

The Social Economy in Ontario High School Business Textbooks

Project # 19

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Introduction

- ❑ Examined business textbooks currently used in Ontario high schools to analyze how the social economy (especially non-profit organizations and co-operatives) is portrayed in those books

- ❑ Follow-up to study conducted in 1995 by Quarter, Davidson and Richmond
 - 1995 study showed low representation of social economy in textbooks

Background and Rationale

- ❑ Social economy organizations make significant contributions to the economy and to society. Based on size and economic reach alone, co-operatives and nonprofits are a significant feature of Canada's everyday life.
 - Co-operative sector: Over 9,000 co-operatives, 155,000 employees and 190 billion in assets. 12 million Canadians belong to at least one co-operative. Long-term survival rate of co-operative enterprises is almost twice that of investor-owned companies.
 - Non-profit sector: 161,000 incorporated non-profits. \$112 billion in revenues, 2 million employees, volunteers equivalent to 1 million full-time jobs, contributes about 7.1% of the GDP; Social impact: poverty alleviation, local economy, community development, social justice, health, recreation, environment, etc.

Project Methodology

- ❑ Reviewed literature on topic
- ❑ Analyzed 22 texts in use in Ontario high school business classes in 2005
- ❑ 5 categories of texts: General Business, Economics, Entrepreneurship, Business English, Marketing
- ❑ Used categories for social economy from 1995 study
 - Co-operatives; Non-profits in public service; Mutual non-profits; Unions; Worker participation

Role and Participation of Community Partners

- ❑ On-going collaboration with the Ontario Co-operative Association
- ❑ Creation of a High School Textbooks Working Group
- ❑ Advocacy efforts with Ministry of Education

Main Findings/Deliverables

The overall representation of the social economy in high school textbooks is very low, and has decreased in the last decade.

- 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

Project outputs so far

- 1 article in *The Toronto Star*
- 3 academic conference presentations
- 1 presentation to the Minister of Education
- 1 webcast presentation

Implications for the Social Economy

One of the main purposes of education is to broaden horizons and perspectives; it is about opening up possibilities and alternatives. A low representation of the social economy in the textbooks narrows learning opportunities instead of expanding them. Students exposed to the social economy are more likely to appreciate and participate in it.

How Students Benefited from the Project

Master's student received a Graduate Assistantship to assist with project

- gained research skills
- gained presentation skills through presenting research project at several national and international conferences
- gained publishing opportunities
- trained students in other provinces on project methodology

Next Steps

Suggestions for next steps:

1. Replicate study in other jurisdictions
2. Conduct longitudinal study of high school textbooks similar to Kalmi study
3. Conduct 1995/2005 high school textbook study in 2015
4. Create network of textbook writers, educators, publishers, students, key social economy actors and public at large so that in 2015 we do not find the same situation again