

## THE COOPERATIVE EDUCATION AND THE EDUCATOR

By André Martin<sup>1</sup> for ACE (July 2014)



---

Since the very beginning, cooperative education has always occupied a prominent position, to the point that it could be considered one of cooperatism's basic principles. To speak of cooperative education is to refer directly to the fifth principle of the ICA, which defines it as follows, "cooperatives offer their members, their executives, their managers, and their employees the **education** and **training** required to enable them to contribute effectively to the development of their cooperative. They **inform** the public at large, especially the young and those who lead public opinion, on the nature and advantages of cooperation."

One historical fact remains: initially, cooperative education did not occupy itself solely with the economic problems of its members. Encompassing basic apprenticeships and sound training, it favored first and foremost the education of people. To the initial proponents of cooperatism, the proposed paradigm was the basis for all action. Paul Lambert states:

(...) the cooperative movement, from its very beginning, aspires to a total transformation of the world and of Man. Moral preoccupations are what moves these initiators: they see within cooperation much more than the solution to a partial and passing problem; they see a formula capable of overhauling the entire economic and social system and of elevating Man to a moral behavior comprising nobility and disinterestedness. (LAMBERT, Paul, *La doctrine coopérative*, 3e éd, Propagateurs de la coopération, Bruxelles, 1964, p. 41)

Thus, cooperative education must it not only present itself as a prerequisite condition to cooperative action, but as a basically constituent and permanent condition. Two authors offer us summaries of the importance of cooperative education as a principle. W.P. Watkins reminds us that cooperative education is a principle indispensable to the existence of the cooperative, because it affords us a philosophical, technical (management and pedagogical tools) and practical comprehension of all remaining principles, the application of each demanding the manifestation of a developed cooperative spirit (WATKINS, W.P., *Co-*

---

<sup>1</sup> Most elements of reflection made in this text come from the following book: MARTIN, André, Anne-Marie Merrien, Martine Sabourin et Josée Charbonneau, *Sens et pertinence de la coopération : un défi d'éducation*, Montréal, Fides, 2012.

*operative principles: today & tomorrow*. Manchester, Holyoake Books, 1986, p. 123-138). Professor P.R. Dhashi goes yet further, stating that education is the principle of all principles because it teaches other principles and because it transcends the cooperative itself (DUBHASHI, Padmakar Ramachandra, *Principles and philosophy of co-operation*, Poona, Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Co-operative Management, 1970, p.72).

We will try to define what cooperative education is so as to better grasp the role of the educator. To help us, we will propose a general definition of education and use the double etymology of the word, *educare* and *educere* to better understand the distinction and the complementarities that exist between information, training, and education in a cooperative context.

### **The educational act**

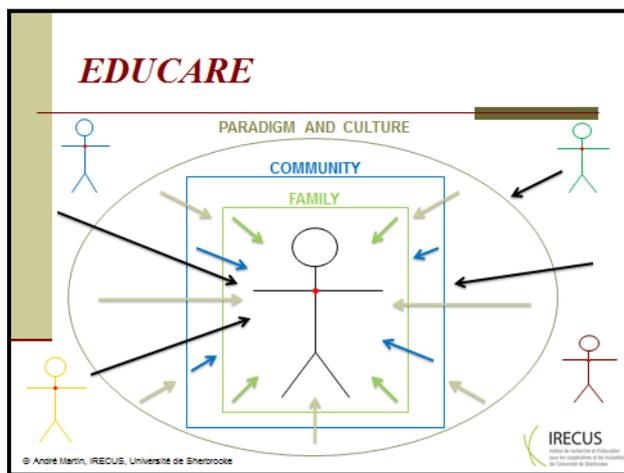
Education is the set of all processes and procedures that allow persons to progressively access their own culture, and that of humans in general. Education is the apex of human experiences that questions the very essence of human beings, their values and purposes, recalling past greatness in order to better understand the present while transcending that which is to come. It is the initial and ultimate action that, while confronting the great existential and ethical questions, elevates humanity toward sound judgment and liberty. It makes possible convincing others, without exclusion, to walk in enlightenment the paths of their culture with its values and customs, while looking yet further, that is to say, towards new paths for humanity. Education is an authentically human and total experience that raises our awareness of self and of the world.

In this context, education is an act and a deeply human experience. Education exists only insofar as women and men, as educators, take actions that facilitate, for ourselves and others, a form of learning which liberates us from ignorance and blindness, allowing us to better understand, to do better and to simply be better. Thus the act of educating is real and tangible only if it transmits knowledge and values, opening the door to the complexity and uncertainty of the world in which each and every one of us must participate. The educator is then defined as one who passes on culture as much as awakens consciousness. In this way, cooperative education becomes part of this process through information, training, and education. These three realities, which complement each other, feed the action of cooperative learning.

## Information: first element of cooperative education

Information is basically the communication of news items or events that makes a complex situation intelligible. It is the collection of data, which we compare, classify, and appropriate with an eye to informing. Information does not articulate knowledge or specific know-how, or even skills. However, it indicates the first step of an essential recognition that avoids too easily giving in to propaganda. To do this, information must be the fairest, most comprehensive, most objective, most transparent, and as true as possible. One can easily grasp that education is not reduced to information because limiting one's self to information is learning facts without necessarily understanding the how and why of things and events. Information allows the person who receives it to remain neutral in the face of recognized news items and events. This informational neutrality facilitates moving from one news event to another without engaging or compromising.

## Training as *educare*



Training is generally understood to be the act of acquiring knowledge. It is an educational process that allows one to learn to do like... Training requires the bringing together and coordination of complex information with a view to comprehension and a deliberate practice. Contrary to information, training requires a certain intention, will, and commitment

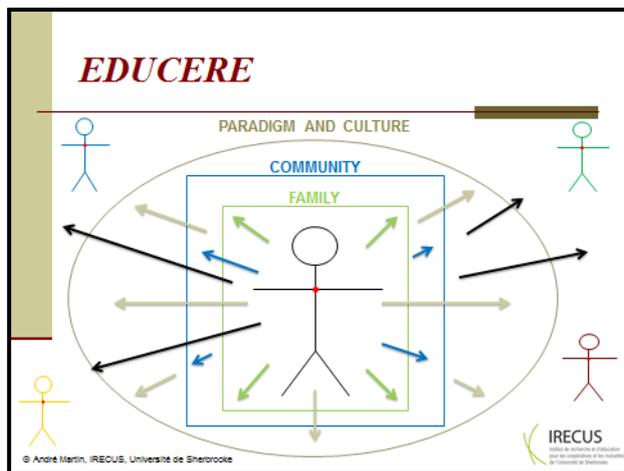
from the person.

The training concept is rooted in the Latin word *educare* which means to feed, fill, nourish, or absorb. Specifically, it is the act of receiving existing knowledge and specific values acquired in a given field. It is the act of appropriating complex knowledge, skills, and abilities, integrating, assimilating, and “digesting” the knowledge and know-how essential to the exercise of social and professional experiences, which models the ways of doing things and allows the adaptability required of a person to live and function in society or in a group. *Educare* means “to take the external shape of ...” or “to adapt to ...”. It is to be trained by someone for specific and expected tasks. This concept therefore illustrates an educational

movement that stems from the outside moving towards the subject him/herself. From external elements, we learn what was unknown to us.

Training is know-how, attitudes, behaviors, and skills developed by an individual within the framework of a program with an eye to a given choice or to professional development. Training is a specific and necessary educational field to the technical comprehension and transmission of a culture's knowledge. But let us not forget that training is but a part of the overall educational experience. If training is the action of "putting in" specific knowledge for voluntary assimilation (*educare*), education is the action of "bringing out" an individual's potentialities (*educere*). Training is to acquire technique what education is to a life considered and valued.

### Education as *educere*

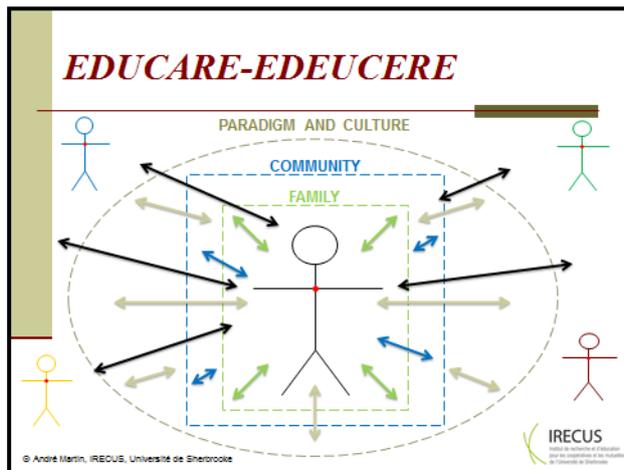


If training, understood as *educare*, is learning to do something according to standards and existing knowledge, education is more like *educere*, which means learning to be independent and responsible by ourselves... If training allows acquisition and assimilation of complex data to live in a culture, education opens to the interiority,

discernment, and critical questioning of the world to which it belongs. If *educare* forms or trains the human being, *educere* transforms him/her, opening new possibilities for one to go beyond the cultural and organizational form received.

Education as such has the distinction of being fundamentally active because it is part and parcel of self-empowerment, in line with human culture and a concrete community. *Educere*, therefore, completes the educational act itself by setting off within the person a movement that predisposes him/her to "moving beyond him/herself". It leads the person "out of him/herself". It is an educational action which creates and gives meaning to existence through the development of a person's critical and ethical judgment. If *educare* is the act of receiving knowledge and values that shapes identity, *educere* is an act that builds autonomy and personal and collective creativity achieved through empowerment, dialogue, doubt, and wonder.

## Complementarity of *educare-educere*



Distinguishing the concepts of training and education allows understanding the importance of this complementarities in reality. The act of educating is found in a continual movement, back and forth, between *educare* and *educere*, between existing traditions and a critical and personal distance, between a specific social practice and an ideal of humanity to

be conquered. *Educare* is the reign of repetition, imitation, comparison; *educere* is that of critical thinking, openness, discernment, and the responsibility for the reconstruction of personal and social experience. One reproduces according to accepted standards, while the other leads to new paths chosen by subjects made aware by current issues. This complementarity of *educare-educere* harmonizes continuity and transformation of the individual, the community and the world. (DEWEY, John, *Democracy and Education*, New York, The Free Press, 1966)

Cooperative education, in the *educare-educere* sense, should serve as a means to maintain a tradition of thought and action and to develop a higher level of human experience in the face of the requirements and needs of people and communities. This educational relationship leads a person to participate in the world's great democratic conversation. The educational process promotes the transition from a passive activity to receive (*educare*) to an active attitude to propose (*educere*). If humans must experience the social world, they must also understand, extend, and renew it with others. In fact, education has sense only in terms of active and democratic participation in the human condition. It is this ability to think for oneself and the ability to take into account the views of others that will continue the transformation of the world by the transformation of people.

### What of the cooperative educator?

Here is the role of the cooperative educator: to pass on cooperative tradition and awaken consciousness to make sure each person and each cooperative participate concretely in the great contemporary democratic dialogue in order to better understand the world in which we live, and provide the critical and necessary tools to meet the current challenges

democratically. (BAILLARGEON, Normand, *Turbulences. Essais de philosophie de l'éducation*, Presses de l'Université Laval, Québec, 2013, p. 109)

Who then is the cooperative educator? We submit the hypothesis that it is more than just an informer and more than a trainer. He/she is also the one who facilitates the awakening of consciousness and the development of critical thinking in others, that is to say, that the personal ability to change his/her views when it is important or necessary. This presupposes an openness to differences and self-criticism. The educator is one who in the educational act of *educare-educere* places the individual at the heart of this collective project and presents the cooperative as a business, a school, or a community of inquiry that all members can enter. (GAGNON, Mathieu, *Guide pratique pour l'animation d'une communauté de recherche philosophique*, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, Québec, 2014, p. 11-12)

Therefore, a cooperative constitutes, through its members, a “reservoir of ideas and intentions” that should be nurtured so that we may find together innovative solutions to the needs and necessities of the world. The cooperative, because of its democratic and collective form, benefits from an important creative potential. Member-citizens can contribute to shaping a different societal project.

The act of educating, as realized by the educator, facilitates the emergence and release of a moral subject and talents whose personal creativity must express its self. Besides the transfer of knowledge and values, education awakens personal empowerment, inner liberation, and humanization by opening up to others. In this way, cooperation not only raises the possibility of differential economic development, but also the deployment of a more penetrating awareness among people, which is the way to permanently implement, in democratic fashion, conclusions more humanly equitable and universal. Thus, cooperative education is directly related to the logic of citizenship education.

To educate in matters of liberty, equality and the dignity of women and men today is to accept the rules and regulations of democracy, as well as the many responsibilities that entails. Education in regard to the cooperative should allow for the development of virtues considered vital to the advent of a healthy democracy, that is to say, the sufficient and necessary knowledge to limit ignorance, the desired autonomy to reduce dependence, the confidence to overcome fear, and openness of mind so indispensable to eliminating indifference. In this sense, the essence of cooperative education is therefore the very essence of cooperative democracy.

This is the noble task to be performed and the teaching method to develop which is incumbent upon those who, for more than a century, have concerned themselves with cooperative education.