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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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Education for Enterprising Citizens: perceptions of effective teaching

Ian Davies, University of York (UK)
Marta Fülöp, Jozsef Attila Tudományegyetem (Hungary)
Merryn Hutchings, University of North London (UK)
Alistair Ross, University of North London (UK)
Mihály Berkics,Institute of Psychology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Hungary)
Liz Floyd, University of North London (UK)

Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the perceptions of teachers in Hungary and England about educational practice in relation to citizenship and enterprise. Both areas (citizenship and enterprise) hold significant interest for national governments and high status international organisations. There is currently an almost overwhelming amount of interest in citizenship education (Torney-Purta, Schwille and Amadeo 1999) and various commentators have often debated the significance of schools for developing enterprise and economic advantage (e.g. Barnett 1986; Rubinstein 1993). In these circumstances it may be useful to go beyond the assertions of policy makers and to explore what the teachers, who are given the responsibility for implementing these grand designs, actually think should be done in schools with and for young people.

This paper is written in a tentative manner. The project from which this paper emerges has another year to run. The analysis presented here has been undertaken in a limited way with little attention given to the patterns across different types of respondents. This simple overview is presented only as a first reading of the data.

Do Teachers See Themselves as Enterprising Citizens?

Many of our interviewees were unsure about the contribution that could be made by teachers. There seems to be a view that teachers are not attuned to the demands of teaching enterprise:

> Teachers are bad business people. Were we not, we wouldn't be teachers…. We don't know that way of thinking, that mentality. We don't know the laws and regulations concerning business. Even if we knew, our knowledge would be like a cookbook. We would know the law but that wouldn't make us able to teach business (Hungarian teacher).

Or, in the words of a teacher from England:

> There seems to be an inverse relationship between academic excellence and money making.

There seems less fundamental opposition to citizenship education but in both countries there is some suggestion that recent reforms have made it less likely that teachers will be able to work in a straightforward way. There is a perception that teachers have been subject to widespread change that has reduced their own capacities for enterprise and in which they have been treated as less than citizens. In relation to enterprise one teacher in England commented that: "Recent changes have themselves ground teachers down so that teachers cannot nowadays be enterprising". When referring to citizenship another commented:

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> There is discernible a mental cramp afflicting many teachers. This is not surprising given the present culture of almost total governmental control of the curriculum and indeed the whole educational agenda. Ways need to be found of setting teachers more free than they have been for an unduly long period of time (England).

Curiously, it seems that the only way in which teachers are perceived as being able to progress in the profession is for a limited approach to be adopted to enterprise. This recognises education:

> as much more of a business and run on more much more managerial and business like lines compared with 20 years ago … If you want to move up you have to adopt the more managerial style. The managerial believes in uniformity, accountability, responsibility. The whole point of the enterprise is to acquire higher grades for one's clients and customers. On the other hand there is an older notion of being a teacher and believing in academic excellence, of valuing the personality of the people you teach and you teach best what you like to teach most (England).

Recent reforms, they suggest, have promoted particular characterisations of consumerist enterprise and passive citizenship that some teachers wish to resist.

How do Teachers Characterise Citizenship and Enterprise?

Citizenship is more widely interpreted than enterprise. Although many teachers find the word 'citizenship' a little off putting (it seems particularly unfamiliar in Hungarian primary schools), they nevertheless feel that there are many activities organised by the school that relate to this area. Enterprise, on the other hand, is not seen in terms of learning to be active, innovative and dynamic (i.e. enterprising). Rather it is viewed as being related (in a few cases) to fund raising, mini enterprise schemes, or, more normally, to a number of business studies lessons. One teacher commented:

> The school teaches issues to do with citizenship, but enterprise is probably done through business studies. Citizenship is whole school activity oriented, whereas enterprise is curriculum orientated (England).

The relative lack of emphasis on enterprise seemed particularly apparent in the primary school context with one fairly common response being:

> Enterprise has connotations of the business world and certainly in the primary school we don't give time over to such considerations. (England).

These comments may hide, however, the tensions that lie within these areas. Three difficulties emerge from an initial analysis of the data.

- *Low status versus high significance*

Citizenship and enterprise are seen as having low status within the school and yet, possibly in England if not in Hungary, be regarded as the central purpose of education. Teachers are drafted into the citizenship timetable when their own specialist subject has left some slight availability. Little or no assessment takes place and qualifications are not normally awarded. And yet, in England, many teachers feel that "citizenship" is, as, one teacher commented, "the watchword for everything".

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- *Political imperatives and educational uncertainty*

It is to be welcomed that policy recommendations include the proposal to aim "at no less than a change in the political culture of this country [UK] both nationally and locally" (QCA 1998, p.4). However, there is as yet no widespread agreement about the way to teach citizenship. Of course, it would be unrealistic and unhelpful to expect complete uniformity of perspective. However, there is a need for some greater clarity if we are not to disguise educational action as political rhetoric.

- *The promotion of consensus and the acceptance of diversity.*

All teachers were very careful to stress their acceptance of a diverse society. However, it is very difficult indeed to specify the acceptable boundaries that could be used in classroom discussion. The responses that have been given to the dilemmas as part of this project may be helpful for determining something about these parameters. But thus far we have only an academic elaboration of the difficulties (e.g. Kymlicka 199 and Dahl 1985) and some limited insights into the nature of teachers' thinking about citizenship (Davies, Gregory and Riley 1999).

What Strategies are Recommended for the Teaching of Citizenship and Enterprise?

The most common response from teachers about the way in which citizenship is approached is by means of the ethos of the school. One commented: "Citizenship is just a word that has been taken over and used to commandeer what we have been doing for years" (England). In Hungary many feel that they have been teaching citizenship for some time (although it has not been described as such). Teachers referred to assemblies, how children are expected to behave and involvement with an 'Investment in people' programme. A number of teachers referred to the importance of citizenship being 'caught and not taught'.

> I think a bad school, operating in negative context, and I've seen many schools like that, yes, they are the very opposite of a decent society. They are biased and unfair unkind places and they can favour bright children against not so bright children, boys against girls and they can embrace the world of inequality and yes, it can be a nightmare. (England).

For classroom teaching respondents from both countries gave an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the use of dilemmas to promote citizenship and enterprise education. Some even said that using dilemmas is the only effective way to teach because simply telling the students about good citizenship would be inappropriate. "Citizenship" one teacher said "is importantly about empowering people". Role-play, circle time and debates were mentioned as relevant strategies.

However, teachers did raise a number of complex issues about the use of dilemmas.

Firstly, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the selection of dilemmas. Dilemmas may be seen to be 'about' different things. Many of the respondents characterised dilemmas as moral issues. Furthermore, the level of controversy attached to these issues seemed to be perceived in different ways. For a statement to be viewed as controversial, the following may be relevant:

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- perceived importance (i.e. an issue of fundamental national importance, such as defence, is likely to be seen as being more controversial than a leisure pursuit such as football)
- the extent to which proposals are made as opposed to ideas being described (e.g. a statement about the age of consent is often seen as less controversial than a proposal to change the age of consent)
- the attachment to a view by a majority of people (i.e. minority views are often seen as lacking real controversy)
- whether a statement is seen as being one that divides a community (see Stradling 1984) on the basis of alternative values.

This is very significant: it will determine whether an issue is discussed and if so in what way. A teacher can choose issues that are more or less controversial among a certain group of people and discuss them in a way that heightens or reduces potential flashpoints.

Secondly, the level of perceived interest from students is not entirely clear. There is perhaps more interest in dilemmas from secondary school students. With students aged less than 13 there is the possibility that general moral issues (e.g. a problem about honesty) is more engaging than something related more precisely to citizenship or enterprise.

Thirdly, the perceived level of student interest between the 2 areas of citizenship and enterprise may vary between Hungary and England. In the latter citizenship is possibly perceived as more interesting than enterprise. In Hungary, although there is some interest in citizenship issues, there may be more immediate interest in enterprise if it is seen to relate principally to financial matters.

Fourthly, although there are some similarities, the way in which teachers felt that issues could be discussed varied between countries. Almost all teachers responded by saying that their aim in discussing issues would be to encourage pupils to consider their own position and to develop their own viewpoint. One quotation from a Hungarian teacher represents this widespread position:

> I would never teach answers. I would teach problems. … You can only clarify as a teacher what the kid's viewpoints could be. You can make him realise why he decided in that way and you can make him take the responsibility his decision implies. (Hungary)

The above, however, does not suggest that the techniques for debating these issues are straightforward. There is disagreement about whether a teacher should present his or her own view in a debate with some interesting differences between the teachers from England and Hungary. Very generally, those from Hungary seem less concerned than those from England to hide their own views in the classroom.

Those who argue that they would not give their own view when debating issues with students do so for a number of reasons. Firstly, some teachers suggest that responses to dilemmas cannot be quickly and easily characterised as 'a view'. A number of teachers rejected the simple choices presented in the dilemmas. A minority claimed when discussing the issues that "There is no right or wrong way" (England). As such, the difficulties of developing a response seems to suggest that our question about whether

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or not they would present their own opinion to a class is for some not appropriate. Secondly, the perceived influence of the teacher is an important consideration. But even when the level of influence is seen differently, the need to hide one's own view is expressed. When influence is perceived as being low:

> What does the kid see at home? What do I tell him? Something completely different. He will discredit one of the two. Probably not what his parents tell him but what I do. Because I am the stupid teacher who is speaking nonsense and cannot even maintain a decent standard of living. (Hungary).

When influence is perceived as being high (in the sense that pupils will follow the ideas given by the teacher) primary school teachers advise caution in revealing one's own views:

> You've got to be careful in the teaching situation Children take you literally. (England).

Some of the Hungarian teachers, although aiming to reveal their views ultimately, would try to keep their views to themselves until the end of a debate, feeling that this would allow pupils the opportunity to discuss issues freely.

When influence is seen as being high but in a counter productive form caution is again needed:

> We often try and tell them right and wrong but it doesn't work. (England).

The third reason given for views to be hidden relates to the teachers' feeling that their own unacceptable ideas and practices need to be disguised. However, interestingly enough, the majority of those Hungarian teachers who gave not normative solutions to the dilemmas would not hide their ideas, because they think that it would not be honest and students would anyway sense that they are hiding something. Only four teachers from the Hungarian provincial town suggested that they would not report the student who was found to be taking drugs but would then not wish to be seen as someone who would not keep the law. From the same perspective a teacher from England who said that she would pay a 'registration fee' in order to secure a business contract would be careful not to let pupils know that she would do that. This response begins to highlight the importance of contextual considerations for teachers. The more serious the issue, the less likely that an 'unacceptable' view will be expressed. As one teacher from England said: "I think there is morality and pragmatism". He explained that human rights abuses would be taken very seriously but issues about traffic lights would be seen less seriously. This point about context also applied to cases where the person felt that the issue would be one that the school regarded as serious and that, as a professional, one had to follow general expectations. Other matters relating to context that were raised included the sense that older pupils who enjoy a positive professional relationship with the teacher would be able to engage in more open debate.

The teachers who suggested that it would be acceptable for one's own views to be presented were similarly concerned to promote the pupils' capacity to think independently. Firstly, a very small minority said that teachers could present their own views as long as all opinions were represented. This may reflect the legislative position in England in which teachers are required to ensure a balanced presentation of opposing views but it does seem a rather unrealistic appreciation of the nature of debate. It is

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unlikely that all views could be represented. Although a two-sided debate is often conducted in the media in a gladiatorial contest it seems unlikely to have much pedagogical worth. (See alternative ways of proceeding in Morton 1996). The second argument that was used to suggest a teacher should express her own view relates to the impossibility of hiding one's own position and the need to elaborate in the interests of informed debate. One teacher explained:

> Early on in my career I came to the conclusion that you could not teach economics without having a political bias and that it is better to explain what it is and let them make the judgement. Make it overt to the kids that it is one [i.e. a bias] rather than pretend that there isn't one. I first started teaching during the miners' strike and teaching economics in Dorset when your Dad's on strike at home is tricky without letting the kids know about it. (England).

The majority of Hungarian teachers agreed with this more open position and disagreed amongst themselves only in terms of the point at which a view would be revealed. Some preferred to engage in open debate from the outset while others would prefer to highlight their views at the end of a debate.

It seems that there is some common purpose intended among these rather disparate views. Teachers want pupils to be able to think meaningfully so as to develop their own decisions and to be able to contribute to enhanced democracy of which they themselves are a part.

Conclusion

Citizenship for most teachers is seen positively and broadly; enterprise is seen less positively and is more narrowly associated with financial matters. Teachers seem to have general (although potentially contradictory) goals; focus on the development of an appropriate school ethos and classroom climate; and are reluctant to impose their own views. The current rather narrow characterisation of enterprise could be explored further with teachers. It is perhaps necessary to allow teachers more space to consider the meaning of some of the implicit tensions in debates about citizenship. Perhaps more work is needed on the realisation of an acceptable ethos. Investigations into the nature of issues based teaching could be explored (Evans, Newmann and Warren Saxe (1996)). This will certainly not solve all the difficult issues mentioned here but these conclusions may suggest, provisionally, routes for further thinking.

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