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## **The responses of English and Hungarian teachers to some hypothetical dilemmas concerning citizenship**

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### **Introduction**

This paper reports on one aspect of a joint project between researchers in Hungary and England (see also Davies *et al.* and Fulop *et al.* in this volume). The aim of the project is to compare the perceptions of teachers in the two countries of the interactions and overlaps between citizenship and enterprise education. In initial discussions we found that members of the research team had varied ideas about the meaning of terms such as citizenship, competition, enterprise and entrepreneurship. We suspected, then, that these terms would also have different meanings for teachers in the two countries, and set out to explore these. We also decided to investigate the differences between responses of teachers in the capitals (London and Budapest) and in smaller university cities (York and Szeged).

The interview schedule started by posing five practical dilemmas that citizens may be faced with. These involve balancing the needs of the individual, other known individuals, and the public. Teachers were asked to respond to these before a more general discussion of citizenship and enterprise education. This paper focuses only on responses to the dilemmas.

### **Previous research using dilemmas**

The best known example of the use of hypothetical dilemmas is the work of Kohlberg (1971). He categorised children's responses into a number of levels of moral development. At Level One considerations of personal interest dominated; the child obeyed in order to avoid punishment. At Level Two there were some notions of reciprocity. By Level Three the child claimed that obeying the law was necessary to win the approval of the social group – being good in order to be liked. Level Four involved a wider notion of society, and of principles of equality before the law and equality of opportunity. Level Five involves truly autonomous moral reasoning based on the principle of maximising human happiness, and by Level Six absolute principles of justice prevail. In Kohlberg's analysis only a handful of humans have ever reached Level Six.

While our research project is not in any way trying to categorise the responses of teachers into stages of moral development, some of the criticisms that have been levelled at Kohlberg also apply to our research. Rosen pointed out that responses are inevitably limited because these dilemmas are hypothetical:

Moral dilemmas are real problems, faced by real people in a real setting. It is no test of an ethical theory, or of the moral reasoning of people for that matter, to pose artificial problems. The problems, note, are not artificial because they are

fictional. They are artificial because they do not represent realistic situations with all their complexity. (Rosen 1980, p. 259)

In the same way we acknowledge that teachers' responses do not necessarily give any indication of how they would behave in real life. But they do show the way that in an interview situation, they construct the law, notions of social justice, and themselves as teachers and citizens.

Many of the criticisms of Kohlberg's work relate to his decisions about what the 'best' moral decisions involve. Gilligan (1977) argues that elevating 'justice' to the top of the list is unsatisfactory; the principle of caring for others is equally important – and is a trait more commonly shown by women. But, she argues, the posing of hypothetical dilemmas is not an adequate way of finding out about people's feelings for one another; respondents have no emotions towards the characters in the dilemma. Several of the teachers we interviewed indicated that in real life their decision might depend on the relationships involved, rather than the moral principles. Gilligan's arguments also suggest that women may use rather different principles from men in their responses to dilemmas. This is something we can consider in our data.

### The sample

The full sample interviewed was 20 teachers in each location (London, Budapest, York and Szeged): that is, 80 in all. We aimed to include teachers in both primary and secondary schools and men and women teachers. Details are given below:

	London	York	Budapest	Szeged	total
primary women	9	4	8	10	31
primary men	1	0	2	1	4
secondary women	7	7	6	3	23
secondary men	3	9	4	6	22

### Findings

The data has been analysed first by counting how many teachers proposed each course of action, and then by categorising the arguments they put forward. The categories were formed from inspection of the data, and this was done independently by English and Hungarian members of the research team, each focusing on their respective sections of the data. This was done in order to avoid the imposition of alien categories on either set of data. It is interesting to note that some categories that were frequent in Hungary did not appear at all in the English analysis, and vice versa.

This paper offers only a preliminary report focusing on the most common responses, and on broad differences between groups of teachers. We found some contrasts in responses between cities, and by gender. However, there was a broad similarity between responses from primary and secondary teachers. We have not yet been able to analyse responses by age of teacher. Here each dilemma is written as it was for the teachers, followed by main findings related to that dilemma.

### Dilemma One

*After considerable debate a law has been passed in your country that aims to reduce drug taking among young people. It is now illegal if anyone sees a young person taking drugs and then does not report that person to the police. If convicted of the crime, the young person would have a criminal record. That criminal record would mean that it would be very difficult and perhaps impossible to gain entry to university and gain a good job. You are a teacher. You see one of your most promising pupils at the end of term party taking illegal drugs. You know that taking drugs is self-destructive and if you do not report him you will also be breaking the law.*

*Do you report the young person to the police? Why/why not?*

This was the dilemma for which responses showed the greatest contrasts, particularly in the English data. Not one of the London teachers said that they would definitely report the pupil to the police, while almost half the York teachers said that they would do so.

	London	York	Budapest	Szeged
would report drug taking	0	9	1	5
would not report	10	9	19	15
it depends ....	10	2	0	0

The teachers in the third category said that their response would depend on the precise circumstances. Regular drug-takers and dealers were more likely to be reported, as were those taking hard drugs.

The overall picture shows that those in the capital cities, Budapest and London, were very much less likely to consider reporting the pupil. These differences may perhaps be seen as typical of the contrasting culture of a capital and a regional city, or, in the English case, of the more multicultural population of London. It is possible that a higher proportion of London teachers may have had experience of pupils taking drugs, or have taken them themselves.

Overall women were far more likely to say that they would report drug-taking; 22% of women interviewed said that they would report the student, and a further 18% would do so only in particular circumstances. In contrast, only 8% of the men would report the student, and a further 11% might do so.

A number of teachers said explicitly that they disagreed with the law, or that it was a bad law, and they were therefore prepared to break it; twelve in London, nine in Budapest, six in Szeged and only one in York. Two of the London teachers claimed that they would campaign to change the law. In contrast, six of those in York who said they would report the student argued that it is important to keep the law; two of these said that this was particularly important for teachers, who should set an example. Twenty Hungarian teachers also referred to the importance of keeping the law – but the majority of these then claimed that they would break it. The reason for this appeared to be that they thought it was an ineffective way of dealing with this particular problem.

The preferred course of action for over 85% of teachers in London and Hungary was to offer other means of support, generally talking to the pupil, but in many cases also talking to the pupil's parents or advising or arranging medical help or counselling. In contrast, only 30% of teachers in York suggested ways of supporting the pupil.

### Dilemma Two

*You are a very busy person who owns a business employing 1500 people. The level of unemployment in your local area is high. You have a vacancy for a computer operator. You know that there are well-qualified people who would apply for the job if you advertised. You are wondering however, if you should go to the trouble and expense of advertising and interviewing given that a member of your family may want the job. Your relative is not well qualified.*

*Do you advertise the job? Why/why not?*

The responses to this dilemma showed very much more similarity. The vast majority said that they would advertise the job (and some added that the relative could apply).

	London	York	Budapest	Szeged
would advertise the job	19	16	17	19
would employ the family member	0	3	3	1
it depends ....	1	1	0	0

About half the respondents (in both countries) talked about the importance for the company of having a well-qualified worker. A small minority referred to the awkward position that might result from employing the relative.

Only one London teacher even entertained the idea of offering the relative the job, and 40% referred explicitly to equality of opportunity or social justice. This may reflect the very great prominence accorded to equal opportunity policies by the Inner London Education Authority in the 1980s, and the strong tradition thus created.

A quarter of the Hungarian teachers, and a fifth of those in York, argued that one should help one's relatives, and suggested other ways to meet the needs of the family member (e.g. by suggesting or arranging for training, employing in another capacity). Family interests were only mentioned by two London teachers. Possibly family relationships are less close for those who have chosen to live in this very large capital city.

### Dilemma Three

*Imagine a low-income country called Tibia that is experiencing difficulties in repaying loans received from overseas countries. There is great poverty in parts of Tibia. You are the Prime Minister of a high-income country and have been asked by an international organisation to cancel the very substantial debt that your country is owed by Tibia. It is suggested to you that cancellation of the debt would allow for the improvement of prosperity in Tibia. You promise to cancel the debt and this promise is to be formally approved in the near future. You then hear that a war has broken out between Tibia and a neighbouring country. It is alleged that human rights abuses are occurring on both sides of the conflict.*

*Do you as Prime Minister continue to make moves to cancel the debt? Why/why not?*

This was the dilemma that teachers felt was furthest from their personal experience. Responses were broadly similar; however, whereas 20% of English teachers said they would not cancel the debt, over 40% of Hungarian teachers made this claim.

	London	York	Budapest	Szeged
cancel the debt	13	11	11	10
do not cancel the debt	3	5	7	10
delay decision/other	4	4	2	0

Similar arguments came up in all four cities: the importance of keeping promises; the need to help the population of Tibia; the pros and cons of seeking guarantees that the money would be used for humanitarian purposes, or setting other conditions on its use; and the need to gather more information. Hungarian teachers were more likely to say that the Prime Minister should consider his own country's interests; they were also more likely to talk about the various constraints on the Prime Minister's decision making. The English teachers were more likely to talk about bringing international pressure to bear on Tibia.

#### Dilemma Four

*You are driving your car along a dual carriageway and you are in a hurry. You are using the right hand lane that is reserved for those cars that will go straight ahead. The traffic light turns red. You need to go straight ahead but you are now part of a long queue. There are plenty of cars in front of you and it is not certain that even at the next green light you will be able to pass the crossing. You notice that there is only one car waiting at the red light in the left hand lane. That lane is reserved for cars turning to the left. If you were to move into the left hand lane and if you were fast enough you would be able to go straight ahead in front of all the cars waiting in the queue. If you did this you could continue your trip without losing a lot of time.*

*Do you stay in the queue? Why/why not?*

Teachers recognised this dilemma about driving behaviour as one that they sometimes faced, but a number explicitly claimed that it was not a 'moral' dilemma.

	London	York	Budapest	Szeged
stay in queue	15	13	16	18
jump the queue	2	5	4	2
it depends ....	4	2	0	0

The vast majority of teachers claimed that they would stay in the queue. There was a marked gender difference in English responses: nearly 50% of men teachers, but only 7%

of women, said that they would jump the queue and that they regularly did so. In Hungary there was a similar, but much less strong, difference by gender.

The reasons most often put forward in Hungary were the risk of accidents (70%) and the need to follow the rules (55%). In London the most common reason offered (by 50%) was that the respondent found it very annoying that other people jumped traffic queues, so they made a point of not doing so.

#### Dilemma Five

*You have slowly built up a small computer software business. You and your colleagues have devoted a lot of time and effort to the development of a particular software package that you hope to be able to sell to a larger company. However you know that several other firms have tendered for the new contract. You have had a number of very positive meetings with the representative of this large company and you feel confident about the outcome. Then you are told that if you pay a 'registration fee' to the representative of the large company the contract will definitely be yours.*

*Do you pay the 'registration fee' or not? Why/why not?*

Most teachers found this dilemma difficult to resolve, as it was not one that they themselves were likely to encounter.

	London	York	Budapest	Szeged
pay the registration fee	2	6	4	8
don't pay the fee	11	7	15	11
other action / don't know	7	7	1	1

Eleven London teachers, but only six in York, identified the demand to pay a registration fee as morally or legally wrong (a bribe, corruption, not ethical, equality of opportunities). A high proportion of Hungarian teachers also referred to morality and honour, but several of these concluded that they would, nevertheless, pay the fee. A third of the respondents referred to concerns about the company's workers: in Hungary and York this was more often used as a reason for paying the fee (i.e. other workers' livelihoods would be threatened if the company did not get the contract), whereas teachers in London talked about the risk of taking illegal action or dealing with untrustworthy people.

#### **Further questions about the dilemmas**

After the teachers had responded to all the dilemmas we asked them what kinds of problems the dilemmas addressed, which they found most familiar, and which were hardest to answer. There was general agreement that these were moral dilemmas, with the exception of the traffic queue. The dilemmas about international debt and the company registration fee were seen as most remote from everyday experience, while drug-taking was often cited as the hardest, because it was the sort of dilemma a teacher might really face, and brought in issues of professionalism as well as morality.

Next teachers were asked how their personal standpoint related to what they might teach to their pupils. There was a considerable range of responses here. Many teachers argued that in teaching they would not put their own views forward at all, but would simply remain neutral. Others said that their role was to offer moral guidance. In some cases they saw this as problematic, because they would have to tell pupils that the 'right' course of action was not the one that they themselves would follow. In contrast, a few claimed that they were well able to act as moral leaders: one York male teacher said: 'One of the things that I pride myself doing in this job is that I am a person who has a reasonably high moral standard and that I am passing this on to those I teach'.

## Discussion

In a short paper it is only possible to touch the surface of the analysis of teachers' responses to hypothetical dilemmas, and to outline the broad differences found between groups. At a later stage we will be able to analyse in more depth the different discourses that the teachers used. Although the samples are small, this paper has shown that there were considerable differences between men and women, between capital and provincial city, and between countries. Further investigation is needed to identify the reasons for these. For example, it is possible that the sample of teachers in London were younger than those in York, and this, rather than location, may explain some differences in the findings.

The next step is then to consider the implications of these differences, for teaching of citizenship and enterprise education, and more generally for creating dialogues between educators in different European countries.

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