

Co-ops in the Curriculum

Numerous studies have shown that while the co-operative business model resonates with teachers, teens and young adults, very few of them are learning about our sector in school.

Co-operatives are **one of the four recognized business types in Canada**, and are included in many streams of Ontario curriculum, however; the co-operative model is often overlooked due to a lack of understanding among educators about their impact and prevalence. From co-operatives like the Green Bay Packers to the Associated Press, there are over three million co-operatives operating, worldwide, in every imaginable sector.

As a values-based business model with a focus on the triple bottom line, co-operatives encourage a more collaborative approach to economic development within communities and offer opportunities for youth to seek careers in a sector that promotes autonomy, authenticity and environmental and social responsibility.

“Using a co-operative modeled business in a classroom has given me a deeper knowledge of business ethics that I can transfer to my students. While teaching them how to build a sustainable, profitable business, I am often emphasizing a community connection built on values and interests.”

- Erin Spry, Teacher, Hastings Prince Edward District School Board

Our organization encourages the study of the co-operative business model through project-based learning

based on strong evidence that projects with real-world outcomes hold some of the greatest potential for helping students become driven, empathetic and engaged citizens. We have developed a program we call *Co-operative Minds* that provides an **authentic and meaningful way** for students to share their collective voice, and the opportunity to collaborate, think critically and communicate in ways that make our world a more co-operative place to live.

Students engage in project-based learning by working as a collective to tackle complex issues and real-life problems that explore the themes of sustainability, financial literacy, food insecurity, affordable housing and access to post-secondary education. Our programs have been developed in partnership with certified Ontario teachers, and they offer tangible connections to current grade 2-12 Ontario curriculum guidelines, align with the Citizenship Education Framework and build competencies outlined in the Transferable Skills Framework.

Additionally, the Ontario Co-operative Association has developed programming to provide a variety of learning and professional development opportunities for a new generation of co-operative leaders through a summer program for youth (Co-operative Young Leaders), facilitation training and opportunities for adults (Co-operative Young Leaders), co-operative training and workshops for both new and existing co-operatives (through webinars, educational sessions, conferences and events, as well as specialized training sessions designed to meet the needs of our members), and other educational opportunities for co-operatives offered outside of OCA, both provincially and nationally.

