

THE DISMAL SCIENCE

Textbooks economical with words about co-ops

JACK QUARTER, DANIEL SCHUGURENSKY, ERICA MCCOLLUM AND LAURIE MOOK

A recent study conducted through the Social Economy Centre at the University of Toronto raises questions about the narrow focus of business and economics textbooks in Ontario's high schools.

The research by professor Daniel Schugurensky and MA student Erica McCollum of OISE/University of Toronto, examined the contents of 22 business textbooks containing 11,375 pages currently used in Ontario high schools.

In general, these textbooks had very little about non-profits and co-operatives.

When all of the materials referring to co-operatives were totalled, they amounted to 35 pages, or 0.3 per cent of the 11,375 pages in the 22 books.

For non-profits, this amounted to 107 pages, or 0.9 per cent of the total pages. In other words, there is not a lot about these types of organizations within the business texts used in Ontario high schools.

A similar study in 1995 (by professor Jack Quarter and then PhD student Alison Davidson also of OISE/UT), upon which the current study was based, had strikingly similar findings.

Not much has changed in the past 12 years with regard to the treatment of co-operatives and non-profits in business textbooks in Ontario.

Do these types of organizations have a place in business textbooks and business programs?

Arguably, these organizations are not in the mainstream of the business world, but they do have a significant impact upon the economy. A survey of the non-profit sector undertaken by Statistics Canada in 2003 (the *National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations*) found that there were 161,000 incorporated non-profits in Canada, about half of which had charitable status registrations.

The same survey estimated that non-profits had revenues of \$112 billion, employ 2 million people (54 per cent full-time), and have a vol-



JOHN OVERMYER ILLUSTRATION

unteer labour force estimated to be another 1 million full-time equivalent jobs (about 2 billion hours).

The stereotype of non-profits is that their revenues are unearned (donations and grants), but the Statistics Canada survey indicates that 35 per cent is earned through the marketplace; in fact, there are a significant number of non-profits that compete successfully in the market with private sector firms (for example, the YMCAs).

Likewise, the stereotype of co-op-

eratives as small and economically insignificant is belied by the data. For instance, the Co-operatives Secretariat, a federal government agency, reported that in 2003 approximately 9,200 co-operatives brought in \$35.8 billion of revenues and employed around 155,000.

Agriculture co-operatives, although having declined in importance due to the demutualization of some of the largest ones, were still marketing and processing a large share of farmers' production, nota-

bly in poultry, dairy and hogs. Two co-operatives are among the top 12 corporations in the food and beverage-manufacturing sector in Canada.

Moreover, eight non-financial co-operatives are among the top 500 corporations in Canada; two of these are among the top 100 corporations.

Le Mouvement des caisses Desjardins, the umbrella organization for credit unions/caisses populaires in francophone Canada, is the largest employer in Quebec and, with a workforce of more than 39,000, is the sixth largest financial institution in Canada with assets of \$118 billion in 2005.

These organizations, a group that we classify as part of the social economy, provide flexible, sustainable and innovative approaches to achieving social and economic objectives.

Although they are not the mainstream of the economy, they employ and train people, create economic growth, provide social support, foster community development, and have valuable assets.

Furthermore, they mobilize large numbers of volunteers who contribute to these organizations but whose contributions are typically ignored in conventional accounting.

These organizations are critical to our diverse Canadian landscape, yet the business and economics textbooks of our high-school students and future leaders are strikingly silent about them.

Our research has focused upon the approved textbooks in Ontario's high school business and economics courses.

We haven't reviewed the major business programs in universities, but we know the terrain there is also relatively barren. Something is missing!

Jack Quarter and Laurie Mook are co-directors of the Social Economy Centre at the University of Toronto; Daniel Schugurensky is director of the collaborative graduate program in community development at the University of Toronto, and Erica McCollum is completing her MA at OISE/UT.

Obituaries inspire us to live fully



LOUIS MACPHERSON

Why don't we fill every precious second of our lives pursuing what will give each of us the greatest reward for the very little time given to us?

Mr. Scholtz, my Grade 13 biology teacher, used to say, "Life is the maintenance of negative entropy," a fancy scientific way of saying the moment you are born is the moment you begin to die. Based on the random selection of death in our lives, this was a precise and profoundly prophetic observation.

There is only one noble goal in life. It is to enrich one's life by enriching the lives of others. This is not as monumental a task as one may believe. It may be a gesture so simple and so innocuous as to be rendered invisible by the world around us. Even the most humble of actions can shape the community in which we live and, more importantly, the community of man.

The inspiration for this article was the obituary column, a microcosm of a life crammed into a single page of newsprint, a fleeting moment in time replaced with a new microcosm of life the next day.

We are so determined to serve ourselves that we forget the immense and irrefutable blessing one anonymous soul may have left behind. Any one of the individuals on the obituary page may be directly responsible for contributing to the traits of the person you most admire, perhaps your best friend, mother, father or spouse.

It would be easy to address the importance of the obituary page with shallow platitudes, but that is not the point. On that one page a vast and possibly incomprehensible amount of good has vanished from our earth. Who will replenish it? Who will replace it?

We look, I believe, at the names, and sometimes the faces, with perfunctory dullness: "Oh, so and so died of cancer . . . this one was only 28," and "Here's one, no cause of death and no donations listed . . . must have been suicide." We are benignly oblivious and blissfully detached from what we are reading, even though the impending mortality of every human stares back at us from the page.

For some people, death will come like a sledgehammer within days of their last obituary reading. For others, it will be devastation of another kind: the sudden death of someone of immeasurable importance, perhaps a person to whom they needed to say, "I'm sorry," or "Please forgive me."

Take heed of the causes of death — they are the canary in the coal mine for a good number of us if we do not change our ways. Take action to combat the devastation levelled by the various forms of cancer, heart disease, vehicular accidents, etc. Make an effort to reduce the carnage.

Let us not live as though events or episodes were a moment in our lives. Let's live as though there were lives in our moments. Let the cavalier activity of perusing a page of death notices inspire us: Be anything but cavalier, carry forward the torch of those before you with unrestrained determination and live what may have been an unrewarding life with enthusiastic zeal. Our time is now!

The reward that comes from making others happy is the ultimate reward. Stand out from the crowd. Make your obituary sing and dance like there is no tomorrow. Be the standard by which others aspire to live. Be the moment. Be the seed, and seed goodwill.

The love and friendship that will follow will astonish even the most cynical among us. Who knows? Tomorrow, and the days ahead, can be the best days of your life, and lives to come.

Louis MacPherson is a Whitby-based writer and theatrical producer.

The Star welcomes submissions for the Ideas page. Original articles should be no longer than 600 words and can be sent to oped@thestar.ca. Please include your name and phone number.

WEB FORUM

Would you vote for a party promising a February holiday in Ontario?

I'm all for the idea of more holidays, but the party in question would have to make a few other promises as well.
Lesley Law, Whitby

Why does the name have to be something that sounds like an excuse for a holiday — "family day?" Flag Day is already in February, yet we do not celebrate it. Let's make that a holiday.
Joel Swagerman, Toronto

Dalton McGuinty surely has made more promises and offered more bribes to voters than any premier in history. He has spent a fortune of our money on useless television ads for just about every ministry. Fixed election dates, also courtesy of McGuinty, have given us this costly circus. It's a pity John Tory has made his unacceptable school promise, leaving voters with little choice.
John Chuckman, Toronto

Sure, it's vote buying, but then so was the 5 per cent GST promise by Stephen Harper. The fact is, a lot of the goodies thrown our way are done during an election season. We will take it as they come.
Adnan Khan, Toronto

Another Liberal promise to be broken as soon as they are re-elected? Haven't we had enough of those broken promises to last us through many unbroken winters?
Alexa van Hoof, Toronto

What a fantastic idea! Too bad it's wrapped up in the insincerity of a

ONLINE RESULTS

YES 46 %
NO 53 %



thestar.com

SPEAK OUT

Go to the star.com for today's question and express your view

vote-buying scheme. If John Tory is smart he will offer the working people of Ontario something similar. We deserve it!
Greg Chris, Toronto

I will vote as I always do — ABC: Anything But Conservative.
Ed Butts, Guelph, Ont.

Considering which party this promise is coming from, it isn't worth the paper it is printed on. I will not vote for a party promising a February holiday.
Robert Marshall, Toronto

I am not swayed by promises made by any political party, or by any in-

dividual. My judgment is based solely upon their track record. The Common Sense Revolution, as promised by a previous Conservative premier, Mike Harris, failed. Political parties and their members are like leopards; they do not change their spots.
David Boyle, Toronto

The liberals are getting really desperate if they think they can bribe me with a holiday. No intelligent person would succumb to this.
Ellen Coates, Fonthill

Yes. I think Ontarians deserve a break when it's cold, wet and messy weather. Ontarians really need a long weekend in February to get together with family.
Surjit Singh Flora, Brampton

Any day families get to spend extra time together is a great idea.
Linda Hunwicks, Welland, Ont.

As much as I would relish a day off, I am appalled that this government would attempt to offer a new statutory holiday in exchange for votes while the brunt of the cost of such a holiday is borne by the employers of the province. To me it is akin to offering a shiny new car to an acquaintance to garner his/her affection, then expecting someone else to pay for it.
Jeff Rogerson, North Bay, Ont.

Outrageous. Still no Remembrance Day holiday, but we have room for another civic holiday?
Scott Harris, Kitchener, Ont.

TRAFFIC REPORT Yesterday on the Web

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- Why Magna doesn't need Stronach
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- Felix slams into Central America