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Educating for competitiveness and entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Modern forms of citizenship are embedded in a nation's societal and economic context that is based on democracy and capitalist market economy in most European countries. For Hungary being a relatively new democracy with its 20 years of democratic traditions promoting fair competition and entrepreneurship is of crucial importance.

Teachers play an important socializing role in educating the next generation. However, previous research shows that Hungarian teachers were found to be significantly more opposed towards enterprise than were teachers from England (Fülöp, Davies, Berkics, Hutchings, Ross, 2004). The goal of the present study was to reveal how Hungarian teachers view the role of schools in preparing students for competition and for entrepreneurship in life. Teachers were also asked if they see a relationship between competition and business and about their perception of the extent individual entrepreneurs contribute to common good. According to our results, from the teachers' point of view there is a very strong and complex relation between the examined phenomena: competition and entrepreneurship. Both of them are valued in a rather ambivalent way and in teachers' opinion the institutional socialisation might be insufficient in both cases. It also seems to be a well based hypothesis that there is a significant tension between the phenomena of citizenship and enterprise.

Keywords: competition, enterprise, entrepreneurship education, public interest, Hungary

Introduction

Nowadays, democracy and capitalist market economy exist in most European countries therefore cooperation, competition and entrepreneurial skills can be key-factors in becoming successful citizens in this social context.

The European Union's strategies (i.e. EU2020, Lisbon Strategy) and especially the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (EIP) stress the importance of development of entrepreneurial culture through fostering entrepreneurial 'mindset', entrepreneurship competencies and awareness of career opportunities (European Commission, 2010).

Good entrepreneurs are usually characterized in academic literature as risk-taking, innovative, dynamic persons, who can deal with challenges and reorganizations of environment (Gartner, 1988). They actively perceive their surroundings to obtain information and observe opportunities in the market and at the same time they are able to act according to these opportunities (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). They may have a higher than average achievement motivation and activity level and they are permanently seeking out new opportunities, innovative solutions and business growth (Cromie, 2000).

According to EU guidelines, the development of this complex set of citizen skills at a community level has essential importance.

In line with political initiatives a number of authors refer to the rapidly growing interest in entrepreneurship education at all levels of the education system (Rizza and Varum, 2011, Klein and Bullock, 2006). The effectiveness and the quality of entrepreneurship education, however, vary throughout the EU. For instance, in Finland, a country, which is usually thought to be an example to be followed in the field of entrepreneurship education, on one hand, teachers are familiar with entrepreneurship education, but on the other hand, as the results indicate, there is a remarkable lack of cohesion in definitions of basic concepts and even in aims and results (Ikävalko, Ruskovaara, and Seikkula-Leino, 2009).

In Hungary there is an ongoing large-scale social, political reorganization. The economical, political and social “shift” in Hungary more than 20 years ago led to a changing concept of citizenship and entrepreneurship. Ideologically banned phenomena like competition and enterprise became highly desired and necessary at almost all levels of society (Fülöp and Berkics, 2002). Due to these turbulent transitions democratic traditions supporting fair competition and entrepreneurship would have basic importance.

In the transition period institutional socialization and of course teachers as the agents of change has played a role of high-concern. However, previous research highlighted that Hungarian teachers were significantly more opposed towards enterprise than were teachers from a Western society, from England (Fülöp et al, 2004). English teachers attributed to entrepreneurs characteristics like meritocracy, pragmatism, responsibility towards the wider community, what harmonizes with Stephen’s (2003) definition of a good citizen. He says that the process of becoming a useful member of society requires consciousness, responsibility and respect for rules and others. In contrast to their English counterparts, Hungarian teachers connected to the representation of entrepreneurs morality at the first place and they perceived the business world as vitally corrupt and immoral.

In reflection of previous results Hungarian teachers seems to have a basically ambivalent view on competition, too. There are several dimensions along which they differentiate between beneficial and harmful forms of competition and morality also in this case is an overemphasized part of representations (Smart, Fülöp and Pergar Kuscer, 2006).

Teachers in Hungarian society has had to face the straining challenge of shifting their whole educational attitude and at the same time they have to cope with strong disillusionment stemming from decreasing social appreciation and their deteriorating financial state.

Even though the Hungarian National Core Curriculum contains basic initiatives in connection with competition and entrepreneurship education, it seems to be a problematic and confused situation about what should be exactly taught, what type of citizen society and economy need and presumably there is no clear consensus about the

definitive and systematic role played by teachers and school system in the institutional socialization process of competition and entrepreneurship.

The main aims of the present study were then to reveal how Hungarian teachers view the role of schools in preparing students for competition in life and for entrepreneurship in adulthood; how satisfied they are with the current effectiveness of institutional socialization process in these fields; what kind of concepts they have about the phenomena of competition and entrepreneurship; and what can be the link between these phenomena and public interest in their opinion.

Participants

Our sample consisted of 264 Hungarian teachers mostly from primary school (51%) and from secondary education (47%). Only the minority of subjects taught in college (1%) or in nursery school (1%). The average age of teachers was 42.9 years ($SD= 7.7$) and the age range altered between 23 and 73 years. The majority of the sample (199 persons) was female (75%).

Method

We used a qualitative paper and pencil method. A questionnaire was given to the subjects, which contained questions about demographic data and open-ended questions in relation to competition, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education. The research questions were the following:

1. *In Your opinion what kind of role does school have in preparing students for competition in life?*
2. *What do you think, to what extent Hungarian school is able to prepare students for entrepreneurship and business-life?*
3. *Can You see any kind of relation between competition and entrepreneurship?*
4. *What do You think, to what extent entrepreneurs take into account public interest in nowadays Hungary?*

The free-descriptive answers were content analysed and categorized and qualitatively different categories were set up.

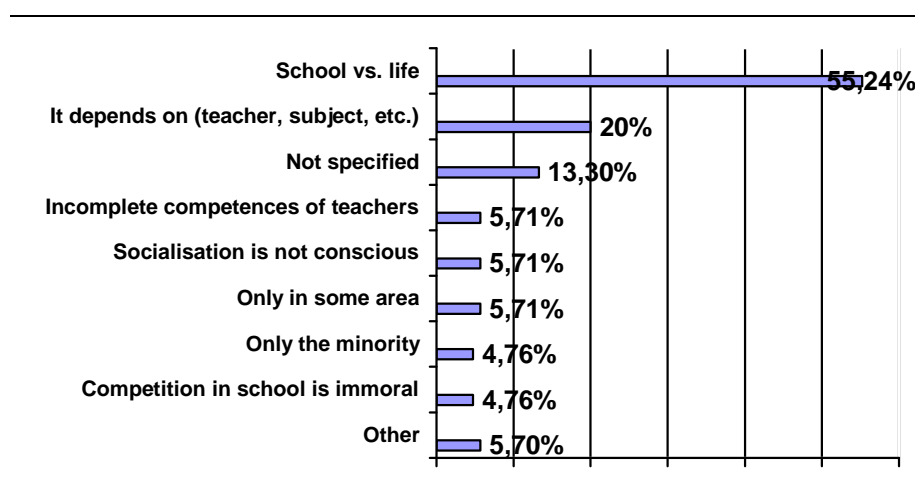
Results

The role of school in preparing for competition in life

In connection with the first question, it is a significant issue whether Hungarian teachers think that preparing students for competition in life is also a responsibility of school and teachers. On the basis of our results, we can declare that the overwhelming majority of Hungarian teachers in our sample obviously think that school should prepare students for competition in life. 97% of the sample referred to the functions of school in this field.

However, only 56% of respondents think that school is able to fulfil this function. According to the opinion of one third of the sample, preparing students for competition in life is or would be a responsibility of school, as well, but school can serve this role only to a limited extent and additional 8% of subjects stated that school is not able to serve this role at all. The answers highlighted a number of reasons, why these two critical groups are not satisfied with the effectiveness of institutional socialisation.

Diagram 1: School serves the function of preparing students for competition in life only to a limited extent/not at all – explanations (N=105)



More than half (55, 24%) of the respondents, who think that preparing for competition is insufficient in school, referred to the sharp contrast between school environment and real life. This is the most robust category from all. They emphasised the significant and essential differences between the 'moral', 'humanistic' and 'healthy' competition in school and the 'immoral', 'harsh' and 'unhealthy' competition in real life.

Table 1: Contradictory view of competition in school and in real life

Competition in school	Competition in life
Competing in conformity with the rules	Irregular competition
Fair	Unfair
Moral	Immoral
Humanistic	Dogs eat dogs; Law of the jungle
Sterile	Brutal
Meritocratic	Success is related to maneuvering for good positions
Healthy	Unhealthy

Learning/Knowledge are values	Learning/Knowledge does not mean too much
Protecting shell	Fights, battlefield
Small stakes	Stakes have existential importance
Theory	Pragmatism
Transmission of knowledge	Application of Knowledge

Moreover, they think that there is a huge gap between knowledge, experiences, which can be obtained in Hungarian schools and competences like aptitude, self-efficacy, confidence and pragmatic approach needed in adult life.

Nowadays, school prepares for life only a little, the curriculum is too theoretical. (Female, 48 years, high school)

School does not prepare students for this [competition in life] adequately because school never allows brutality. (Female, 46 years, primary school)

I see contradiction between the real life's so called 'dogs eat dogs' world and the classic socializing system of schools based on humanistic values. (Female, 45 years, primary school)

Overall, 3 main elements of these contradictory views can be derived from the descriptive answers. First, they can see school as a protective shell in contrast with the brutal outside world. Second, they think that Hungarian curriculum is too theoretical and in this sense school may be alien from the expectations of real world. Third, in their opinion classic moral values represented in school are not reflecting the changing morality of Hungarian society.

It [school] prepares students for the fights of life only a little. Rather, school has a role of protecting and worrying about them... Partly it is bad because it creates an artificial environment, a too ideal environment for students. (Female, 52 years, high school)

School does not prepare for competition in life in any way, because knowledge obtained in school is only 'knowledge of textbooks'. Competition in life requires much more (prompt recognition of the features of a given situation, aptitude, inborn intelligence, social status). (Female, 56 years, primary school)

I think if school emphasized classical intellectual and moral values, it is not really able to prepare students for competition raging in present life. (Female, 37 years, primary school)

Teachers in these groups seem to have an ambivalent and considerably negative representation about 'outside world' and competition 'out there'. It is a serious question how they can socialize students for competition in life constructively and to what extent

they are motivated to socialize for competition at all in contrary to their negative opinion.

Looking at the rest of categories, 20% of respondents in these groups mentioned that the efficiency of socialization for competition depends on different factors of school environment like the given subject, the ability and personality of student, the type of school, and of course the teachers themselves. 13.3% did not explain their opinion in detail and there were also some rather marginal categories (each under 10%). Some respondents mentioned the incomplete competencies of teachers (i.e. they are not appropriate role models), others also referred to the problem that preparing is sufficient only in a limited area and in certain subjects (e.g. through academic competitions). Some teacher stated that only the minority can profit from academic competitions and some even think that competition in school is immoral and can teach only this negative approach.

Nevertheless, the majority of teachers presume that school serves a great number of functions in preparing for competition.

31% of respondents mentioned that competition in school can contribute to the students' future goal achievement, because it teaches how to cope with success and failure; how to strive for something, how to make an effort to reach one's goals or what is needed for goal achievement. Students can experience that standing up and continue is possible after a failure or losing and it is also a chance to acquire strategies of focusing powers.

Students can become familiar with the phenomena of striving for something and with the experience of winning and losing. They can feel satisfaction and the happiness of 'I achieved something', 'I overcome my weaknesses'. They can get to know the connections between talent, hard work and persistence. (Female, 43 years, primary school)

Almost one forth (23.44%) of the sample think, that students can gain routine in competition and better adaptability to extreme situations. Competition in school means a great possibility to train themselves and to cope constructively with stress and frustration.

Its [school] main task would be to make pupils be accustomed to the stress of competitions, to develop their failure tolerance. To make them meet with the difficulties of contests. (Female, 45 years, primary school)

Morality might be an important category in relation to competition in school context, as well. More than 18% of teachers said that competition in school can have crucial importance because it can represent moral values as a model to be followed and it can promote fairness and meritocracy. From this point of view, our present results in connection with the central role of morality are in harmony with previous results among Hungarian teachers (like Fülöp et al, 2004).

The function of school is to acquaint students with the rules of fair competition and to get them to keep the rules in competitive situations in school... (Female, 37 years, primary school)

In addition, subjects often mentioned that competition can develop expertise and competencies in a particular field or in the field of competitive skills (14.45%), and it can contribute to the development of personality through enrichment of self-knowledge and confidence (13.67%). Competition can have a significant impact on social relations in a positive way (10.94%), because it can strengthen group relations, tolerance and acceptance, but students can have also the opportunity to win their right positions in the peer group during competition. Competition and competitive spirit in school also might mean a long-term driving force for students (9.77%).

What is very important, only 2.34% thought that school plays an exclusively negative role in preparing students for competition in life. However, teachers are not unanimously satisfied with effectiveness or the methods of socialization they really think, that school has to take responsibility for this unavoidable role.

Entrepreneurship education

In terms of entrepreneurship the views are much more skeptical. According to 20 % of teachers, school does not develop business skills at all and additional 73% think that school prepares for entrepreneurship only to a limited extent.

The most dominant category of explanations of this unfavorable situation is that the quality of socialization depends on the type of school. E.g. they think that vocational secondary schools or special colleges can fulfill their function but especially primary schools and secondary schools cannot or even they do not have to because it is not their initial task! This general belief (mentioned by almost half of the respondents) suggests that only given students need entrepreneurial competencies and skills. This view is opposed to all economical remarks and political initiatives, which stress, that many of competencies identified as being of critical importance in the future of work are indeed elements of a skill-set identified as entrepreneurial mindset. In today's international network organizations based on innovation, entrepreneurial skill-set may become a standard expectation for workforce (Bamford, 2000). Hence, the somewhat rigid approach of Hungarian teachers can have serious economical effects.

Also in this section they contrasted the school environment with real life (23.5%), what confirms the relative importance of this element of their representation.

Relationship between competition and enterprise

The answers for the third question ('Can You see any kind of relation between competition and entrepreneurship?') definitely show that competition and entrepreneurship are closely interconnected phenomena from the teachers point of view, 89.76% of them obviously can see a complex and strong relation between them.

E.g. they mentioned competition between enterprises; the opinion that competitive attitude is a must for an entrepreneur; or that similar personality factors are needed in a competitive situation and during running a business. They also referred to the fact that competition is needed for survival or success of an enterprise, and moreover, some of them defined enterprise as competition, etc.

The entrepreneur, who can compete well, is the one who will survive. Hence, it would be important for a person starting to run an enterprise to know the 'science of competition'. (Female, 48 years, high school)

Yes, an enterprise, as a matter of fact, is competition for costumers, profit and better positions. (Female, 44 years, primary school)

Competitive spirit is a must for an entrepreneur. They have to accept contest and fight bravely. (Female, 42 years, high school)

We can presume that the manifest connection between these two phenomena can lead to the ambivalent evaluation of enterprise and entrepreneurship, too.

Entrepreneurs and public interest

According to the opinion of almost 90% of the sample, entrepreneurs do not take public interest into account or they consider it only to a very limited extent. In the mirror of previous results (Fülöp et al, 2004) it is not surprising. Usually, they cannot see any kind of possible connection between entrepreneurship and public good. E.g. only two teachers mentioned that enterprises are based upon public interest. Partly it is probably because they even cannot imagine someone in a competitive context – as entrepreneur – to cooperate or to reduce the impact of the hypothesized clear self-interest governing his behavior.

I have a very negative opinion about this. Entrepreneurs today – with rare exceptions, 1-2% - are concerned exclusively about themselves. Not one or only a few care about their employees or their environment. If they care, it is only because this act means benefits for themselves... I think it is natural that someone works for a better life. But not at all price or 'anybodyprice'... All the problems of our little country can be derived from this: corruption, lack of understanding, accusations, problems of privatization and I could recount the numerous negative consequences from morning till night, what we succeeded to collect during this short period. Just in short: entrepreneurs – national, foreign – are not affected by public interest over their self-interest. Unfortunately as I see this trend is not decreasing but even this is a rising tendency. (Male, 48 years, high school teacher)

More than half of the teachers in our sample thought that entrepreneurs are driven by self-interest at the first place. They assign attributes to entrepreneurs like immorality (13.24%), short-term perspective and desire of rapid enrichment (10.29%), tax evasion (6.86%), profit orientation (2.94%) and show-off (1.47%) spontaneously.

Conclusion

Firstly, results highlighted that outside world - especially competition and enterprise - has a rather negative representation among Hungarian teachers (destructive competition, immorality, brutality, etc.). This raises two very serious questions: 1. if competition in life has such a negative meaning for teachers in Hungary, how can they socialize students for competition in life and entrepreneurship constructively; 2. to what extent they are motivated to socialize for competition and entrepreneurship at all.

Secondly, our results show a very strong tension between enterprise and citizenship. Hungarian teachers' representation about competition and entrepreneurship seems to be fairly ambivalent. Morality is an overemphasized part of the representation and they cannot see any kind of link between competition, enterprise and public interest. Because of these, teachers may not see Hungarian entrepreneurs as responsible for the wider community (cf. English sample, Fülöp et al, 2004). And unfortunately, Hungarian teachers neither may see their role in educating entrepreneurs who are good citizens.

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