power for the present, and hope for the future. It enables him to review and avoid the mistakes of his predecessors and it cultivates the power to take, and the habit of taking, the long view.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, there were three courses in industrial history, an elementary one and an advanced one split into two parts, Part I going from 1066 to 1760 and Part II from 1760 to 1930. A suite of

more specialised courses dealt with the 'Industrial Revolution', the period in which 'most of our present day industrial and social problems had their birth' and the study of which was essential for a right understanding of these problems, 'Economic and Industrial History of the Nineteenth Century', 'Reform Movements of the Nineteenth Century' and 'Constitutional History'.<sup>47</sup> Alongside the historical courses, was a series on economics including general economics and more specific courses on 'Money, Prices and Banking', 'Business Organisation' and 'Industry and Commerce'. For those interested in contemporary social and political issues, the courses in 'Citizenship' and in local and central government were offered, as well as more theoretical ones in 'Political Science' and in 'Sociology and Ethics'. As an alternative way into the subject a new course was devised on 'Civics', which looked at other forms of community life and organisation besides the more formal structures of local and central government.

A significant development was the emergence of intermediate grade classes in co-operation. These were intended for adolescents who had been through the junior course, but were not ready to join the adult classes. They were first formed before the war, but grew rapidly during the interwar years at a similar time to the emergence of the Woodcraft Folk and other co-operative youth organisations.<sup>48</sup> Four parallel courses were devised, all of which had an essentially historical basis. The 'A' course took a biographical approach through a study of the lives of social reformers from within the movement and wider socialist thinkers and campaigners such as Owen, Fry, Kingsley, Thomas Hughes, Ruskin, Morris, E. V. Neale and Holyoake. Course 'B' was an extension of the study of the history and principles of co-operation, covering much the same kind of syllabus in greater depth. A novel perspective was provided in course 'C', which took industrial history and co-operation as its subject, but which drew on Hall's textbook, *Sunnyside*. This text included an account of the formation of a model co-operative community, so the course, while drawing on the facts of the past was

also, in part, an imaginative exercise. It was noted that such an approach would require careful interpretation by the teacher. Finally, course 'D' treated on co-operation through the ages, which ranged widely over time and geographical area and drew on examples and analogies from the natural world as well as human interaction. The numbers taking these courses were quite substantial. In 1930, a total of 5,252 were enrolled in 131 classes, with course 'A' the most popular.<sup>49</sup> It is unclear precisely what age these students were.

Intermediate classes were described as for 'adolescents', and the previous Stage III of junior co-operation was designated as suitable for those aged fourteen to sixteen, which indicates an age group in their mid to late teens. To put these figures in context, we can try to relate them to their peer age group studying history in the schools.

State schooling had expanded considerably during the 1920s, with more opportunities for adolescents. In elementary schools, the compulsory leaving age was raised to fourteen and more children stayed on beyond that, with a variety of post-elementary possibilities developing alongside the growing secondary school sector.<sup>50</sup> History was a central feature of the school curriculum.<sup>51</sup> After the First World War, there were attempts to broaden the scope of school history, to move away from an insular national narrative and adopt a more internationalist perspective. Experiments in progressive pedagogy were also encouraged. The focus on key events in national political history, however, remained and, when school textbooks had a very long shelf life, most historians see few changes in the nature and content of school history before and after the war. Nevertheless, in secondary schools, history was a popular feature of the new examinations at sixteen and eighteen, the School and Higher School Certificates. This is approximately the same age group as those taking Junior Stage III and intermediate classes in co-operation and raises the possibility of making some comparisons. The following figures are for the cohort examined in 1930 (see Table 5.1).<sup>52</sup>

[insert Table 5.1 near here]

There is no room here to examine properly which of these figures can be compared meaningfully with each other, or indeed whether it would be possible to do so. The point of the juxtaposition, then, is to raise the possibility that they could be compared; that the number of young people in their mid-teens studying the history of the co-operative movement might conceivably bear comparison with the numbers following the standard nationalistic political narrative of the schools.

## **Conclusions**

At the end of the nineteenth century, the co-operative movement launched a major campaign in education, especially in organised courses and classes. Partly, it was to reposition the movement's educational endeavours against the changing national landscape, but there was also a perceived need to revivify grass roots effort which had, apparently, lapsed into torpor. To begin with, it seemed designed not just as an insular preoccupation, but to engage with the wider contemporary debates about citizenship, democracy and the role of labour. Quickly, however, a more defensive aspect prevailed, with greater urgency to promote deeper understanding of co-operation within the movement against threatening manoeuvres. A very similar situation prevailed in the aftermath of the First World War when, once again, co-operators looked to their own resources to stabilise, enhance and promote the importance and value of their movement through reflexive educational engagement. Throughout, the approach taken was, substantially, an education in history – of the origins and emergence of the movement, its founding principles and pervasive ethos, of its struggles and triumphs, and the importance of its continuing task. This was not unusual in contemporary educational thinking; history was the favoured means of instilling moral messages, character development and citizenship training. Where it differed was in the content and context of the curriculum.

Co-operative history was about modern urban, industrial times, active and participatory citizenship, and the agency of working people to make their own history.

The educational programmes put in place were a remarkable achievement of scale, scope and organisation, but advocates constantly bemoaned the lack of interest in serious education in the movement. Indeed, it would be fair to say that only a small fraction of adult co-operators pursued classes, and many fewer to successful examination. Nevertheless, those who persevered constituted an educated cadre of some hundreds a year, leavening the movement and perhaps entering onto larger stages. At the same time, considerable efforts went into capturing the young and, here, the numbers reached are not to be derided. By the 1930s, significant cohorts of young people were taking advantage of the opportunities to explore their own history, culture and ethos. Repeating the caveats of the previous section, we cannot, here, go into the potential implications of this; whether and how it may have impacted on popular understandings of the past, or on ideas of citizenship, or the development of the co-operative movement, or engagement with politics and civic life. That the questions can even be asked, however, raises interesting possibilities for all these questions. Although most did not, significant numbers did take advantage of the resources put in place for co-operators, and especially the next generation of co-operators, to appreciate the distinguished history of their movement, and how this equipped them for the challenges of their times both within co-operation and for its wider role in society.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Polyp, *The Co-operative Revolution: A Graphic Novel* (Ottawa: New Internationalist, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870–1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996). C. Wrigley, ‘The commemorative urge:

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the co-operative movement's collective memory' in L. Black and N. Robertson, eds, *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History. Taking Stock* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 157–73; I. MacPherson, 'Community, individuality and co-operation: the centrality of values' in A. A. Webster, L. Shaw, J. K. Walton, A. Brown and D. Stewart, eds, *The Hidden Alternative: Co-operative Values, Past, Present and Future* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011) pp. 203–25.

<sup>3</sup>T. Woodin, 'Co-operative education in Britain during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: context, identity and learning', in Webster *et al*, *Hidden Alternative*, pp. 78–95.

<sup>4</sup> Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*; N. Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914–1960: Minding Their Own Business* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Woodin, 'Co-operative education in Britain'; K. Vernon, 'Values and vocation: educating the co-operative workforce', in Webster *et al*, *Hidden Alternative*, pp. 37–58.

<sup>5</sup> See the Educational Programmes published by the CU (CU), National Co-operative Archive (NCA).

<sup>6</sup> This chapter does not consider the even more impressive range of vocational courses developed for employees of the co-operative movement. For this aspect, see Vernon, 'Values and Vocation'.

<sup>7</sup> V. E. Chancellor, *History for their Masters. Opinion in the English History Textbook 1800–1914* (New York: Augustus Kelly, 1970); J. A. Mangan, ed, 'Benefits Bestowed'? *Education and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); S. Heathorn, *For Home, Country, and Race: Constructing Gender, Class and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), D. Cannadine, J. Keating, and N. Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History. Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); J. Keating, 'Approaches to

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citizenship teaching in the first half of the twentieth century – the experience of the London County Council’, *History of Education* 40 (2011), pp. 761–78.

<sup>8</sup> K. Vernon, ‘Co-operative education and the state, c.1895–1935’ *Forum* 55 (2013), pp. 293–307.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Report of the Committee on Education,’ *Co-operative Congress Report* (1895).

<sup>10</sup> Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*.

<sup>11</sup> Reported in the ‘Report of the Committee on Education and Production’, *Co-operative Congress Report* (1896).

<sup>12</sup> *Co-operative Congress Report* (1896), p.114.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Report of Special Committee on Education’, *Co-operative Congress Report* (1898).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12 (emphasis in original).

<sup>15</sup> See for example, *Co-operative Educational Programme 1910* (Manchester: Co-operative Union [CU], 1910).

<sup>16</sup> ‘Report of the Committee on Education’, *Co-operative Congress Report* (1899).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Report of the Committee on Education’, *Co-operative Congress Report* (1902–4).

<sup>18</sup> ‘Report of the Committee on Education’, *Co-operative Congress Report* (1899).

<sup>19</sup> ‘Educational Conference’, *Co-operative Congress Report* (1901), p. 198.

<sup>20</sup> Vernon, ‘Co-operative education and the state.’

<sup>21</sup> N. Daghish, *Education Policy-making in England and Wales: The Crucible Years, 1895 – 1911* (London: Woburn Press, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> ‘How best can Co-operative Societies utilise their educational funds in view of the educational facilities now provided by municipal and local authorities’, *Co-operative Congress Report* (1904).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>24</sup> *Co-operative Educational Programme 1910*, p. 7.

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<sup>25</sup> Chancellor, *History for their Masters*; Heathorn, *For Home, Country, and Race*; Cannadine *et al.*, *Right Kind of History*; Keating, 'Approaches to citizenship teaching'.

<sup>26</sup> *Educational Programme 1910*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> *Examination Papers 1910–11* (Manchester: CU, 1911).

<sup>30</sup> 'Juniors' examination in "Co-operation": hints to local examiners on marking papers', *Examination Papers 1910–11*.

<sup>31</sup> *Co-operative Classes Session 1910–11: Results of Examinations* (Manchester: CU, 1911).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> I. Nicholson, *Our Story* (Manchester: CU, 1903).

<sup>34</sup> 'Report of the Committee on Education', *Co-operative Congress Report* (1907).

<sup>35</sup> Nicholson, *Our Story*, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> *Educational Programme 1910*, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Educational Programme 1910*, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> D. Powell, *British Politics and the Labour Question, 1868–1990* (London: Macmillan, 1992)

<sup>39</sup> *Results of Examinations, 1910–11*.

<sup>40</sup> P. Maguire, 'Co-operation and crisis: government, co-operation and politics, 1917–22', in S. Yeo, ed, *New Views of Co-operation* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 187–206.

<sup>41</sup> F. Hall, *A Review of the Education Report of the Survey Committee as presented to the Swansea Congress of 1917* (Manchester: CU, 1919).

<sup>42</sup> Vernon, 'Values and Vocation.'

<sup>43</sup> *Educational Programme: Session 1931–32* (Manchester: Co-operative Printing Society, 1931).

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<sup>44</sup> *Educational Programme 1931–32*, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> G. Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: the Women's Co-operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> *Educational Programme 1931–32*, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> *Educational Programme 1931–32*, p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> J. Attfield, *With Light of Knowledge: A Hundred Years of Education in the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, 1877–1977* (London: Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society and Journeyman Press, 1981).

<sup>49</sup> *Co-operative Classes Session 1930–31: Results of Examinations* (Manchester: CU, 1911).

<sup>50</sup> G. Bernbaum, *Social Change and the Schools 1918–1944* (London: RKP, 1967).

<sup>51</sup> Cannadine *et al*, *Right Kind of History*.

<sup>52</sup> Figures for co-operative examinations from *Results of Examinations 1930–31*; for school history from Cannadine *et al*, *Right Kind of History*.