



Developing cultural awareness in Ethics in Hungary

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In Hungary, the 2012/13 academic year saw the introduction of Ethics [etika], a newly designed subject, into the national curriculum for primary education. Aiming to promote learners' understanding of individual and social values by means of its subject-matter covering major aspects of the world of human relations, Ethics both directly and indirectly teaches about culture. This paper gives an insight into the character and implementation of the subject while presenting some practical ideas regarding how to develop primary children's cultural awareness. My analysis contends that the weekly Ethics lesson accomplishes this goal by providing a discursive approach for students to reflect on their personal experience or any knowledge gained in other school subjects. Students can form and express their opinions about news, current events, human behaviour or analyse their own personal dilemmas or genuine conflicts. The variety of the methodological tools promotes learning about culture both implicitly and explicitly from a young age while enabling learners to practise the skills that are needed for displaying cultural sensitivity.

Keywords: primary education, Ethics, morality, culture, methodology

A short history and description of the subject

The implementation of Ethics

As a new academic subject, Ethics was introduced into Hungarian public education in September 2013. The Public Education Act of 2011 had decided on creating and starting a new subject of moral development under the name of 'Morality' [Erkölcstan] for forms 1-8 in lower and upper primary schools. The subject was to be taught to children who favoured it, as it was optional to choose either 'Morality' or 'Religion and morality' [Hit- és erkölcstan]. The latter was a new subject, too, and it was the responsibility of churches and denominations both to provide teachers and decide on the aims and content for this subject. Throughout the schoolyear, one lesson per week was incorporated in the timetable for either of the subjects. Prior to this introduction, the study of Ethics [Etika] and Human Studies [Emberismeret és etika] had been present in the local curricula of primary schools as optional one-term modules usually held in the seventh year.

The main objectives and the basic content of the new subject were defined by the National Core Curriculum published in 2012. Issued at the end of 2012, the framework curricula were then expanded to elaborate the subject-matter



and various pedagogical details, such as the principles and approaches of teaching, suggested methods, and the special attributes of the subject. The targeted stages of development and the units of content were arranged in a system of two-year cycles. Subsequently, a significant change was carried out by a certain modification of Public Education Act 2012, when the name of the subject was replaced by 'Ethics' in 2015¹. This fact may indicate the uncertainty and ambivalence that had surrounded the new implementation: the words 'morality' or 'moral' might have aroused anxiety in many educators and parents who had presumably supposed that the subject aimed at enouncing moral judgements or truths to students while the word 'ethics' had more connotations of discussion. Nonetheless, the new name was also criticised, especially when the subject content was contrasted with the subject-matter of ethics as a branch of philosophy. Many educators expected the two to be alike, however, Ethics incorporated 'too much' of personal, life management, or mental hygiene issues. As a matter of fact, it is important to assert that this subject neither is classical ethics, nor pure morality or human studies: it is special in terms of content. Although its main focus is on various ethical issues and aspects of human behaviour, it also incorporates some topics that have appeared in other subjects with either less emphasis or not at all. Therefore, the weekly Ethics lesson provides an opportunity for students to reflect on any knowledge they have gained in other school subjects. They can also form and express their opinions about news, current events they have heard of, or people's behaviour, and have the opportunity to analyse their own personal dilemmas or even real conflicts. The introductory part of the framework curricula – which is referred to as 'recommendation' – offers a wide range of teaching methods and techniques to enhance the core activities of the subject, which are reflection and discussion.

Naturally, in the system of educational objectives, numerous classical moral principles and values appear. However, these are regarded as social and pedagogical values, which might be viewed as the optimal forms of attitude and behaviour of human coexistence. As Pálvölgyi (2009) categorised them, these include the protection of life (helpfulness, empathy, courage), respect for human dignity (trust, tolerance, acceptance), the protection of communities (responsibility, love, care), the administration of justice and freedom (decision-making power, self-determination, self-assertion), striving for harmony (activity, creativity, open thinking), the protection of intellectual and material goods (honesty, moderation). According to the 2012 framework curricula, the teaching methods and techniques (such as games, structured debates, project work, research, role play, creating group rules, applying communication techniques) also help students understand the core values of human society and identify with them, develop self-knowledge and attentiveness towards the others, deepen the knowledge and understanding of the world.

¹ See Act LXV of 2015 on Modification of Act CXC of 2011 on Public Education [2015. évi LXV. törvény a nemzeti köznevelésről szóló 2011. évi CXC. törvény módosításáról. 17§ 10., 28. Magyar Közlöny, 2015/77, 6917–6926]

Learner-centred approach

The recommendation was a significant part of the curricula. Not only did it describe the methodology of teaching Ethics, but it also presented a definite learner-centred educational approach that is determined by some essential attributes. These grew from the constructivist epistemological theory, infant developmental psychology, and moral psychology. In this regard, learners of all ages are considered as partners who observe, interpret, ask questions, and take an active part in shaping their own knowledge. As the framework curricula 2012 put it²:

The aims of the development are to enrich the meanings of the moral categories determining the person's behaviour year by year, to experience and reflect on moral values at an age-appropriate level, and to rearrange the new knowledge if necessary. This all has to be based on personal experience, reflections, and the opinion-forming of the learners. [A fejlesztés célja a magatartást meghatározó erkölcsi kategóriák jelentéstartalmának évről évre való gazdagítása, az életkornak megfelelő szinten való megtapasztalása, tudatosítása, illetve szükség szerinti újrendezése. Mindennek személyes tapasztalatokon, reflexiókon és véleményalkotáson kell nyugodnia.] (para. 8)

The subject does not regard learners as recipients of statements, but as active – thinking, asking, pondering, trying, arguing – participants in the learning process. [Az erkölcsstan a tanulókra nem közlések befogadóiként, hanem a tanulási folyamat aktív – gondolkodó, kérdező, mérlegelő, próbálkozó, vitatkozó és útkereső – résztvevőiként tekint.] (para. 9)

Since moral education begins in early childhood within the family, then continues in kindergarten and expands through more and more influences from the environment – including peer groups or the media –, children do not enter the school as a 'blank slate,' either on the first day or later. They all bring their extant moral order, which can be more or less explicit by this time. [Mivel az erkölcsi nevelés már kisgyermekkorban, a családban elkezdődik, majd az óvodában és egyre táguló környezeti hatások között folytatódik – ideértve a kortársi csoportokat és a médiát is –, a gyerekek sem az első napon, sem pedig a későbbiekben nem „tisztalapként” lépnek be az iskola kapuján. Valamilyen ösztönösen és/vagy tudatosan már meglévő erkölcsi rendet hoznak magukkal.] (para. 10)

It can be understood that the curricula attempted to intertwine the social and personal aspects of morality, thereby bringing it closer to young learners while emphasising its everyday function and importance, too. As values, beliefs and knowledge are always individual and it is the individual who makes judgement or decision, self-reflection and self-development are essential parts of development.

² In the paper, the excerpts from Hungarian educational documents have been translated by the author. Since these official, legal documents have not been translated into English, the Hungarian original has also been provided.

Structure of the content and methodology

The content of Ethics originates from Human and moral studies, which, before 2013, would have been a subject module in the upper-primary grades. This subject had been developed by István Kamarás et al. in the 1990s, who called it a Hungarian pedagogical innovation (Géczi & Kamarás, 2007; Kamarás, 2013). In the framework curricula 2012, the topics were structured upon six main themes: first the focus is on the individual, the self (1st), then moves to the peers and personal relationship (2nd), next to groups and communities (3rd), then it shifts to society, nations, cultural communities, and the humanity (4th), next to the living and non-living world (5th), and in the end, to human thinking and the spiritual world (6th). The central questions for each field are: what is my relationship with them? What do I know and think of them? How do I interpret them? What questions do I have about them? The authors of the framework curricula had taken the challenge to formulate the detailed content in questions, for instance ‘How can I express if I love someone?’, ‘What connects the members of my groups?’, ‘What is the reason for regarding someone an outsider?’, ‘How can I contribute to the preservation of the values of nature and wildlife?’ As was mentioned before, these main units were organised in a system of two-grade cycles, in which all the six foci appear in every pair of years, partly through the same questions (e.g. ‘What is love? What is friendship?’ – theme 2); mostly with different questions, which help students elaborate and extend the previously gained knowledge (‘For what purposes do we use objects?’/ ‘Why is technology being developed?’/ ‘What benefits and dangers can we meet when using technology?’ – theme 5; ‘Why are we curious about the world?’/ ‘To what extent can we explore the world?’ – theme 6).

The importance of this approach and this structure – which is referred to as a ‘spiral system’ – is that educators can tailor the general content to the interests and needs of different age and study groups. On the one hand, the recurring questions will presumably generate more and more elaborate answers as children get older and more experienced. On the other hand, the alternating questions within one topic can introduce more complex issues and aspects of the world. As a result, *flexibility* appears as one of the essential teaching principles in the curricula, so that teachers can reorganise the topics of the curriculum or the syllabus if, for example, some interesting, challenging or current issue arises. This may happen even during a pre-planned lesson, in which case the teacher is advised to switch the focus of learning to that question.

Although the value of this approach is that it is remarkably learner-centred, it also requires an advanced level of proficiency in methodology on the part of the educators. In other words, the educator must be ready to plan flexibly and be open to and interested in learners’ ideas. The curricula also emphasises that a change is needed in the teacher’s role: it is recommended that they ‘step back’, and, instead of controlling the process of teaching, they facilitate learning by providing interesting materials, challenging issues, and questions. Their voice, their answers to the questions, their opinion about controversial topics are not

the 'correct answer' or 'the truth' but a part of the group's debate. To enable this type of approach, the teacher and students must coexist in a friendly, trustful atmosphere in class; by its very presence, this kind of an atmosphere can simulate a more effective and respectful way of human cooperation.

Alterations in 2020

To summarise the history of the subject described so far, it can be stated that the new subject was created in 2012, as its main characteristics were established in this year's educational documents. By 2018, the coursebooks for all the eight forms of primary school had been developed and issued and the content and tasks these publications included represented the aforementioned principles. However, as a result of changes in education policy, a new National Core Curriculum and framework curricula were issued in 2020, in which minor alterations in focus and content structure were carried out. The documents kept the system of content with the six main themes and the spiral structure, and more emphasis was given to the role of the family, personal emotions, Hungarian traditions, and Christianity. Nevertheless, the pedagogical approach has become different in some significant aspects: it lost some of its discursive nature, content diversity, and, what is more, the idea of the thinking, asking, exploring, self-reflecting child is less apparent. The language used in parts of the framework curricula 2020 reveal this:

The basic goal of the subject Ethics is to form and stabilise individual and community identity; to create cooperation between individuals and groups. This process is helped by presenting the moral principles rooted in cultural traditions, social rules, and developing socio-emotional skills. [Az etika tantárgy alapvető célja az egyéni és közösségi identitás formálása, stabilizálása, az egyének és a csoportok közti együttműködés megteremtése. Ehhez járulnak hozzá a kulturális hagyományokban gyökerező erkölcsi elvek, társas szabályok megismertetése, az egyén gondolkodásában formálódó, a szocio-emocionális készségek fejlesztése.] (para. 1)

In this curriculum, the primary goal is emotional and moral education, through which it is essential to form children's beliefs and have them act for the consolidation of their conscientious behaviour. [Ebben a tantervben elsődleges az érzelmi, érzületi nevelés, a morálfejlesztés, amely során a gyermekek cselekedtetése, meggyőződésének formálása elengedhetetlenül szükséges a lelkiismeretes magatartás megszilárdulása érdekében.] (para. 19)

This might seem a step back to a more teacher-centred way of education, as if the teacher were indispensable for the children to understand and accept human values. This idea, in fact, is expressed in the National Core Curriculum 2020: 'Every student needs help and guidance implemented with a pedagogical attitude that promotes development, especially the development of social skills and thinking skills.' [Minden tanulóknak a fejlődést segítő pedagógiai attitűddel megvalósított segítségnyújtásra, iránymutatásra van szüksége, különösen a társas képességek és a gondolkodási készségek fejlesztéséhez.] (p. 361)

However, the documents also refer to the importance of learners' individual knowledge and attitudes, recommend using cooperative techniques in class and mention the debate as a basic method of development, as it is expressed in the National Core Curriculum (2020):

Ethics, by its very nature, is also interpretive, and different opinions about facts necessarily result in debates. [Az etika természete szerint értelmező jellegű is, a tényekről alkotott különböző vélemények szükségszerűen vitákat eredményeznek.] (p. 359)

The applied pedagogical methods and techniques create such conditions that let students wonder at phenomena in the world, ask questions, justify their own opinions, and listen to the opinions of others. Among the modes of work, cooperative group work, individual and group project tasks play an important role. [Az alkalmazott pedagógiai módszerek olyan feltételeket teremtenek, amelyek lehetővé teszik, hogy a tanulók rácsodálkozzanak a jelenségekre, kérdezzenek, igazolják saját véleményüket és meghallgassák mások véleményét.] (p. 361)

The subject ... provides conceptual tools and skills development opportunities for them to examine and construct their identity and world view. [A tantárgy ... a tanulóknak készségfejlesztési lehetőségeket és fogalmi eszközöket biztosít ahhoz, hogy megvizsgálják, felépítsék identitásukat, világszemléletüket.] (p. 361)

Culture in Ethics

As will be described in detail, culture is a naturally related focus in Ethics and can be examined by means of various topics at different levels. The framework curricula 2020 list the sixth theme as 'The impact of European culture on the values of the individual'. This unit covers the discovery and interpretation of the moral values in Hungarian and European culture, partly through traditional stories, customs or rites, partly in everyday life.

However, all the aforementioned changes in the educational documents have certainly affected the content and objectives as regards teaching about culture and developing learners' cultural awareness. Unlike the preceding curricula, in this case neither the concepts of 'diversity', 'multiculturalism' or 'plural cultural identity' nor those of 'coexisting cultures', 'migration' and 'inclusion' are referred to. Belief, religion, and churches are a highlighted issue in both 2012 and 2020 curricula; while the first introduced the major world religions, the second narrows the topic to Christian religions.

The same year the second curricula appeared, the state publisher of the coursebooks started to revise the Ethics textbooks. In these new editions, the altered pedagogical approach can be seen even more clearly: the pictures and the texts show less diversity; the number of questions and cases to discuss was reduced, and the amount of informative and evaluative text was raised instead. The effect of these changes is that the coursebooks provide fewer opportunities for learners to study the heterogeneity of cultural aspects or the variegation of human thinking. For these reasons, in this paper, as examples of developing cultural awareness through Ethics, we will present some extracts taken from Ethics coursebooks which were accredited to the 2012 curricula.

Culture and cultural awareness

The concept of culture

It might be claimed that *culture* is one of the most controversial concepts in terms of definitions. The various interpretations of the concept emerged from human history, as it was going through its own evolution. The aspects of 'high culture' and 'low' or 'mass' culture, or the 'visible' culture (artefacts, buildings, customs) and 'invisible' culture (ideas, beliefs, habits) are combined in definitions. The word has a connotation of 'perfectness' (Arnold, 1869), that is to say, culture is something that raises human above nature and immorality. It also evokes the notion of society, and the power that a growing, organised community of people can gain. In history, mostly the prosperous and dominant societies have been referred to as 'cultures,' the ones that developed socially and intellectually, and also managed to acquire the resources for artistic development. These interpretations of culture mostly refer to the 'high' aspect, however, they also helped justify the oppression or misuse of other societies. As more egalitarian perspectives started to spread in the 20th century, the meaning of *culture* broadened and came to embrace the everyday aspects of the life of socially lower classes (Williams, 1958/2014), or traditional individual communities (Geertz, 1972), as well. The new comprehensive view corresponds to one of the classic definitions developed by anthropologist Tylor (1871/1891), who states that 'Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (p. 1). Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990) summarised the content of culture and divided it into four categories, which are aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and pragmatic senses. Aesthetic sense includes art, literature, media; sociological sense refers to interpersonal relations, organisations, habits, traditions; semantic sense refers to the special context and concepts; and pragmatic sense covers social, linguistic, and paralinguistic skills for successfully contacting and communicating with others. This system incorporates almost all elements of the human environment and suggests how difficult it can be for a person to explore and understand not only his or her own culture but to learn another one. A further assumption that makes learning complicated is that a culture one lives in and belongs to is, in fact, a blend of cultures existing in parallel or within each other, if we consider, for example, different subcultures.

Tylor (1871/1891) also claimed that culture can be researched and understood on general principles, and, despite the fact that he believed in 'lower tribes' and 'higher nations' (p. 1), he points to the similar features of any culture. This thought could be a step towards the presumption that, if diverse human cultures share common basic features, there can be one human culture, the roots of which go back tens of thousands of years in ancient history. This idea became supported in the twentieth century, as findings of research in anthropology, evolutionary psychology, social psychology, also human and animal ethology outlined the fundamental attributes of human thinking and

behaviour, which had been going through evolutionary development and selection (see, for example, Trivers, 1971; Pinker, 1997; Csányi, 1999) and can serve as the frame of particular cultures. By means of either experience or education (i.e., taught by some expert), a person can recognise that there can be various habits or responses from other people to the same functions, but beyond that he or she can also understand that elements and functions are the same in different cultures.

When viewing it from the cognitive-constructivist perspective, *culture* is not some visible, perceivable, discrete object in the world, but rather a mental construct of each individual, a representation of the human environment they live in, a kind of knowledge. Like many types of knowledge, cultural knowledge can be very practical: it helps to find the appropriate and successful ways of behaviour. A person's familiarity with routines, habits, special meanings of words, visual or audial symbols saves time and energy because it provides information to predict others' behaviour, supposing, of course, that their knowledge and intentions are similar in given circumstances. Naturally, this also means that culture is a social construct because people must observe one another's behaviour, listen to one another, and interpret what they see and hear. Based upon this input, individuals can start to adjust their concepts to approach those held by others. When assumptions and expectations are confirmed by others' actions, this familiarity is complemented by a positive and relaxed attitude. That is why a person is lost and frightened when predictions do not work: culture shock is a threat that our survival is not safe. Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) interpret the notion on an even more complex level:

Culture in such a view is not a coherent whole, but a situated process of dealing with problems of social life. Cultures are thus to open to elements that are diverse and contradictory, and different interpretations may be of the same events by individuals who may be considered to be from the same culture. (p. 29)

The multiple nature of culture – simultaneously stative and dynamic, general and diverse – elicits several questions, such as those of how many cultures may exist, how many of these can a person belong to, how these cultures are related to one another, and if it is possible to separate or categorise the cultures of different societies, nations, nationalities, communities. Attempts have been made to define these abstract, complex, individually perceived, but socially learnt concepts on the basis of some attributes. These interpretations generate controversies and constant debates. One reason for this might be the endeavour to apply the classical (ancient Greek) theory of categorisation, which requires clear conditions to define a category and decide if someone/something is a member or a non-member, although it does not seem to work in case of such complex and implicit notions like culture. It might be worth opting for other theories, for instance the prototype theory, which allows more differences between members (Evans & Green, 2006). However, since the prototype is an 'ideal' or abstract example of the category, which is judged by the individual to have the most typical features, it can easily turn into a stereotype.

The aforementioned questions also become relevant when it comes to teaching and learning about cultures. Some practical implications – which are present in the methodology of Ethics, as well – are the following: complex concepts are not defined by the educators, but rather discussed with the learners for a longer period of time, so that students will have enough time and stimulus to bring to light their explicit knowledge and revise and reconsider their knowledge while learning new issues or understanding others' views. Definitions are not developed only in verbal statements – especially with young learners – but through exemplary situations, similes and metaphors, mind maps, or discussing contradicting beliefs. Using these techniques leads to a second level of learning, i.e., learners can understand the complex nature of both the concepts and human thinking. What is more, this flexible approach can not only teach learners that culture exists in diversity but also that it is neither timeless, static nor perfectly coherent. Subsequently, a culture can change or be changed.

Figure 1

Exploring and defining concepts



A part of the revision unit of Theme 4. The large, detailed picture offers various tasks. Students can choose a situation, describe or dramatise it, and reflect upon it. They can define, explain the words given (community, culture, nationality), or connect the words to the elements of the illustration (Year 6, p. 28). Another example of exploring and enriching various concepts is the task type in which some fictional characters discuss different issues. In the eighth year, in Theme 4, the characters in the book talk about what it means to be a Hungarian. Students compare and reflect on these ideas, and, if they want, form their own expression of identity.

Cultural awareness and related terms

However perplexing it is to define culture or understand its nature, in everyday life we realise the impacts of cultural differences. In fact, this realisation has become a principal issue in the latest decades. As a result of globalisation and a growing human population, many cultures have advanced towards one another and must now coexist within one place or institute. Similarly, *cultural diversity* is also considered a value which should be preserved, and each cultural community has the right to keep their culture. As the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) states:

As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations of international peace and security ... The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. (p. 4)

In the same document, the international organisation also offers an 'action plan' (pp. 6–7) in which the role of education and teacher education is emphasised in raising 'an awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity'.

Like many terms that are used in several professions and public discourse, *cultural awareness* has slightly different meanings. Fong et al. (2016) state that it is understanding the self's own cultural values, preferences, characteristics, and seeking to learn about those of the others while also considering how the two might affect the relationship. The terms 'cultural competence', 'cross-cultural competence', 'intercultural competence' or 'cultural sensitivity' refer to different models, most of them comprise a three-dimensional structure of beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Byram (1997) describes *intercultural competence* as 'Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviours; and relativizing one's self' (p. 34). Tennekoon (2015) analyses Byram's five-factor model (1997) as (1) the attitude factor involves the ability of revitalisation, curiosity and openness; (2) knowledge is about knowing the social practices of the self and the others; (3) the ability to interpret, explain and relate contents from different cultures; (4) the skills of discovery, the ability to go into and learn from cross-cultural interactions; (5) critical cultural awareness to evaluate one's own and other cultures. Bennet (1993) describes the process from one's being 'ethnocentric' (the individual's culture is the central world view) to being 'ethnorelative' (the individual's culture is one of many equally valid world views), and its stages are denial, defence, minimalization, acceptance, adaptation, integration.

To improve cultural awareness in primary education, it is important to deal with the three aspects: learners' attitude, skills and knowledge. Knowledge and skills might be regarded as less demanding to improve than attitudes. Learners' abilities needed for being culturally sensitive, such as reflection, self-reflection, effective communication and understanding, critical thinking, evaluation, perspective-taking, or empathy are developed in many fields of education. As for enriching knowledge about culture, educators can provide plenty of topics and facts to present, by means of which students can gain familiarity with the unknown. When the similar features of differing cultures are highlighted, the general features of human culture can be recognised and welcomed as well-known. Although one might view attitudes as the most challenging aspect to change, it can be assumed that broadening knowledge, deeper understanding, positive examples, and growing familiarity with the matter will affect learners' attitudes, too.

Developing learners' cultural awareness

In this section, a short overview will be presented regarding how learners' cultural awareness can be developed in Ethics. This field can be roughly divided into three parts according to content and aims. First, as most of the content of the 2012 curricula was taken from subject Human and moral studies, which teaches about the general attributes of human as a species, we can claim that students become indirectly acquainted with *human cultural universals* throughout the entire course of learning. (This content has become more significant since 2020, when the study of prehistoric times was completely left out of History education in public education. This decision is unfortunate because while dealing with this topic, students can understand that all humans belong to one species that has developed its peculiar characteristics over its long history, such as language and thinking abilities, social predispositions, or the capacity for innovation.) Furthermore, as learners study the dynamics of the common cultural elements and the differences, they also learn about the multiple layers of culture and get prepared for meeting or recalling experiences about subcultures.

In the second field, culture is presented explicitly when students discover and reflect on numerous elements and aspects of some national, ethnic, or religious cultures. The educational goal is to help learners strengthen their cultural identities and understand the cultural environment they live in more deeply. However, some problems and dangers might arise here, as every participant experiences his or her cultural identity in his or her own way, therefore 'familiar' and 'strange' elements are not the same in a study group. Moreover, it can be as difficult to explore and reflect upon one's own culture so as to avoid stereotyping a culture that one does not belong to. Teaching can be more successful if the topic is personalised, that is to say, learners share some experiences and reflections on the cultural aspects of their lives, like family habits, religious and ethnic customs. However, because of the required protection of sensitive personal information, these topics should be treated with great care.

The third way that aims at cultural sensitivity is developing different skills and attitudes of learners. The recommended methods and techniques, for instance structured debates, association games, picture interpretations, case analysis, role play, and the following reflective discussion not only reveal the diversity of ideas and attitudes, emotions, but have learners practise how to deal with them effectively. The teacher can promote this with comments like: 'What an interesting thought, that hasn't occurred to me' or 'I notice you interpret this word a little differently'. Besides this, empathy can be developed through emotional involvement of students – for example when they read or dramatise stories –, and with tasks that require changing perspectives. Acquiring more and more information about a problem can support learners' critical thinking, but also can affect their emotional commitment to an issue.

A special way in which culture appears in the subject is when the students' task is to create a fictional community and describe how it works. The product of this project displays the cultural elements, values, and symbols that learners consider important and decide on by agreement. This imaginary cultural

community can be 'the ideal school,' a group of settlers on an uninhabited island, a family, or even the first human community on a Mars expedition.

Figure 2

Creating and describing a community



'The Mars colony' is a complex, whole-year project, in which students in groups design the preparations, the choice of travellers, the rules and principles of living together. They also imagine the development of separated communities, which live according to slightly different rules for some time (Year 8, p. 89). In upper classes, each book offers a longer, continuous, creative project suiting to the main themes of the year, for example a structured tale about a royal family, a story about young people's time-travelling, 'snapshots' of the life of a family.

In the next paragraphs, some examples will be described to present the aforementioned ideas. The tasks are taken from Ethics coursebooks published between 2013 and 2018.

Aim 1: to recognise the diversity of thinking

When playing various association games, children observe that they can react to the same thing or phenomenon in several ways. After the game, in the reflective phase, the teacher can ask what the reason might be for different responses. For example, when children are asked to choose an animal they would like to become and give reasons for the choice, their answers display different background experiences. The task also helps learners bring their implicit experiences or ideas to the surface.

When associating about images, learners are asked to describe what comes to their mind about a picture, what emotion it evokes in them, or how they interpret what is happening in the picture. While doing so, the group will meet a significant number of differences. It is extremely important that the teacher be open to receiving any answer and not suggest that he or she is expecting a 'correct' or preferred one.

Figure 3
Reflecting on pictures



A task from unit 'Trust and help', Theme 2. Children are asked to interpret the situation in the picture and then suggest an action to help the people. Although one aim is to develop their empathy, some learners might express refusal or negative feelings, e.g. 'Why should I help her? She must be clumsy.' 'Why does he think he can move that pile?'. This is the moment when the teacher – instead of 'highlighting what is morally right' – should ask for more opinions to develop a debate among the learners in order that the moral decision can be understood and supported (Year 1, p. 31).

Talking about and comparing students' personal preferences in one group is a natural situation and recognisably strengthens their self-knowledge and tolerance towards one another. However, children should never be forced to utter these self-reflective thoughts in public: they have to have the right to 'pass' in answering. Even certain instructions in the books include the sentence: Share your answers with others only if you want to. Older children are advised to keep a diary in which they can contemplate the issues of the lesson on their own.

Even young learners can design and conduct interviews or questionnaires with each other or people outside the classroom (school staff, family members, etc.). When they summarise and present the data, they will see the divergence or convergence of answers. Various graphic organisers are displayed in the coursebooks to help students visualise the results.

Older students (over the age of 11) can be given some media content to analyse how different sources express their views about the same matter. It can be difficult for the teacher to choose this content, as the style, language, attitude, and statements range from calm and logical to illogical and aggressive. Even so, as children might meet this language and content every day in the media, interpreting them critically is indispensable.

Figure 4*Reflecting on media content*

A section of a long dialogue among three characters on a fictional social media platform. One of the girls is verbally bullied by another, while the third tries to protect her⁶. These invented situations can include elements of real-life events (Year 5. p. 142)

Aim 2: to learn about learners' culture more deeply

In lower primary forms, the first topic which focuses on this aim is usually 'the place where we live' (Theme 4), because children in the class can have direct and shared experiences. For example, if they live in the same settlement, they can make a map upon which they mark their favourite places. They can create a brochure or an events calendar by searching the town's website for information. These tasks can be included in a longer project for groups; in order to work successfully, students will need to discuss and agree on their ideas intensively.

In Ethics, it is also recommended to invite external guests to present their special knowledge. Upper classes can visit outside places and programs, such as public forums and civic actions. While the previous task focuses on the 'familiar', this stage incorporates a lot of 'new' information.

Figure 5
Identifying some elements of Hungarian culture



A frequently used task is to identify the unique elements of Hungarian culture, some of which can be stereotypical. However, if children are asked to present them to a foreigner – explain what they are, why they are important, in what way they are special –, the task gets more depth and gives more motivation (Year 5, p. 92). In year 8, students read about ‘hungarikum’ (i.e. special Hungarian values that are officially qualified and registered), and they suggest more that they would like to be registered. Similarly, through the topic of ‘protected heritage sites’, Theme 4, learners can make their preferences, gain knowledge, strengthen bonds of cultural identity, and, in addition, the institute of World Heritage shows them that we are also part of a larger culture.

Figure 6
Identifying and understanding some elements of the Hungarian language



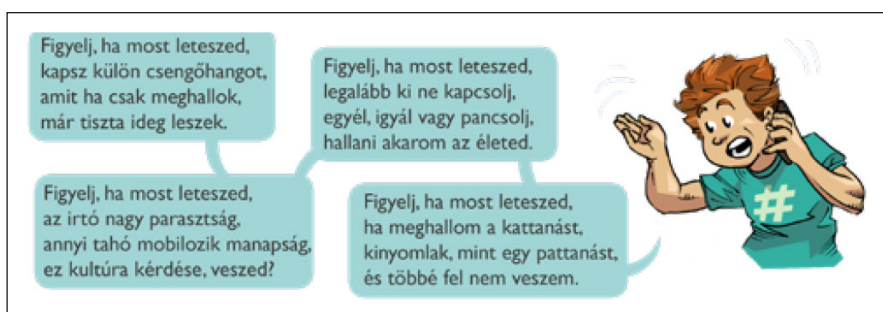
Language is a great tool to explore the elements, structure, or diversity of a culture. This short matching task can indicate that the native language can incorporate loanwords as the native culture integrates new elements (Year 4, p. 17). When discussing the changes of language, the differences in style or slang can help learners understand that culture is always diverse in the present as it was throughout its history. An amusing task for children is to write sentences which are hard to understand for older generations, and the next task is to explain the meanings.

This aim can be supplemented with building the concept of *culture* in general, mostly in an indirect way. As culture includes almost every aspect of life, it is a rich field to explore: learners can search for and reflect upon artefacts, customs, clothes, food, buildings, everyday objects by observing pictures, videos, having

interviews, reading stories, writing articles, etc. They can compare differences and changes appearing in the course of time. Similarly, learners can be asked to invent new elements of culture: a custom, an object or a design in order to understand that culture is changing and changeable. On the other hand, students can notice that some cultural phenomena can be negative, harmful, or morally unacceptable, especially in the realm of behaviour and social interactions. Educators can present fictional or real events, cases, problems, and children can evaluate the participants' behaviour, or debate the solutions to the problems. At a higher level of critical and self-reflective thinking, students can reflect upon satirical, even stereotypical writing and drawings, or they can read about how foreigners see the students' culture.

Figure 7

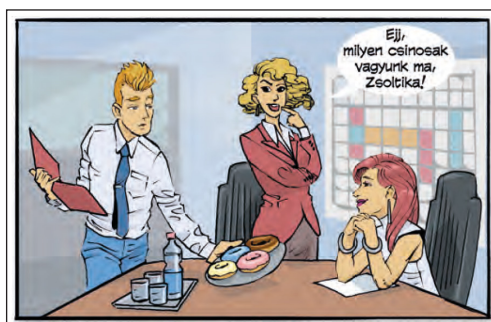
Literature as a source of ethical issues



Classical and contemporary literature is a great source of events, problems or characters for Ethics. The coursebooks and teachers' supplementary resources contain numerous poems from modern children's literature, most of which are written about children's life in children's language. In this poem by the contemporary poet, János Lackfi, both the exaggerated style and the content can stimulate a discussion about what behaviour is appropriate in the course of a phone conversation (Year 6, p. 63).

Figure 8

Reflecting on satirical visual art



A provocative cartoon depicting gender inequalities and workplace harassment. The caption says: How pretty you are today, Johnny! Students are asked to analyse the picture and imagine the genders of the characters vice versa. Then they discuss if the situation is acceptable in any

case. Cartoons are a great device to show special, sometimes extreme events, and the characters' postures, faces or movements, also the circumstances can be well-presented. It is easier for students to dramatise the case. The Internet is also a rich source of this type of visual art (Year 7, p. 59).

Aim 3: to learn about double or multiple cultural identity

People belonging to ethnic minorities of a country, or living in two countries alternately can be in a special situation if they experience a natural blend of two or more cultures, while members of the majority might want to decide which culture they are part of. In Ethics, this topic is introduced quite early and usually via the stories of some fictional characters who speak in first person singular and discuss some ordinary situations. In the second year, for example, a child from an English-Hungarian family, a child from a Hungarian family in Ukraine and a Hungarian-Jewish child tell about how they celebrate winter festivals. Beyond the obvious differences, common features are emphasised, such as family life, the importance of special days, the story behind the festival, or presents for children.

Figure 9

Presenting historical figures from various ethnic groups

Név	Clark Ádám	
Született	Edinburgh (Skócia), 1811	
Foglalkozása	mérnök	
Munkahelye	Lánchíd Részvénytársaság, Országos Közlekedési Bizottság	
Lakhelye	Életem nagyobb részében Buda	
Kapcsolat	Széchenyi István	
Családtagok	Feleségem Áldásy Mária. Három gyermekünk született.	

A fictitious social media profile of a famous English-Hungarian engineer, Adam Clark. Learners are probably familiar with the name but might not know his nationality. Their task is to get information about other prominent figures of Hungarian history and create such profiles. Some names are given, mostly of people of various ethnicity. Before giving this task, the teacher should check different sources as it is worth recommending the most reliable ones (Year 6, p. 145).

Nevertheless, the other side of this situation must be also dealt with in class, namely the case when someone meets prejudice, or social exclusion and humiliation from a cultural community. Teachers should never ask children about their own memories directly: the issue can be presented through either fictional or real stories instead, and after that learners can share their experiences if they decide to do so. In the sixth year, for example, students can read about how two famous Hungarian authors, Menyhért Lakatos and Gyula

Illyés were shamed at school: Lakatos for his Roma origin and Illyés for his rural accent. The Roma minority is the largest one in Hungary, so they should be presented in Ethics in a way that avoids stereotypes but also refers to social hardships. Sixth-year students can learn about the compelling successes of Roma people by getting to know about 'The Golden Strap Award', a distinction founded by the Roma Press Centre. The interviews with the nominees reveal their backgrounds, which are often poor and harsh. In addition, students can reflect on what 'golden strap' refers to. It is a metaphor used by poet József Kovács Hontalan in which he claims he has two golden straps on him: one is the Hungarian culture, the another is his being a gypsy, neither of which he wants to give up on.

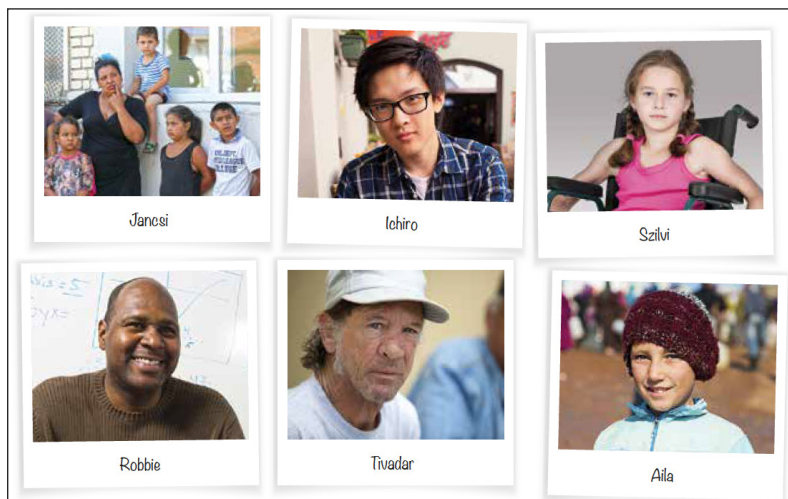
Aim 4: to familiarise with 'other' cultures

This may be the most important instructional goal when regarding cultural awareness, however, as the first step, educators have to consider what 'our' and what 'other' cultures are like. This depends on the circumstances in which learning takes place and the most typical features of the students' background – with the knowledge, of course, that there are no homogeneous classes. For middle-class students, learning about poverty can widen their understanding; for students from families of lower status, penury can sadly be a general experience. This is the main reason why much of the decision process is delegated to the teachers: the aim is for teachers to tailor the general content of the subject to the classes.

For younger learners, showing pictures of different environmental and cultural elements or telling them about the life of a child can be motivating. Even if characters are fictional, they should be created on the basis of authentic reports. Images depicting the days of a Mongolian shepherd family living in a yurt, a South Sea fishing family or even children living in a refugee camp can make the learners realise that there are many different lifestyles. They can start to talk about the reasons for these differences, try to imagine more details, putting themselves into the characters' places. Pictures arranged around a theme, such as 'schools around the world', 'my favourite toy', or 'what families eat',⁷ on the other hand, show some common elements of cultures, as well, like the importance of education or need for play anywhere in the world. This also teaches about universal human culture. Older students can do some research and give a presentation on a culture. It is even more exciting for students to talk about personal experiences.

Figure 10

Presenting characters from various social or cultural backgrounds



This task is a part of a whole-year-project, in which learners describe the life of some characters. Now, the story brings new characters with pictures and a short introduction of their personalities and backgrounds. These include a Roma family, a Japanese IT expert, a disabled child, an English teacher from the USA, a former homeless person, and a refugee. Learners are asked to role-play how the main characters meet and get acquainted with the new ones (Year 4, p. 41).

Although it might be easier to discuss and research the culture of everyday life, the exploration of deeper, implicit structures and values is more complicated. This is also true of our own culture. A possible way can be comparing the commands of what is 'forbidden,' 'allowed' and 'obligatory' for members of a community. An interesting source for older students can be a series of magazine interviews in which representatives of different churches or cultures give answers to the same moral question. In Ethics, during a discussion about values, students should be made aware that none of the answers will be designated as the true one; however, they can express their opinions and preferences about the issue. To reinforce this idea, they should be asked to use introductory phrases like 'I think...,' 'In my view...,' 'As I see, most people agree...' during the debates.

Conclusion

In Hungary, the school subject of Ethics offers many opportunities to teach students about culture from the very beginning of their primary studies. During this eight-year-long process, young people can explore the complexity of cultures, how individuals experience their cultural bonds and reflect upon those of others. Culture, in the sense of being a special way of human coexistence, definitely involves the most important human values as guidance to efficient cooperation and entails social and cognitive skills that humans need for living according to these values. Ethics aims at developing learners'

skills as well as broadening their conceptual knowledge. The subject applies a learner-centred pedagogical approach, the essence of which is discussion, self-reflection, gradualness, and flexibility. It also provides a wide range of methodological devices to promote learning in an age-appropriate way.

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