

# The structure of primary and secondary teachers' attributions for pupils' misbehaviour: a preliminary cross-phase and cross-cultural investigation

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**The purpose of this study was to see if systematic contrasts in educational culture and curricular emphases might affect the underlying structure of teachers' attributions for children's behaviour. Thus, responses to a questionnaire developed from earlier work by Miller and colleagues (2000, 2002) were gathered from primary and secondary school teachers in England and the Republic of Ireland. Exploratory factor analyses revealed that teachers participating in the study appear to have attributed pupils' misbehaviour at least as much to teachers' and adult behaviours as much as to any distinctive parental or home factors. The structure of primary and secondary teachers' attributions appears to have differed, with primary teachers distinguishing between their own and parental influences on children's behaviour. However, contrary to expectation the demands of the curriculum did not seem to have figured highly in these teachers' perception of causes of misbehaviour. Finally, some speculations on possible differences in relative weighting between English and Irish teachers' views are offered. Teachers in the Republic of Ireland appear to have attached greater importance to children's personalities and pressures on children. Further, teachers in primary schools in England seem to have rated their classroom management strategies and other more general adult behaviours as more important associates of behaviour than did their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland. The implications of the findings are discussed in relation to cultural and curricular differences and teachers' constructions of behaviour and special educational needs.**

## Introduction

A range of sources employing a variety of methods suggest that teachers' views may contribute to views of what constitute 'special educational needs' and how these may best be addressed (see, for instance, Ainscow, 2005; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Tournaki & Podell, 2005; Villa, Thousand, Meyers & Nevin, 1996). As suggested by Behre, Astor and Meyer (2001) and Dompnier, Pansu and Bressoux (2006), it is also

sensible to consider that teachers' views or attributions may be affected by contextual influences. The purpose of this paper is to present an exploration of how teachers' views of behaviour may be related to certain contextual variables.

Previous studies of adults' attributions for children's behaviour have provided information about the convergence and divergence of teachers' and parents' views (Croll & Moses, 1985; Miller, 1995; Miller, Ferguson & Moore, 2002). While Croll & Moses (1985) found that junior school teachers were more likely to attribute behavioural difficulties to home, family and parental factors, Miller and colleagues (2002) have suggested that the situation is less clear cut and that the structure of attributions could indicate some acknowledgement that the causes of misbehaviour lay with teachers and with children themselves. These studies have also tended to focus on the behaviour and causal attributions for the behaviour of primary school-age children. Less attention has been paid to determining the consistency (or otherwise) of teachers' views across settings and phase of education.

Ho (2004), however, recognised that it is important to consider the influence of cultural factors on teachers' attributions as it is reasonable to consider that attributional styles would reflect differential cultural values. As Bernstein (1977) asserted, the means by which a society classifies, transmits and evaluates educational knowledge reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control. Within cultural factors, it is possible to discern the educational curriculum as a prime example of cultural priorities. Watson (2005) suggested it is possible to consider teachers themselves to be subject to systemic factors, the most potent of these being 'the curriculum'.

In an attempt to disentangle these factors, the work reported in this paper was a study of the structure of the attributions teachers make for pupils' behaviour across four different settings that would take account of different organisational and structural influences. Thus, the views of teachers in primary and secondary schools were surveyed in two potentially contrasting social and educational contexts – England and the Republic of Ireland.

*Differential effects of age or stage of development*

Studies of teachers' attributions for problematic behaviour have, almost exclusively, elicited the views of teachers in either primary (Mavropoulou & Padelidu, 2002; Miller, 1995; Poulou & Norwich, 2002) or, more rarely, secondary schools (Ho, 2004; Little, 2005). Inevitably, these researchers used a range of methodologies. It is, therefore, hard to derive a coherent account of any systematic differences between the attributions of teachers across the two different sectors of education. To the best of our knowledge to date there has been no systematic study of any possible general differences in perception between teachers in primary and secondary schools.

Whilst, at primary school level, as outlined below, different approaches may be detected between England and the Republic of Ireland, education and assessment in secondary schools are motivated by relatively similar thinking, with both countries having formal summative assessment of students (by the age of 16 years).

A further distinction between the two phases of education (primary and secondary) in both countries is that whereas teachers in primary schools are most likely to teach the whole curriculum, teachers in secondary schools are more likely to specialise in teaching a particular subject. A consequence of this may be, as found by Ogilvy (1994) in a study of secondary school teachers, that subject delivery and examination demands adversely affected teachers' perception and tolerance of problem behaviour. It is possible that these differences may be tracked in UK government statistics (Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 2005) that show that in the period from 1997 to 2004, over 80% of permanent exclusions were from secondary schools with around 13–16% from primary schools (the remainder being recorded as from special schools). We were unable to find similar statistics for exclusion rates in the Republic of Ireland.

*Culture, educational policy and the experience of behaviour*

A range of cultural, historical, social and economic factors not necessarily common to both England and the Republic of Ireland have mediated developments in education. A cumulative effect of governmental policies in England, termed the 'politicisation of the curriculum' by Kelly (2004), has more direct and central political control of the National Curriculum. The result is a highly prescribed and centrally determined curriculum with little if any scope for local variation. In contrast, whilst the curriculum in the Republic of Ireland is guided by governmental guidelines, not tight prescription, the government is legally obliged to recognise the local priorities of individual schools. More specifically, and of potential relevance here, the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) was developed to embrace an explicitly 'child-centred' philosophy that is responsive to local factors and individual children.

In England assessment of children at the end of each 'key stage' (at ages 7–, 11–, 14– and 16– years) is used to

compare individual students, schools and local authorities (LA) in published league tables. In the Republic of Ireland, in contrast, there are no statutory regulations as to when or in what form assessment of pupils takes place. It is, thus, possible as suggested by Maras and Kutnick (1999) that teachers in England might perceive they have relatively less scope for professional practice that is contingent on the needs of individual or even groups of children than their colleagues in the Republic of Ireland. Maras and Kutnick (1999) further suggested that as a result of the curricular constraints they experience, teachers are more likely to view problematic behaviour as caused by or residing in individual children rather than being related to situations or interactions. It was, therefore, hypothesised that in relation to systematic differences in the curricular models, teachers would form different structures of attributions for the misbehaviour of children in their schools. More specifically, we considered that the differences in orientation between primary and secondary teachers would be associated with different structures of attributions, and that the differing cultural and educational emphases between the Republic of Ireland and England would also be associated with differing structures of attributions.

**Method***Procedures*

The study was carried out in mainstream schools in England and the Republic of Ireland. Whilst reasonable attempts were made to obtain representative samples of all four main groups (English, Irish, primary and secondary teachers), if only on the basis of the very different response rates (see below) and schools that we were able to contact, the samples are, in fact, best regarded as opportunity samples.

Attempts were made to increase the reliability of data collection with respect to procedures and timing. All questionnaires were completed during school hours and in the school in order to ensure ecological validity. In order to limit reactivity, data were gathered during school term time. As it was also anticipated that data gathered immediately after an extended school holiday might distort the reality the questions were attempting to expose, questionnaires were administered 2 to 4 weeks after the school holidays.

*Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was based on earlier work by Miller et al. (2000, 2002) who, eliciting the views of children and parents, investigated the psychosocial aspects of behaviour in schools. To the list of 25 items derived from the views of children that formed the core of that work (Miller, personal communication), three items ('Curriculum too rigid', 'Children under too much pressure to achieve curriculum targets' and 'Teachers under pressure to achieve curriculum targets') were added to the questionnaire in an attempt to capture differences in teachers' perceptions of the effect of curricular pressures. Whilst it might be argued that this questionnaire did not enable us to elicit teachers' own attributions, it should be noted that all but three of the items used had already been used in studies of adult

perceptions (see Miller et al., 2000, 2002), and that the main purpose of the study was to compare the structure of teachers' responses under different conditions.

In an attempt to identify any possible difficulties regarding either administration or the wording of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. A sample of six teachers in the Republic of Ireland and six in England were asked to complete and comment on the questionnaire. This pilot study suggested that no changes to the instrument were necessary.

Each questionnaire item was rated on a four-point Likert-type scale – Very important; Quite important; Not very important; and Not important at all. Users were instructed to rate each item and to put a tick in the appropriate box according to how they view its importance to them (see Appendix 1).

*Distribution of the questionnaire*

Contact from the second author was made with the head teacher of each school by letter, telephone or email, when an outline of the research was given and permission to send questionnaires sought. A criterion for inclusion in the study was, thereby, schools that could be contacted in this way. A covering letter outlining the research accompanied each questionnaire. Anonymity and confidentiality were also guaranteed. Questionnaires were forwarded and returned by post.

*Response rates*

Response rates varied considerably between the two countries and between schools. Within the Republic of Ireland, the response rate from teachers in the 15 schools (10 primary, 5 secondary) we were able to contact was over 90%. A total of 121 primary school teachers and 113 secondary school teachers completed the questionnaire. In England, teachers in 157 schools (140 primary, 17 secondary schools) across the north of the country were asked to complete the questionnaire. The response rate was poor, at just over 15% overall. Usable responses were obtained from 119 primary school teachers and from 102 secondary school teachers.

**Results**

*Analysis*

In order to test the main hypothesis of differences in perception of behaviour between primary and secondary school teachers, two main data sets were formed. Initial screening of these indicated that no items exceeded acceptable limits (of  $\pm 2.0$ ) for skew or kurtosis (Ferguson & Cox, 1993). Exploratory factor analytic (EFA) procedures were then applied to both data sets. Subsequently, each data set was tested for differences between the views of English and Irish teachers.

*Primary school teachers*

The primary school teachers' data had a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) of 0.87 and a Bartlett test of sphericity of 2424.4 ( $p < 0.0001$ ) which indicated that the data were suitable for EFA (Ferguson & Cox, 1993). Following this initial

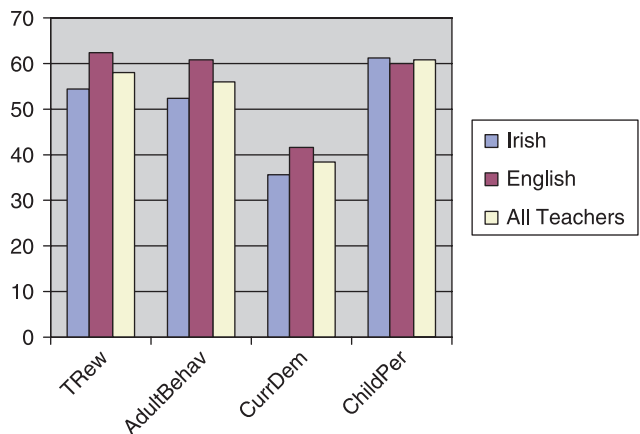
screening, factors were extracted using principal components analysis. There were seven eigen values greater than 1 and the solution was dominated by a large initial eigen value (8.2), suggesting that a one-factor solution might be the best statistical explanation. However, on the basis of the scree test and the maximum likelihood  $\chi^2$  heuristic (Ferguson & Cox, 1993), a four-factor solution was requested. This solution, which accounts for 48.6% of the variance, is presented in Table 1. The first factor was 'Teacher's rewards and punishment' (TRew); the second 'Adult behaviours' (AdultBehav); the third, 'Curriculum demands on children' (CurrDem); and the fourth, 'Child's personality' (ChildPer).

As may be seen in Table 1, because there are a number of cross-loadings, this solution is not susceptible to unambiguous interpretation. However, the analysis was repeated with an oblique (direct oblimin) rotation and an identical solution obtained, yielding some increased confidence in the four-factor solution. Further extractions were attempted with cross-loaded items deleted and the underlying structure was found to persist. It was decided to retain all items in order to allow maximum potential theoretical interpretation and greater ease of comparison with earlier work (Miller et al., 2000, 2002). As observed in Table 1, three of the four factors were found to have acceptable reliability (Chronbach's  $\alpha > 0.8$ ).

Each of the four factors was converted to proportions of its maximum (as they comprised differing numbers of items) and inspected for inter-correlation (Table 2). As can be seen, there existed significant correlations between all pairs. As reported by Miller et al. (2002), this may also suggest a single factor but, alternatively, be considered as indicative of a superordinate factor (termed 'systemic interactions' by Miller et al., 2002) onto which each of the four factors loaded.

*Causes perceived as most important.* The means (converted to proportions of their maximum) for each factor by country are shown in Table 3 and illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Irish and English primary school teachers mean attributions for children's behaviour. Teacher's rewards and punishment (TRew), Adult behaviours (AdultBehav), Curriculum demands on children (CurrDem), Child's personality (ChildPer)**



**Table 1: Factor solution (with varimax rotation) for primary school teachers' attributions**

	TRew	AdultBeh	CurrDem	ChildPer
Teachers unfair system of rewards	<b>0.803</b>	0.119	0.161	-0.002
Teachers not rewarding good work	<b>0.684</b>	0.036	0.276	-0.023
Good work isn't noticed	<b>0.682</b>	0.281	0.145	0.128
Teachers unfair punishment system	<b>0.662</b>	0.202	0.216	0.012
Teachers don't listen to children	<b>0.616</b>	0.436	-0.011	0.147
Teachers are too soft	<b>0.609</b>	-0.096	0.106	0.260
Teachers not punishing bad behaviour	<b>0.582</b>	-0.031	0.213	0.018
Pupil is being bullied	<b>0.508</b>	<b>0.427</b>	-0.118	0.140
Child is bored	<b>0.415</b>	0.187	0.144	0.232
Parents bully their children	0.119	<b>0.678</b>	0.150	-0.131
Parents behaviour sets bad example	-0.035	<b>0.636</b>	0.244	-0.096
Parents are uncaring	0.141	<b>0.596</b>	0.228	0.003
Child is worried about other things	0.149	<b>0.555</b>	<b>0.375</b>	0.014
Teachers have racist attitudes	<b>0.397</b>	<b>0.542</b>	<b>0.305</b>	0.097
Child needs more help in class	-0.0623	<b>0.535</b>	<b>0.352</b>	0.198
Teachers shout all the time	<b>0.303</b>	<b>0.510</b>	<b>0.402</b>	0.101
Child is picked on or tormented	<b>0.371</b>	<b>0.447</b>	0.030	0.237
Alcohol or drug abuse by family member	0.254	<b>0.424</b>	0.069	<b>0.334</b>
Too much homework is give	0.240	0.229	<b>0.665</b>	-0.151
Too much class work	0.067	0.142	<b>0.654</b>	0.125
Other children want to copy work	0.200	0.067	<b>0.652</b>	0.081
Children under pressure to achieve curriculum targets	0.202	<b>0.354</b>	<b>0.608</b>	0.019
Curriculum is too rigid	0.235	<b>0.326</b>	<b>0.589</b>	-0.094
Teachers pressure to meet curriculum targets	0.077	<b>0.435</b>	<b>0.546</b>	0.164
Teachers are too strict	0.137	0.132	<b>0.473</b>	0.153
Child's personality	0.008	-0.195	0.231	<b>0.675</b>
Pupil wants attention	0.156	0.114	-0.227	<b>0.672</b>
Other children encourage it	0.162	0.104	0.192	<b>0.601</b>
Eigen value	8.2	2.4	1.5	1.5
$\alpha$	0.84	0.84	0.82	0.46

All loadings over 0.3 shown in bold.

Teacher's rewards and punishment (TRew); Adult behaviours (AdultBehav); Curriculum demands on children (CurrDem); Child's personality (ChildPer).

**Table 2: Correlations between four-factor solution for primary teachers' attributions**

	TRew	AdultBeh	CurrDem	ChildPer
Teacher's rewards and punishments (TRew)	1			
Adults' behaviours (AdultBeh)	0.59**	1		
Curriculum demands on children (CurrDem)	0.49**	0.68**	1	
Child's personality (ChildPer)	0.30**	0.21*	0.17*	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with Country (England, Ireland) as the between-subjects variable and Attribution (TRew, AdultBehav, CurrDem, ChildPer) as the within-subjects variable. This indicated a significant interaction of Country and Factor (Pillai's trace  $F = 9.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and significant main effects of Attribution ( $F = 189.7$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and of Country ( $F = 16.5$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Pairwise comparisons with Bonferonni adjustment for multiple comparisons indicated significant overall differences between the perceptions of all primary school teachers with regard to the most (or least important) causal factors. 'ChildPer' was found to be rated as a significantly greater causal factor than any of the others and 'CurrDem' as significantly less important than any of the others.

**Table 3: Means (converted to percentage of the maximum) for each primary teacher factor by country**

Factor	Country of respondents	Mean	Standard deviation	N
TRew	Irish	54.4	12.7	109
	English	62.3	9.4	88
	Total	57.9	12.0	197
AdultBeh	Irish	52.4	13.8	109
	English	60.7	10.5	88
	Total	56.1	13.1	197
CurrDem	Irish	35.4	16.5	109
	English	41.8	12.3	88
	Total	38.3	15.1	197
ChildPer	Irish	61.2	10.7	109
	English	60.0	12.0	88
	Total	60.7	11.3	197

Teacher's rewards and punishment (TRew); Adult behaviours (AdultBehav); Curriculum demands on children (CurrDem); Child's personality (ChildPer).

The difference between 'TRew' and 'AdultBehav' was not significantly greater than might have been found by chance.

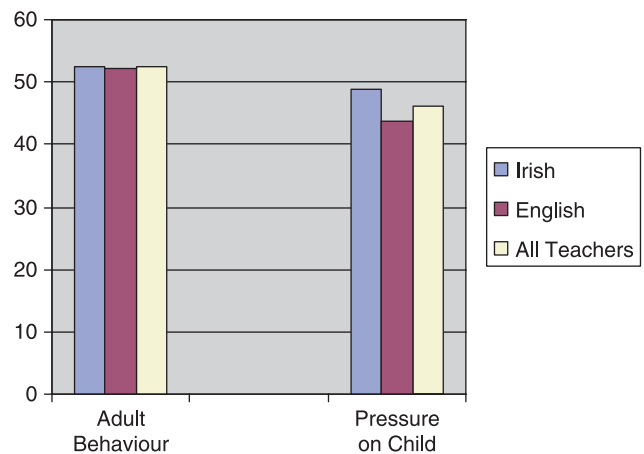
Within factors, English teachers perceived each factor to be more important than their Irish counterparts with the exception of 'ChildPer' which was rated equally important by teachers in both countries.

#### Secondary school teachers

The secondary teachers' data had KMO of 0.84 and Bartlett test of sphericity of 1838.2 ( $p < 0.0001$ ), indicating suitability for EFA procedures. Following initial screening, factors were again extracted using principal components analysis. There were seven eigen values greater than 1 and the solution was dominated by a large initial eigen value (7.1), suggesting that a one-factor solution again might be the best statistical explanation. However, on the basis of the scree test and the maximum likelihood  $\chi^2$  heuristic (Ferguson & Cox, 1993), a two-factor solution with varimax rotation was requested. This solution, which accounts for 32.7% of the variance, is presented in Table 4. A two-factor solution with direct oblimin rotation was also requested. The two solutions were found to be identical in structure. As can be seen (Table 4), both factors had acceptable reliability (Chronbach's  $\alpha > 0.8$ ).

The two factors ('Adult behaviours' and 'Pressures on the child') were found to be significantly correlated ( $r = 0.60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Again, this may be interpreted as further indication that a one-factor solution is a better explanation of the data or, alternatively, that both these primary factors load onto a superordinate factor, which may be termed 'systemic interactions'.

*Causes perceived as most important.* The two factors were converted to proportions of their maximum. A multivariate analysis of variance was then carried out to test for significant differences between secondary teachers' attributions and for systematic differences across the two countries.

**Figure 2: Irish and English secondary school teachers mean attributions for children's behaviour**

A significant interaction of Attribution with Country ( $F = 13.4$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) was found with a significant main effect of Attribution ( $F = 83.7$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The effect of Country appeared to be marginal ( $F = 3.9$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ). The converted means by country are shown in Table 5 and Figure 2.

Pairwise comparisons indicated that, overall, these secondary teachers perceived 'Adult behaviours' as a significantly more important cause of misbehaviour than 'Pressures on the child'. However, it also appeared that the Irish teachers rated 'Pressures on the child' as significantly more important than their English counterparts, whereas the difference between English and Irish teachers' views of the importance of 'Adult behaviours' was not significantly greater than might be expected by chance.

#### Discussion

We believe this report to be the first systematic study to provide comparisons of structures of attributions provided by primary and secondary school teachers. As the majority

**Table 4: 2 Factor solution (with varimax rotation) for secondary school teachers' attributions**

	Adults' behaviour	Pressure on the child
Teachers unfair punishment system	<b>0.753</b>	0.077
Teachers unfair system of rewards	<b>0.716</b>	0.088
Teachers not rewarding good work	<b>0.698</b>	0.096
Good work isn't noticed	<b>0.620</b>	<b>0.328</b>
Teachers don't listen to children	<b>0.618</b>	<b>0.308</b>
Teachers not punishing bad behaviour	<b>0.593</b>	0.061
Teachers shout all the time	<b>0.559</b>	0.161
Teachers have racist attitudes	<b>0.536</b>	0.264
Teachers are too soft	<b>0.464</b>	0.026
Parents are uncaring	<b>0.458</b>	0.287
Child is bored	<b>0.423</b>	0.207
Parents bully their children	<b>0.415</b>	0.400
Parents behaviour sets bad example	<b>0.363</b>	0.126
Curriculum is too rigid	<b>0.274</b>	0.247
Pupil wants attention	<b>0.149</b>	0.134
Child is picked on or tormented	0.120	<b>0.691</b>
Too much homework is give	0.096	<b>0.665</b>
Pupil is being bullied	0.204	<b>0.647</b>
Child is worried about other things	0.159	<b>0.646</b>
Children under pressure to achieve curriculum targets	0.194	<b>0.594</b>
Teachers pressure to meet curriculum targets	0.085	<b>0.571</b>
Alcohol/drug abuse by family member	0.126	<b>0.558</b>
Too much class work	0.227	<b>0.490</b>
Other children want to copy work	0.288	<b>0.467</b>
Teachers are too strict	<b>0.312</b>	<b>0.426</b>
Child needs more help in class	0.246	<b>0.404</b>
Child's personality	0.123	<b>0.309</b>
Other children encourage it	-0.007	<b>0.228</b>
Eigen value	7.1	2.1
$\alpha$	0.84	0.81

All loadings over 0.3 shown in bold.

**Table 5: Means (converted to percentage of the maximum) for each secondary teacher factor by country**

Factor	Country of respondents	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Adults' behaviour	Irish	52.6	9.5	85
	English	52.3	11.5	86
	Total	52.4	10.5	171
Pressure on child	Irish	48.8	10.3	85
	English	43.6	9.3	86
	Total	46.2	10.1	171

of the items in the questionnaire were derived initially from Miller et al.'s (2000) study of children's attributions for misbehaviour in primary schools, we cannot claim that this study has elicited teachers' own explanations for the causes of misbehaviour. However, an underlying assumption was that if the structure of teachers' responses to the questionnaire differed, this could be due to the influence

of differing contexts. The existence of a single factorial explanation for all teachers' attributions, in line with findings of Miller et al. (2002), might incline us to support a view that children's behaviour in schools is 'simply' a complex interaction of a range of variables including the behaviours and strategies exhibited by adults (teachers and parents), curriculum demands and children's backgrounds.

Given that the number of schools and response rates varied considerably between England and Ireland, it is also possible that several other factors may have influenced responses and the patterning of teachers' attributions. However, on the basis of the results of this investigation, it does seem plausible that systematic differences between the structures of attributions of teachers working in different organisational settings may exist. Given the sample sizes and the good internal consistency of the significant factors, we have some confidence in reporting the differences between the structure of the attributions of primary and secondary teachers. However, the comparisons between national subgroups must be regarded as more tentative as the samples of teachers may not be sufficiently representative of any group and are rather small.

#### *Comparing the structure of attributions by primary and secondary school teachers*

Clearly, all the teachers who participated in this study appeared to recognise that their own behaviour (in terms of responding to children's work and behaviour) was a major influence on children's behaviour. It seems evident that these teachers recognised that, in effect, behaviour problems do not emanate from the individual child but are a product of social interaction. It is interesting to note that, in accord with the earlier work of Miller (1995), the primary school teachers distinguished between their own and parental influences on behaviour. In contrast, it seems that secondary school teachers in the present study did not appear to make this distinction. We wonder if that might be related to differing patterns of interaction with parents, with primary teachers more frequently meeting parents on a semi-formal basis and thereby forming distinct views of parental styles. However, it does seem likely that, in contrast to the findings of Croll and Moses (1985), teachers in this study attributed pupil misbehaviour to teachers' and adult behaviours generally at least as much as to any distinctive parental or home factors.

While the factor 'ChildPer' did not have great internal reliability (possibly an artefact of the small number of items contributing to this factor), it is important to note that this distinct factor appears to have existed within the primary school teachers' attributions and to figure highly in their perception of causal influences. In contrast, the secondary teachers appear to have subsumed this in a more general, and less important factor that demonstrates some understanding that there are pressures on children that may be causally associated with their behaviour. In that sense, at least, it seems that the primary and secondary teachers may have had quite different views about the role of children themselves in generating poor behaviour. Very tentatively, we wonder to what extent that may be reflected in differing constructions of behaviour as a 'special educational need'.

Maras and Kutnick (1999) suggested that as teachers experience greater external constraint on their mode of curriculum delivery, they would be more likely to view problematic behaviour as residing within individual children. We are not confident that the current evidence

necessarily bears that out. Nor, indeed, is it evident here that the curriculum is necessarily a potent systemic influence on teachers, as had been suggested by Watson (2005). In particular we would draw attention to the relatively modest correlation between 'ChildPer' and 'CurrDem' in the primary teachers' attributions for misbehaviour. Further, whilst Ogilvy (1994) argued that secondary teachers' perception and tolerance of behaviour might be adversely affected by pressures of subject delivery and examination results, the findings of this present study suggest that curricular pressures did not emerge as a distinct factor for secondary school teachers. It also seems that for secondary teachers (and in particular for English secondary teachers), the factor 'Pressures on the child' that subsumes the items relating to curricular pressures was rated less important than the behaviour of teachers and parents as causal influences on children's behaviour.

Instead, it seems the secondary school teachers in this study appeared to regard issues connected with their own rewards and sanctions as the dominant influences on their pupils' behaviour. As far as the evidence of this current investigation allows, we speculate that this suggests a greater acceptance by these secondary teachers of their causal role than was evident in Miller's (1995) initial study of primary school teachers' attributions.

#### *Differences across cultures*

Although the cultural differences between the two countries may not be considerable as noted in the introduction to this paper, there are some differences of emphasis at least between the educational systems of the two countries. We were interested to see whether or not these had any manifestation within the structures of attributions given by teachers in the two systems.

In fact, in line with the Irish government's explicitly 'child-centred' philosophy for educational practice, it does seem that Irish teachers in both phases attributed marginally greater importance than did their English colleagues to recognising the salience of children's personalities or pressures on children. Similarly, Irish primary teachers seemed to relegate the importance of curriculum demands to a greater extent than did English primary school teachers.

The obverse of this is that, at least within the primary school sector, English teachers seem to have rated their own classroom management strategies, along with adult behaviours more generally, as rather more important than did their Irish colleagues. These English teachers themselves also seemed to have rated these two factors as being of greater importance than individual child-related issues.

We offer two cautious conclusions, therefore. First, that at least at the time that the data were gathered, in Irish schools there may have been some greater regard for individual child matters than pertained in English schools or, conversely, that English primary school teachers placed greater faith in the influence of classroom management and adult influences on children's behaviour.

*Comparison of pupil, parent and teacher attribution*

Whilst formal comparisons of this nature were beyond the scope of this study, given that the core of the questionnaire used here was very similar to the items used in earlier studies by Miller and colleagues, it is possible to make two observations about possible similarities or differences across these studies.

First, the underlying structure of the secondary teachers' attributions in this study is clearly different from the structures of the responses in Miller et al.'s studies and those of the primary teachers here. However, it does seem that the dominant factors in this study and in those conducted with pupils and parents by Miller and colleagues (2000, 2002 respectively) are ones, however labelled, that subsume teachers' responses to pupils' work and behaviour. It may be that this finding of concordance goes some way to ameliorating a concern expressed by Miller et al. (2000) that teachers' apparent difficulty in acknowledging responsibility for causes of pupil misbehaviour might obstruct attempts to develop behaviour management strategies that could be implemented by parents and teachers.

Second, however, it is interesting to note that there are few other similarities between the present findings and those of Miller and colleagues. Thus, with particular regard to children's vulnerability (deemed a separate and important factor in Miller's work), of the items that are labelled as 'pupil vulnerability' (Miller et al., 2000) that are common across all the studies, three ('Child is worried about other things', 'Other children want to copy work', and 'Child needs more help in class') were associated with items labelled as 'Pressures on the child' in the findings from secondary teachers here. These three items were, however, subsumed in the factors 'AdultBeh' and 'CurrDem' in the analysis of the primary school teachers' attributions. As noted above, this may reflect something of the differing views of primary and secondary teachers with regard to the contribution that children themselves make to difficult behaviour. However, as a cautionary note, it should be recalled that the items in the questionnaire derive chiefly from the views of children in Miller et al.'s (2000) study of the children in their first year of secondary school. The children in that study were asked to think back to what they thought might have been associated with misbehaviour in their primary schools. It has to be said, therefore, that the

questionnaire as used here may not have been capable of capturing all the critical issues for teachers – particularly those working in secondary schools. We do, however, on the basis of the reliability of the responses ( $\alpha$  values  $> 0.8$ ) have some reasonable confidence that the questionnaire was not entirely unsuitable for the secondary teachers.

**Conclusion**

This study has illustrated how differing structures of causal attributions for children's behaviour may be situationally (culturally) determined. Most clearly evident were some substantial structural differences between primary and secondary school teachers' attributions. It was noted that structural differences were also found between the results of this study and the earlier work of Miller and colleagues. Some subtler but nonetheless potentially valid differences were found between the views of English and Irish counterparts. It is suggested that these latter findings related at least in part to fundamental differences in educational philosophy. The differences between primary and secondary teachers' views, whilst no doubt sensitive to philosophical issues, were more obviously associated with the presence (or absence) of perceptions of individual child matters. These perceptions appear to have had considerable importance for primary school teachers in both countries but do not appear to have had any significance for secondary teachers. Finally, with reference to Miller and colleagues' studies of the attributions of pupils and parents, it was observed that considerable similarities appear in the importance teachers, pupils and parents place on the causal role of teachers themselves in creating or maintaining problematic behaviours exhibited by children. We hope that this finding, at least, supports further endeavours to understand more fully teachers' roles in relation to the construction of children's behaviour and special educational needs.

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**Appendix 1: Questionnaire as used in the study**

We are interested in finding out what teachers think might cause children to misbehave in class. Over the page is a list of things which some people say cause misbehaviour in classrooms. Please rate each item and specify (by putting a √ in the appropriate box) whether you see them as very important, quite important, not very important, or not important at all.

Please complete the following questions before turning over. All the information you give will be anonymous and confidential.

What stage of education are you involved in?

- Primary
- Secondary

Are you

- Male
- Female

Here is an example. Think about this statement and rate how important you see it as a cause of misbehaviour.

Causes	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not important at all
Child doesn't want to stand out as good or clever				

How important do you think each of these might be in causing misbehaviour in class? Rate each one according to how important you view it by putting a ✓ in the appropriate box.

Causes	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not important at all
1. Too much class work is given				
2. Child is bored				
3. Parents bully their children				
4. Teachers are too strict				
5. Parents' behaviour sets a bad example				
6. Teachers not seeming to punish bad behaviour				
7. Child needs more help in class				
8. Teachers seeming to have unfair punishment systems				
9. Too much homework is given				
10. Other children wanting to copy work				
11. Parents are uncaring				
12. Curriculum is too rigid				
13. Teachers not rewarding good work				
14. Children are under too much pressure to achieve curriculum targets				
15. Other children encourage it				
16. Alcohol/drug abuse by a family member				
17. Teachers are too soft				
18. Child is picked on or tormented by other children				
19. Teachers shout all the time				
20. Pupil wants attention				
21. Teachers have racist attitudes				
22. Child's personality				
23. Child is worried about other things				
24. Teachers seeming to have unfair system of rewards				
25. Good work isn't noticed				
26. Teachers under pressure to meet curriculum targets				
27. Teachers don't listen to children				
28. Pupil is being bullied				

If you feel there are other major causes of misbehaviour, please add them here: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your help.