

## Socialization for a cooperative and competitive citizen: a classroom observation study

Márta Fülöp\*

### Abstract

*Activities that are cooperative and competitive are considered to be significant aspects of social behaviour. Therefore these activities should matter to educationalists, social theorists and those concerned with citizenship issues. Furthermore, the concept of the good citizen has at least two aspects: her/his relations to the state and to his/her fellow citizens.*

*This paper discusses the issues related to socialization for a cooperative and competitive citizen and presents findings from a classroom observation study using qualitative case study material, from a relatively small set of schools, to build a more nuanced view of the ways in which competition and cooperation are manifested in the educational realm and to facilitate a more detailed analysis of local practices in a specific geographical and temporal context.(1)(2)*

**Keywords:** social behavior, cooperative and competitive activities, citizens, qualitative study, economic and political life, capitalistic market economy, pluralistic democratic society.

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\* Prof. Márta Fülöp is a Senior Research fellow and Head of the Comparative Cultural Psychology Group in the Institute for Psychology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Faculty of Psychology and Education, at Eötvös Lorand University (Hungary).

## Introduction

Cooperative and competitive activities are significant aspects of social behaviour, and as such, should matter to educationalists, social theorists and those concerned with citizenship issues. The concept of the good citizen has at least two aspects: her/his relations to the state and to his/her fellow citizens (Heater, 1990). Interpersonal cooperation and competition are both significant aspects of the way citizens in a particular society relate to each other. In spite of this, citizenship research does not devote major attention to them, especially not to competition, even though competition is a crucial aspect of the economic and political life in a capitalist market economy and in a pluralistic democratic society. More emphasis is put on those behavioral requirements of citizenship that imply cooperation among members of the society. For example, according to Heater (1999) the notion of citizenship is some sort of compound of a legal status (together with the formal rights and responsibilities associated with that status), a sense of identity in which one's attachments to a geographical or political or cultural group are emphasised and, finally, a willingness and ability to act in or for the achievement of a democratic public context. Therefore the most important characteristic of a good citizen in a liberal democratic state is being helpful to his/her fellows and co-operativeness. He lists participation in public affairs, integrity and honesty and abiding the law only after these requirements. Yates & Youniss (1999) just like Heater (1990) consider pro-social activities, like community service, voluntary work and contributing actively to an immediate improvement of social conditions to be the roots of civic identity among young people and important qualities of the adult citizen. The Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship in Great Britain (DfEE, 1998) also describes volunteering and community involvement as necessary conditions of civil society and democracy. In Davies et al's (1999) study English teachers ranked 'Social concern characteristics', for instance, participation in community or school affairs (that might require cooperation) and concern for the welfare of others (that might imply helping behavior), among the most important assets of a good citizen.

The concept of citizenship and the good citizen both imply the necessity and importance of cooperation as a kind of 'civic virtue'. Oliver & Heater (1994) emphasize that citizens should be persons who want to behave in a way that brings benefit to the community. Competition or being com-

petitive however are mentioned in connection to capitalism and market economy leading to personality traits such as egoism, greed and selfishness (Heater, 1990), that are contradictory with the ideal of the good citizen, who has to endow integrity and must struggle with these 'temptations'. Heater (1999) stresses that charity and not greed is the characteristic of the model citizen. It seems to be difficult to reconcile the socially responsible, moral and cooperative citizen with the traditional liberal notion of the individual citizen living in a capitalist society who is free, selfish, follows his/her self-interest and is competitive. This was the case within psychological research too. For several decades, cooperation and competition as main forms of social interaction were symbiotically handled in social and educational psychology (Deutsch, 1949, 1973; Johnson & Johnson, 1989) but at the same time they had been conceptualized as two extremes of a single behavioral dimension or polar opposites. Related to the tendency to dichotomize competition and cooperation has been the assumption that competition is a destructive force that should be eliminated as much as possible from the environments in which children and adolescents grow i.e. from schools (Kohn, 1986, Johnson & Johnson, 1989). In those literatures, teamwork and cooperation have been extolled as healthy forms of interaction that encourage open and honest communication and trust, and increase the willingness to respond helpfully to the other's needs and requests (Fülöp et al, 2007). Quite the opposite was the case with competition. Competitive processes were characterized by either lack of communication or misleading communication, suspicious and hostile attitude and readiness to exploit others (Deutsch, 1990). While cooperation was connected to the idea of equality and solidarity orientation, competition was linked to economic orientation, meritocracy and equity resulting in increasing differences among parties in terms of their outcomes. Therefore educational psychologists came up with the advice that teachers should motivate their students to cooperate rather than to compete and give them a lot of small group assignments that give possibility for cooperation among the group members. At the same time, in order to improve relationships among students, teachers were admonished to attempt to eliminate those educational practices that may result in individual competition that is detrimental to group cohesion, equal treatment, tolerance and solidarity towards those in need (Deutsch, 1990). According to this concept it is not competition but cooperation that has to be taught to educate good citizens who respect and care about others and about those in need (Ryan, 2006), who are helpful and considerate and do not

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place their own interest above others' or above the public interest. The question, of how to be a successful and responsible citizen in a market economy that is based on economic competition and competition in the job market, and in a democratic political system, the essence of which is competition among the different political forces, without being socialized to competition, was not addressed.

From the beginning of nineties there has been a gradual change in the literature on cooperation and competition towards a less dichotomous concept. More and more researchers argued that competition and cooperation are rarely found in their "pure" form in nature, but, instead, are found more typically mixed together (Van de Vliert, 1998). Many forms of interpersonal and inter-group functioning are a mixture of competitive and cooperative processes and the course of the relationship and its consequences are heavily dependent upon the nature of the cooperative-competitive mix (Deutsch, 1990). Research results also increasingly indicate that competition and cooperation should not be viewed as mutually inconsistent. Such dichotomization is irreconcilable with biosocial theories of human behavior that emphasize the subtle interweaving of cooperation and competition as strategies used by individual primates and humans (Chapais, 1996; Charlesworth, 1996). Competition and cooperation are not mutually exclusive in the business world either (Lado et al. 1997, Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1998). Many commercial environments are characterized by simultaneous intense competition and extensive inter-organizational collaboration (Bengsston, 2004).

Due to that fact that competition was typically compared to cooperation and handled as something negative there was no interest to reveal those conditions among which it can be positive and constructive. If a phenomenon is studied chiefly by juxtaposing it against another phenomenon, the features that differentiate the two are highlighted while other potentially important features may be obscured. In this way, the multidimensional nature of competition eluded researchers as qualitatively different processes got lumped together within a single and one-dimensional construct of competition. (Fülöp 2003; Schneider et al. 2006).

In the last decade there have been a growing number of research that studied competitive relationships and processes and differentiated between constructive and destructive competitions and identified those factors that can contribute to a constructive competitive relationship. A competitive process is considered constructive if the competing parties are not enemies wanting to destroy the other, but opponents who establish re-

spectful and correct relationships with the rival and who bring out the best from themselves and each other thus contributing not only to their own development but also to the development of the group and the society (Fülöp 2004). This is possible if the competing parties are fair and honest and keep the rules of competition (Fülöp 1995; Tjosvold et al, 2003) if they have similar chances to win (Fülöp 2003; Tjosvold et al, 2003), if there are clear criteria of evaluation (Fülöp 1995, if the rivals concentrate on the task or goal and not on proving their superiority to others (Tassi and Schneider, 1997) and there is a degree of respect among them.

The paradigm shift that occurred in relation to cooperation and competition within psychology coincided with the collapse of the socialist system in East-Central Europe. The socialist system was not based on competition and at least at the ideological level emphasized cooperation. The poorly functioning state-controlled economy of the socialist block and the lack of a democratic political system with no competition among different political actors made at least questionable the notion that competition has only negative consequences. Citizenship research so far has not followed this trend. In spite of the fact that constructive competition is a necessary skill in the world of employment (DfEE, 1998) and it is useful for citizens living in a competitive market economy and in a democratic society with different political forces competing for governance, the ability and skill to compete constructively are not part of the image of the good citizen and are not seen as having significance in civic attitudes.

## Cooperation and competition and the society's political past, cultural traditions and educational practices

In the transition of post-communist states to market economy, competition –a previously ideologically denied and banned phenomenon– has been a key concept and became a highly required and praised one at all levels of the society, from politics to everyday individual life (Fülöp 1999). This was the case in Hungary too. After the political changes, collective goals and public interest have become denigrated and private interests gained priority. Instead of the notion of the collectivistic citizen, the ideal

citizen is individualistic, competitive and entrepreneurial and is able to be successful in the job market.

Individualism was present in Hungary during the socialist years too. In spite of several decades of ideological emphasis on the collective, Hungarians perceived themselves as individualists and non-cooperative already in 1973 when Hunyady (1998) asked respondents of a national representative sample about the good and bad qualities of Hungarians. He found that among the negative qualities individualism, envy and selfishness were mentioned. Two years later in 1975, young and adult workers and intellectuals were asked to characterize Hungarians and cooperativity got the third lowest average among 20 characteristics (Hunyady, 1998).

Hollos (1980) investigated social-perspectivism (role-taking and communicative ability) and cooperation of two groups of Hungarian children who grew up in two different social environments: in a village attending a collective educational setting of a kindergarten and in a rural nuclear family. Her idea was that children in Hungary had been trained from an early age for a collective existence in the educational institutions. Therefore she expected that those children who spent a significant amount of time in these institutions would have been more cooperative than those who were mainly in their rural home-family environment. She found just the opposite. Village children were more competitive in spite of the fact that they attended the kindergarten where according to Hollos they received a very collectivistic education, with constant emphasis on pro-social behaviour. As she noted "as far as the aims of collective socialist education are concerned, it seems that these are better achieved away from the kindergarten/school setting." (p.21.) In other words they were not achieved in the educational context. "Although activities are strictly scheduled and coordinated in the kindergartens and children are brought up with an ideology that stresses cooperation, this does not produce cooperative individuals (p.21)".

The GLOBE study (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) compared mid-level managers in 61 culturally diverse countries along nine cultural dimensions at the end of the nineties (House et al. 2004). Hungary scored second highest on institutional individualism, i.e. leaders emphasize individual goals and individual interests rather than collective interest or group loyalty. People were generally seen as low (58th among 61 countries) in humane orientation (being concerned about others and being sensitive towards others), but high (third highest) in assertiveness (dominance, competition and aggressiveness). All these refer to competitiveness with a low degree of cooperation and concern for others.

In another study carried out with secondary school students and teachers Fülöp (2002) found that both groups elaborated at greater length on the negative consequences of competition in the Hungarian society than they had done on positive consequences. The most frequently mentioned negative aspects were immorality (corruption, bribery, fraud, theft, cheating, lying, misleading and misinforming others as a result of competition in both the political and the economic sphere) followed by aggression and interpersonal conflict, pragmatic and money oriented people, increased stress, self-centredness (extreme individualism), and discrimination (inequality, large gap between poor and rich, losers and winners).

Fouts (2005) has suggested that the meaning of citizenship is dependent upon contemporary individual and societal considerations relating to geography and culture and that the concept is determined – among others – by historical circumstances. Fülöp et al. (2002) compared Hungarian and English teachers' ideas on citizenship and the good citizen. English teachers placed much more emphasis on the need to educate pupils to be responsible members of society and they spoke a great deal about the importance of cooperating and behaving in a way that will benefit the community, while Hungarian teachers stressed the importance of individual rights and did not consider the community so important. Self-interest has eclipsed public interest in the goals of young people too. Young people have retreated from politics and civic concerns, commitment to the welfare of the broader community has declined and materialist aspirations have increased. Hungarian adolescents do not perceive their local society as cohesive and caring and they like to be engaged in individual activities and can be characterized by lack of interest in communities (Macek et al., 1998). They feel that most students only care for their friends and only look out for themselves, rather than helping others (Flanagan et al., 2003).

The educational arena shows a similar picture. The first PISA study by the OECD in 2000 created comparative international indices for cooperative and competitive learning. The cooperative indices consisted of questions about whether students liked working with others and helping others, etc., while the competitive index was based on responses to questions about whether students liked to do better than others (being the best, learning better when trying to be better than others). In this study Hungary scored third lowest among the 24 countries on cooperative learning (OECD, 2001, Table 4.8) and eighth highest on competitive learning (OECD, 2001, Table 4.9). Commenting on this Education in Hungary (Lantern & Halász, 2004) suggested that cooperative learning strategies are

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used to a lesser extent, and there is a tradition of the prevalent classroom management, which displays a dominance of frontal teaching. This leads to a competitive, performance-orientated environment – in addition to the process of individualization also perceptible at societal level – in which the youth display less solidarity towards each other and less cohesion is shown among schoolmates.

The OECD results are however in sharp contrast to the goals of the National Basic Curriculum (Nemzeti Alaptanterv, NAT, 2003). There are relatively few direct references to competition in it but there are many more to encourage cooperation as a socially desirable behavior to be developed in schools. Working and debating in pairs and in small groups are recommended. As a clear goal it is postulated that pupils have to plan, organize and distribute work together, have to take into consideration during the joint work each of their individual abilities and characteristics in order to achieve a good joint result, and they have to respect these in order to promote each of their individual development during the joint work. They also have to be able to cooperate in long-term projects (from NAT, 2003).

## Education of a cooperative and competitive citizen

Education for citizenship is developing knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for exercising responsibilities and rights in a democratic society (Carr, 1991). Civic duties and social obligations are commonly taught in a factual manner, incorporated into a school subject i.e. history. However, education of the good citizen goes on in the ‘hidden curriculum’, the daily almost subliminal messages which pupils absorb i.e. via relationships with teachers, the organisation of the class teaching etc. The role of educators and schools in the process of acquiring cooperative and constructive competitive behaviour is clearly of great interest. The balance of competitiveness and co-operation, teamwork and individual initiative, self-assurance and deference are all part of the socialisation to establish skills and attitudes to cooperate and compete. The study described in this paper is set in this context. Its main goal was to reveal how teachers in the Hungarian school whether intentionally or otherwise foster cooperative and competitive behaviours in their practices.



## The Study

We decided that we would focus on observation of real school practice, i.e. on qualitative case study material, from a relatively small set of schools, to build a more nuanced view of the ways in which competition and cooperation are manifested in the educational realm and to facilitate a more detailed analysis of local practices in a specific geographical and temporal context.

We decided to study teachers' practices at two levels in the educational system: primary teachers working with 8 to 9 year olds (in Hungary Grade 2) and secondary teachers working with 16 year olds (in Hungary Grade 10). The primary teachers were essentially working with the same group of children all the time, across almost all subjects. At the secondary level we focused only on literature and mathematics teachers.

We confined our study to schools that were in the middle ranking of school achievement, esteem and social intake in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. We avoided schools that were considered, for any reason, to be particularly 'good' or particularly 'disadvantaged'. We observed five primary teachers (from two primary schools) and eight secondary teachers (four teachers of mathematics and four teachers of literature – from two different secondary schools). They were all females. Their average age was 43 years with a teaching experience of approximately twenty years.

The observed teachers had only been told that we were interested in pupil-teacher interactions, and the words 'competition' and 'cooperation' were not used before the observations began. The observations made it possible to watch the phenomena of interest in their natural setting and note the teachers' practice and behaviour directly, without relying on their own reports and accounts of their behaviour or intentions.

The observations were carried out by three observers sitting in different corners of the classrooms. Two of them were sitting in the back of the class, one of them in the right, the other in the left corner. A third observer was sitting facing the class. After the observations the notes were put together and a joint record was prepared. Altogether 4 reading and 4 mathematics lessons in the primary and 4 literature and 4 mathematics lessons in the secondary school were observed. We observed various interactions between the teacher and the pupils and interactions occurring among the pupils.

Observations were recorded and categorised in following categories:

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- Teacher encourages cooperation
- Teacher encourages competition
- Teacher discourages/regulates competition
- Teacher discourages/regulates cooperation
- Pupils compete
- Pupil cooperate
- Pupils resist competition
- Pupils resist cooperation

This gave us a very straightforward observational matrix and also a framework to analyze what we have seen.

In our analysis we differentiated between structured (formal) and spontaneous competition and structured (formal) and spontaneous cooperation during the lessons (Kohn, 1986, Sommer, 1995). Structured competitive and cooperative activity took place only in case the teacher initiated that. It was considered a structured competitive task if there were clearly defined competitors; it was called a competition and if there were more or less explicit rules and criteria of evaluation defined (e.g. groups competing with each other over the speed and correctness of the solutions of a series of mathematic problems). A structured cooperative situation was where pupils were expected and instructed to contribute jointly to a common result as members of clearly defined groups or pairs. There were also spontaneous attempts, on the teachers' side to invoke competition or cooperation and indirect methods applied to encourage these behaviours. Teachers sometimes seemed to be aware of the results of these actions and sometimes not at all. We observed spontaneous competitions and cooperations among the pupils too, that were either indirectly encouraged by the teacher's spontaneous interventions or derived from the students own, intrinsic desire. Social comparison processes i.e. 'I am faster, than you!' were considered as examples of spontaneous competition and different kinds of pro-social activities like helping and sharing as examples of spontaneous cooperation.

## Results

### Competition in the class

Both in primary and secondary school teachers introduced structured competitive tasks for pupils. During the four observed primary school lessons teachers gave an explicitly competitively structured task nine times in total, and during the eight secondary school lessons only three times in total. In the primary school there were competitions among groups, pairs and among all members of the class as individuals, in the secondary school only one was among pairs, the other two among individuals.

An example of a structured competitive task was when in a primary school maths lesson Mrs. Pataki, the teacher set up three groups based on the three columns of desks where the children sat in the class, and the three groups had to compete with each other. One after another children had to solve simple mathematical problems (addition) at the blackboard. They had to run to the blackboard, solve a problem then run back to their seat. Both speed and the number of correct/incorrect answers were taken into consideration when the winning group was decided. The teacher announced these criteria in advance. "It is not enough to be fast you also have to be correct."

When primary teachers announced structured competitive tasks that required children to compete in groups they jumped up, raised their arms and shouted in English (!) "Yeah!" We could not observe any resistance or withdrawal. During group competitions children became especially active, excited and very much involved and tried to do their best. They not only enjoyed these situations, but they asked for more competitive tasks on all lessons where the teacher introduced a structured competition. Individual forms of competition seemed to evoke a little bit less enthusiasm than group ones.

We observed 23 cases in total where the primary teacher spontaneously encouraged competition among pupils during the lesson. Teachers evoked competition sometimes being seemingly unaware of the effect of their action. The most frequent type of indirect encouragement to compete was when the teacher offered a reward to those who could solve a problem well or carried out a task faster or better than others. For example: "Red points for good results, if you worked well, if you were the first" or "Who can list all the vowels for a 5 grade?" or "Who would like to open

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this pack? That person who has a correct result and counts fast." These situations were not explicitly structured as competitions but the comparative aspect, the teacher's expressions i.e. "first" and the reward being contingent on the speed etc. established a competitive atmosphere.

Primary school teachers created several situations where children could directly compare themselves in relation to each other: "Those who can continue please put your hands up!" "Who has no mistakes?" "That person who thinks fast is already ready. Let me see!" "The person, who is clever, shows four." "Those who have the wrong answer, sit down!" "How many points do you have, please show!" Teachers sometimes explicitly announced ranks or made children aware of their comparative rank: "Tomi is the first!"

Raising hands is a type of competition that is basically structurally in-built into the process of frontal classroom learning. The teaching and learning process takes place not in an individual teacher-pupil dyadic situation where the student can be fully active, but in a group situation where the individual's activity is limited. Therefore every frontal lesson is a scarce resource situation where many children want to make sure that it is he or she who is called. It was observed that teachers encouraged this type of competition by regularly asking questions like "Who can show the number on the ruler?" "Who is that clever, that can answer this?" "Who dares to read it aloud?" "Who remembers what was the last lesson about?", "Who can do this again but better than before?" These questions made children answer: "I can do that!", "I am the one!" By encouraging them to put themselves into the foreground teachers wanted to, and according to the observations, not only wanted to, but really motivated pupils' competitive participation even if the reward was not tangible (red point, seal or a good grade) but social: being the one who knows!

We observed many different types of competitive tactics on behalf of the pupils: half standing up at the desk to be more visible, moaning and groaning, moving their hand left to right and back as the teachers notice movements easier than inactive "objects", they desperately shouted "Me! Me!" or "I know, I know!" They were happy if the teacher asked them to answer and they were disappointed if the teacher asked someone else. Sometimes they expressed this only with gestures and grimaces but sometimes loudly.

Pupils also competed in being cooperative with the teacher. The teacher asked: "Who helps the teacher distribute the books?" and children were trying to outdo each other.

Most of pupils' competitive actions took place outside of the structured competitive situations and, arose spontaneously. Apart from putting hands up, we could identify children behaving competitively altogether 63 times.

Secondary school teachers applied very similar methods to primary teachers. For example in one math lesson the teacher presented a problem to the whole class. "I will give a prize to those who will solve the problem first – let's say the first three will get a prize." The students started to work on the problem and when the first three students were ready the teacher closed the competition. "OK. We have got the third one, now!"

During the structured competitive situations secondary school students behaved in different ways. Most of them worked on the given task individually, not showing interest towards their competitors, however there were a couple of students who regularly tried to see where others were in their problem solving process or tried to copy others' solutions (cheat). Sometimes the classmates noticed this and 'cooperated' and let the copying happen in spite of being in competition with each other, only once we observed a student hiding the solution and behaving according to the rules.

In terms of spontaneous encouragement of competition in the secondary school occurred only in nine cases when the teacher tried to motivate students by direct or indirect social comparison, using similar techniques as the primary school teachers. Frontal questions like 'Whose solutions were all correct? Put your hand up!' or giving reward (e.g. a star like in the primary school) to those who had no mistake and doing this after a frontal question to the whole class, making direct comparison between students such as 'this was much better' or asking students to put up their hands if they are ready with a task and then setting up a rank order according to speed, were the examples.

Competition of raising hands and being called on by the teacher was observed less frequently among secondary school students than among primary school students and sometimes even evoked laughter among classmates if a student like a second grader said "Me! Me!" when she wanted the teacher to choose her. In all observed secondary classes there was a rule that everybody who wants to say something has to put up his or her hand. There were however, many situations when there was a conversation between the class and the teacher and the rule was broken and the students joined the discussion freely without the teacher's explicit, but with the teacher's implicit permission. This caused conflict when several students joined in at the same time and they started to raise their voice and compete for attention, or when some students raised their

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hands while others (including the teacher) ignored them and conversed parallel freely.

Apart from of the “raising hands” competition, spontaneous competition was observed in 18 cases among secondary students. Several times students interpreted a clearly non-competitive exercise as a competitive task. For instance after an individual task a student announced: “I won!” and in a math lesson when a student was determined to have the right solution, she looked around the class and showed everybody a V (a victory sign) like an Olympic winner. Students also asked about each others’ results and compared them. Those, whose results were not so good, tried to hide them, others whose results were better than their classmates, were satisfied.

In literature lessons spontaneous competition took the form of long intellectual debates among students. They tried to come up with better and better arguments and many times it could be seen that boys also applied humour in order to focus the attention of the audience on them, especially that of the girls’. It was observed that after a good argument they looked around and tried to see the impact.

In primary school generally the whole class was active during a structured competition and in cases where the teacher’s spontaneously encouraged competition a large majority of the class reacted. It was very rare that children withdrew from competing. This was not the case in the secondary school. Neither the structured competitions, nor the spontaneous encouragements had as much of an enthusiastic reception as among the primary school students. However, there was a behavioural effect as the majority of students worked harder and in a more serious and concentrated way when there was a competition. They asked the teacher to define the not well explained conditions of the competition and were motivated to compete in a manner that the teacher prescribed. They also became more animated and worked harder in cases where there was a potential reward (good grade), but they did not seem to react as strongly, with a visibly higher activity level (like the primary school pupils did) in case of the teachers’ indirect competition evoking interventions.

## Regulation of competition

We paid special attention to how teachers set up, managed, regulated and discouraged competition among their pupils and also in what kind of

situations they did or did not intervene. During our primary school observations, we found altogether 39 examples when teachers tried to regulate, control or discourage competition among the pupils, meaning that they had many more interactions related to the management of the already existing competition than to the initiation of it. In the secondary school there were less competitive events, therefore too there was less need of regulating interventions, altogether eight of them were counted.

### Establishing optimal circumstances

One type of regulation was the striving to ensure the best conditions for the competitive process. For instance, in order to be able to concentrate to the task pupils need relative silence. Therefore the primary teachers tried to discipline those, who were not quiet and in this way disturbed the work of others "Mate, please respect your partner and do not disturb him." – the teacher said to a boy.

### Keeping the rules

One significant aspect of competition management is, how teachers establish a fair competitive process and how they monitor if the rules of competition are kept. Teachers can indirectly encourage unfair competition among pupils if they do not regulate those who break the rules in a competitive situation. For instance, if the teacher asks a question the explicit rule is to raise their hand and wait until the teacher calls somebody. If a child shouts out the result and does not raise his/her hand the teacher should control this type of behaviour. In fact many times children broke the rules of waiting until they were called. Teachers had very different reactions to this. Sometimes they did not react at all (let the rule-breaker go), in other instances sometimes they stated that this was not right and emphasized the principle. The lack of a well monitored explicit rule basically kept the number of rule breakers stable in all classes.

Primary teachers also tried to ensure rule keeping in the case of structured competitive tasks: "If we discussed a rule and agreed upon that, then we have to keep to them" They also discouraged cheating when they noticed it themselves (this happened three times). In one maths lesson, only those children who managed to collect five red points for their good

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solutions during the lesson were meant to raise their hands. One boy, who clearly did not collect enough points, still raised his hand. The teacher noticed this and turned to him: "We will talk about this later face to face. Now you get the reward like others, but we will discuss this!" – and she did discuss it during the break. Other interventions were: "Barbara, don't look at David's work! Try to use your own mind!" or "Don't take an extra breath secretly!" (when there was a competition about who can speak the longest with one breath).

Surprisingly, when they were the fellow pupil who noticed cheating during competition and they reported it to the teacher, all primary school teachers interpreted this as a sign of destructive competition, trying to cause social harm to their competitor, they did not examine if there was any truth in this announcement but in all cases they morally condemned the pupil who reported the cheating ("Mind your own business!") and not the pupil who committed the cheating. This happened in spite of the fact that we as, observers could see that in all cases the pupil who reported the cheating was right. In fact primary teachers noticed only one-third of those cheatings that the observers noticed, therefore most of the incorrect competition went unattended, moreover the pupil who broke the rules could experience that it is possible to get ahead by cheating and only the 'authority' (the teacher) has the right to regulate this, and that there cannot be peer or community control on it. Apart from shouting out the result without being asked, we observed cheating eight times: copying from the other's work (2), false correction of the results (5) copying the good result from the blackboard (1).

In secondary school we observed several times that students copied each other's work during an individual/competitive task, but it never happened that this was reported by another student who noticed the cheating. On the contrary, a kind of solidarity surrounded these students and even in case of competition students let each other copy their solutions. Teachers, when they noticed the cheating, intervened and discouraged this kind of 'cooperation' and reminded the students to work individually.

### Ensuring equal opportunities

Sometimes teachers tried to discourage those children who were too competitive and tried to encourage those who were not active enough, tryin in this way to set up equal opportunities for everybody. The most



common instance of this was not to call on those students who were competing to give an answer to the teacher's question by raising their hands, but deliberately calling those who were inactive. Sometimes this was accompanied by an explicit remark such as, "I don't want to always hear Orsi give an explanation." or "Now I want to hear somebody who has not read yet today." or "That is not fair that always the same children answer." If no explicit explanation was given, it was more probable that the rule was broken and a pupil who was not asked shouted out the solution, not giving an opportunity to others who were either passive or behaved according to the rules.

### Coping with winning and losing

Another type of behaviour regulation was related to the interpersonal relationship among the competitors, primarily to the winners' or better performing children's behaviour towards the weaker ones. For instance teachers did not like when pupils were openly happy with winning, for example by happily jumping. "I don't like this behaviour. I am sad!" – said the teacher. Self-enhancement: for instance calling the teacher's attention loudly to the fact that he or she is ready with the work or showing off, saying aloud that he or she is better than others evoked the teacher's intervention. When a child boasted that he has a task sheet for which he got as a reward for his fastest solution, the teacher said: "I gave you the task sheet not to be showed around, but to be solved!" Concern for the weaker was expressed by explicit instructions to pay attention to those who are less able, by, for instance, slowing down.

Teachers also tried to deal with the losers. If someone was unhappy or sad because of losing in a game, the teacher showed understanding and empathy. "I know that it hurts that you did not win, but try to endure it." Mrs. Pataki consoled and encouraged a pupil who was slower in solving a task than her classmate. "Yes, she was very skilful, but you will also be ready soon." One teacher, who wanted to avoid the negative effect of losing even tried to influence the results of the competition and tried to make a tie. After losing in a structured competition we observed pupils scolding each other within the group but we could also observe that a group applauded the others when they won.

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### Controlling destructive competition

We also saw examples of destructive ways of competing - however only in a few cases - for instance trying to downgrade the "rival" and telling the teacher not to give a 5 to another pupil, devaluing the others' achievement, hitting or pushing a rival, forming an alliance against a third party and denigrating another pupil for lower achievement.

Primary school teachers several times did not comment when the pupils expressed their scorn towards weaker students who made more mistakes or solved several problems in a wrong way. They did not ask the mocking children to be more understanding with their less able classmate.

Destructive competition was more frequent though in secondary than in primary school. For instance when a female student answered a question well and got two stars from the teacher (five stars equalled a grade 5) one of her classmates turned to another girl sitting next to her and asked aloud: 'Why did you whisper to her the solution and not me?' her intention being clearly to devalue the girl's achievement in front of the class and giving the message to the others that it was not she who knew the answer but somebody else.

In literature lessons during debates boys especially laughed disdainfully at each other's arguments, made sarcastic remarks, tried to turn the class against their partner in the debate etc. The emotional intensity of these debates rose quickly, and quite a chaotic situation was generated in a short period of time. In one of the lessons the teacher had to intervene strongly as the debate about Dante's Divine Comedy became such an aggressive verbal fight among boys: 'There is an order, give room to everybody to express his/her opinion, let others speak too, don't interrupt your partner, listen to your partner etc.' When a boy said about his classmate during a debate: 'He is mad!' the teacher told him: 'Sir, refrain yourself from these types of remarks. Express your opinion in a more acceptable way!' The teacher also intervened when a student laughed with disdain at his classmate who gave a good answer and got a reward. 'Why don't you laugh this way when you yourself get a reward for your good achievement?'

## Cooperation in the class

Both primary and secondary school teachers organized situations where cooperation within pairs or among group members was a necessary part of accomplishing the task. We observed five situations like this over four observed lessons in the primary school and only two over eight observed lessons in the secondary school. In all but one case the overall framework of the structured cooperative activity was in fact competition, cooperation was an implicit but not explicit part of an overtly competitive situation. In a primary school reading lesson children had to work in pairs finding words in a text together. The teacher emphasized the competitive aspect the most: "The pair who works well and is the first to be ready, gets a 'seal' " (a rabbit figure). At the end of the task the teacher told the pairs: "The pair that had no mistakes put your hand up! The pair that had one mistake put your hands up! The pair that had two mistakes etc. " This way she created a clear ranking among the pairs and rewarded the best one.

Within the competitive set up the tasks required different levels of cooperation among the members. When at a math lesson children of each group had to run to the blackboard and solve a problem individually and the group achievement was basically the simple sum of the speed and correctness of the individual solutions, only a low level of cooperation was required.

Only two of the observed situations required children to collaborate and think together. One example was when children had to solve mathematic tasks together in smaller groups while these groups were competing with each other.

In the mixed competitive and cooperative situations, teachers paid more attention to the competitive aspect of the task, emphasizing rules, setting up priorities (correctness over speed), etc. However, a few remarks showed that they were also following the cooperative aspect, e.g. "You can put your heads together at one of the tables" – when children solved problems in small groups. In the case of the pair work, Mrs Pataki said: "Work in a smart way and help each other!" Then later she repeated: "Pairs please help each other, but whisper so you do not disturb the work of other pairs!" When at the end of the competition the whole class discussed the solutions together the teacher noticed that some pairs did not have the same solution, so they clearly worked individually when they were supposed to collaborate. She said: "Why did not you work the same way? The main point was to help each other!" When during the pair work

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one child left her pair to go to the toilet she said: "This is the worst moment!" – referring to the fact that the girl left her partner to work alone.

In secondary school there were two structured cooperative tasks, both in literature lessons. One required pairs to work together on a quiz. Although all pairs that came up with a perfect solution were entitled to get a 5 as a grade, the teacher constantly accompanied the process with competition evoking remarks, such as: "Let me see, which pair finishes first!" creating from an originally cooperative situation, one that was blended with competition among pairs. The other was a collective drama game. The teacher formed small groups and each group had to represent a common ideology (enlightenment, positivism, Christian religiousness etc.) and the members had to argue and have a debate. The task required a joint effort to find the best arguments within a group and also paying thorough attention to group members' arguments. Students turned this task into a fiercely competitive debate among groups in spite of the lack of any message in this direction from the teacher.

The 16 observed spontaneous interventions of teachers in primary school and 12 in secondary school that were considered to emphasize cooperation among pupils were in fact very different in nature and referred more to pro-social behaviour than cooperation. One kind of spontaneous encouragement in primary school was to ask children to share resources and another was asking for cooperation in keeping the rules in order to establish optimal conditions for work e.g. "Don't disturb your peers during reading!". Teachers also tried to develop empathy (taking others into consideration) in their pupils by saying: or "Choose quickly! So the others do not have to wait for you!" or "You should not do this, the whole group is waiting for you!" When the teacher praised someone openly in front of the class for a good achievement and she asked the children to applaud him/her she socialized them to be able to acknowledge jointly, as a group, another person's better achievement.

Encouragement of intellectual help and joint problem solving without the presence of structured competition was rare. One example was when in a primary math lesson a boy ended up with a wrong solution and the teacher asked the class: "Let's think together and try to find where he makes a mistake." In a secondary school math lesson students were solving a problem individually but the teacher told them: "You may help each other, if it doesn't work individually."

We observed spontaneous cooperation among pupils in 30 cases in the primary school.. This was less than half of the forms of behaviour that

were categorized as spontaneously competitive (63). The most common form of cooperation was sharing and helping. But these were not two-way cooperation but one-way interactions, a child giving a pencil or a card to the neighbour, sharing the book with him/her or showing where they are in the book in the reading lesson. Another form of cooperation happened when children had to read a text as a group aloud or recite a poem as a group aloud. These activities required all the children to adapt to each other's rhythm and speed in order to come up with a comprehensible joint product. Only twice was it observed that children spontaneously started to discuss a task and work on it jointly or corrected each other's mistakes. It happened however more often, that children were supposed to work individually and instead one pupil whispered the solution to the other or let the other copy her solution, acts that can be considered expressions of solidarity or unfair rule breaking behaviour as they were against the explicit requirement of individual work. A destructive form of cooperation was observed three times when two children formed an alliance against a third one and jointly reported on him/her to the teacher with the clear intention to cause harm to the third party.

During the 8 secondary school lessons 21 spontaneous cooperative actions were observed, i.e. sharing, helping, and explaining. When students were supposed to work in pairs a whole scale of different levels of cooperation could be observed. There were pairs where only one student worked and the other did nothing, there were pairs where one of them tried to work and the other deliberately disturbed his/her partner's work, there were pairs who collaborated in an exemplary way and there were pairs who started to collaborate with other pairs (however this was against the explicit rule of pair competition). The teacher did not monitor the quality of cooperation, did not make any effort to socialize students to cooperate in a better way.

It was observed that during individual tasks and even during individual competitions students helped each other. In this latter situation there were two norms that contradict each other: the norm of individual achievement, that dictates that the student should compete and aim for better and better individual results, and the norm of solidarity and cooperation among students. If a student who is well-prepared doesn't want to share his/her solution with others, he/she very quickly becomes unpopular among his/her classmates. In all but one case the observed students violated the norm of individual competition and answered and helped if a classmate asked for it.

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We observed pupils avoiding cooperation both in primary and in secondary school. For instance when children who were meant to be working in a group worked individually instead, or did other things. In the secondary school during the pair work there were a number of students who took part passively and did not contribute to the joint results or even behaved in a disruptive way. We observed refusal to help or share both in primary and in secondary school.

### Regulation of cooperation

Primary school teachers regulated cooperation strikingly less times than they regulated competition (only 10 times versus 39). This was more balanced in the secondary school (10 versus 8). These were mainly situations when the pupils were supposed to work individually on a task and instead of this they tried to help each other. For example Mrs. Pi?csi said: “Don’t tell it to your neighbour! Not because it has to be a secret, but because I want you to find the solution yourself!” In competitive situations cooperation among the students was considered cheating and the teacher tried to stop and regulate that and protect the rules of the competition. If it was not a competitive context, then teachers in most of the cases let students who sat next to each other briefly discuss the tasks and solutions even if they had announced explicitly that they expect individual work. However, when it was frontal teaching they did not let students clarify the learning material with each other, but instructed them to turn to the teacher for help.

Interestingly enough there were instances when both primary and secondary school teachers discouraged cooperation even if pupils were supposed to cooperate, or they blocked the spontaneously emerged cooperation among students. For instance in the primary school during group competition, where members of the same group were supposed to discuss joint solutions, Ms. Pogany asked them to work silently and Ms. Pataki said not to help each other and not to tell each other anything!

Teachers in one primary school undermined cooperation by not enforcing the rules, because they did not regulate those children who shouted out answers to questions and did not wait to be called – which was the explicit rule. Those children who were waiting nicely to be called, with their hands raised, were clearly disappointed and during the course of the lesson gradually deviated towards the rule-breaking behaviour. The lack of

regulation on the teacher's side resulted in reduced cooperation and increased unfair competition.

## Discussion

Being pro-social and the ability to cooperate effectively with fellow citizens is typically part of the concept of the 'good citizen'. The skill to be successful in a competitive world and compete constructively is traditionally not included in this discourse. However, constructive competition ability, i.e. to establish and to maintain a competitive relationship among the competing parties that contributes to the development of both and brings out their best potentials, while keeping the rules of competition and a respectful and cooperative relationship among the competitive parties, is a significant requirement in a society that constructs competitive situations in many different realms from everyday community life to economics and politics.

Education for citizenship goes on at different levels: *cognitively*, transferring knowledge about the functioning of the society, about civic rights and duties etc.; *attitudinally*, establishing a participative, tolerant, non-discriminative, respectful, relationship among members of the society (both in cooperative and competitive relationships) and *behaviourally*, developing skills that make it possible to function as a knowledgeable, responsible, respectful citizen, who contributes to society with his/her potentials in the best possible way.

In our study we observed the 'hidden curriculum' in connection with cooperative and competitive attitudes and behavioural skills in schools in a society, that is under transition from socialism that ideologically advocated the priority of the collective and the public interest and banned competition, to a capitalist market economy, emphasizing the priority of the individual and his/her interests. The Hungarian society reacted to this challenge with strengthened individualism (House, et al, 2004) the roots of which were already there during socialism (Hunyady, 1998, Hollós, 1980), with overheated competition (Fülöp 1999, 2004) and lack of concern for the community (Macek et al, 1998). However, a newly established market economy and democracy need a workforce that is competitive and entrepreneurial but at the same time is able to cooperate.

According to our observation study while the Hungarian National Curriculum (2002) speaks mainly about the encouragement of cooperation,

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teachers instead socialize 'citizens' that are competitive and not so much cooperative. Teachers both deliberately and spontaneously encourage competition more in their teaching practice: they more often apply competitive problem solving than cooperative ones, they have many more spontaneous interactions with students that aim to increase their competitive spirit, and they spend more time with regulating different aspects of competition than with teaching their students how to cooperate effectively. Helping and sharing and caring as civic virtues are encouraged and also rewarded, but higher level cooperation i.e. collaboration and working together are not. Even if teachers combine competition with cooperation among group members, for instance in the form of inter-group competitions, they mainly focus on the competitive aspects of these situations and the role of cooperation almost exclusively is to serve successful competition. According to our observations cooperation in the form of distribution of meaningful tasks and collaboration without the structurally introduced element of competition is a rare.

In a previous study, Fülöp (2002) found that both secondary school students and teachers considered immorality (cheating, lying etc.) as the main negative aspect of competition in the Hungarian society. In our study several times we observed students cheating during a competition. Most of these were not noticed by teachers, therefore remained unattended and uncontrolled. At the primary school level, 8-9 year-old children still reported rule breaking to the teachers, but in each of these instances teachers morally condemned the child who announced the cheating and did not examine if he/she is right or not. This behaviour was in clear contradiction to the teacher's explicit interventions ( emphasizing the importance of competing according to the rules) in case she noticed herself the rule-breaking. The hidden message of this was that 'community control' is not acceptable and trustworthy, only the 'authorities' have the right to react to misbehavior. Our observations showed that by the secondary school, the 'community' of 16-17 year old students instead protected and helped those who did not keep the rules of competition against the 'authority' and were very cooperative in this kind of 'rule-breaking'.



## Conclusion

Our study demonstrates that everyday school practices are not necessarily the intended outcome of policy initiatives: for the most part, they are unplanned, even unnoticed, consequences of educational cultural traditions that are entrenched or implicit and largely uncharted. Our case study showed that the general cultural, political and economical contexts overwrite the written educational guidelines and teachers' conscious intentions. Principles and ideals advocating the cooperative citizen do not coincide with everyday educational practice. This demonstrates that educational policy suggestions might be independent of the socio-historical context and if they are not coupled with explicit professional training that makes teachers aware of their 'hidden curriculum', they are bound to fail to get across to real educational practice.

## Endnotes

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