

Furthering Skill Development Through a Creative Learning Climate in Language and Literature Classes

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Abstract

The presented research examines a specific learning environment in Serbian school system, the language and literature education of Hungarian native speakers, and, more precisely, how can a creative learning climate be created in this field. Several educational reforms have been implemented in Serbia in the past decades, but these changes have yet to produce significant results in skill development. In recent years, it has come to light that the number of functionally illiterate student in the Serbian educational system is alarmingly high. Despite this fact, and due to the leniency of the educational system, most of these students not only manage to finish elementary school, but they also graduate from high school. Furthermore, the secondary educational stage concludes with excellent grades by a considerable number of students. These data illuminate the paradoxical position that the Serbian educational system has come to be in, in the 21st century, simultaneously producing poor and surprisingly excellent results. The education of national minorities suffers from the same problems as the whole system, a curriculum still heavily burdened by its Prussian roots, which means that the weight of developing a methodology for cultivating skills falls entirely on the teachers. The paper aims to evaluate if the current educational system can further develop these highly-regarded skills in students and to examine methods and techniques that teachers could employ to further competencies that require a certain level of creativity, even in absent circumstances.

Keywords: creative learning climate, literary education, Serbian educational system, skill development

Introduction

The 21st century brought significant changes in the approach to competency and skills in the labour market. Strong communication, sophisticated interpersonal, refined problem-solving, and excellent writing skills (sometimes in more than one language), just as digital literacy, are the standard expectation in most competency-based fields. Additionally, depending on the exact nature of the position, a range of practical and academic knowledge, ideally paired with experience, is also required by many employers. Furthermore, our educational systems must prepare students for professions that may not even exist at the beginning of their education.

We also have to admit that these statements can, in certain context, sound quite like a cliché, but they can also be easily corroborated only by considering the developments of the year 2022 in the field of AI research and its popular and thrilling results available to the public,

such as ChatGPT, or text-to-image prompting tools like DALL-E or Midjourney. For our students, these are stimulating new resources with limitless possibilities; for us, educators, on the other hand, they serve as constant reminders that public education has to find a way to be progressive to cultivate creativity-based skill sets even if it seems difficult most of the time, sometimes even against all odds. These are in fact essential for cultivating transversal and digital key competencies, which can be regarded as base knowledge in our current sociocultural and scientific set-up.

Creativity, creative climate, and transversal competencies

Creativity is an integral part of our lives, and it should not come as a surprise that it is in fact a very well-researched subject. There have been many attempts to define the experience, the feeling, to capture the essence of the creative process in numerous disciplines giving us an insight from quite different perspectives. Vlad Glăveanu also attempted to summarise these results, or at least, to provide an overview of the different approaches by pointing out that it would be optimal to consider all possible theories regarding this intricate subject: “There is no single, unified definition of creativity and this is certainly for the best. Instead of opting for one understanding or the other, it is better to consider each one as a facet of a complex phenomenon. The product approach helps us identify when creativity takes place and to compare creative products. Cognitive definitions tell us something about the creative person and the intra-psychological processes they engage in. Systemic and sociocultural reformulations help us consider the wider dynamic of creative expression beyond individual minds and point to the role played by the ideas of others and the broader culture” (Glăveanu, 2021).

Since our research focuses on creative climate in an educational context, a more comprehensive and, in some respects, simplified approach to creativity was needed, which could also be potentially introduced to students of varying academic levels. Coleman and Deutsch provided a summary of the basic preconceptions, factors, and criteria of creative problem solving, referencing the works of various scholars and practitioners. The contexts of their study were conflict management and problem solving to ensure a healthy organizational climate. The following are, of course, also important elements of classroom work, not only determining factors of group dynamics at any given workplace.

In their study, Coleman and Deutsch elaborated on seven themes and guidelines to approach creativity. The first is the importance of challenging and dispelling myths about creativity. It is a common phenomenon that people regard creativity as a quality that is only available to exceptionally talented, intelligent people, and/or artists. In addition, it is often assumed, that it cannot be taught or learned, but, rather, it is a somewhat supernatural, mysterious anomaly. This myth has already been refuted by many researchers, showing that anyone is capable of creativity given the right circumstances and opportunities. A discussion on this topic would be highly beneficial for student of all ages. The second point is that time and space are necessary for creative problem solving, and it is overall beneficial to create an “oasis” for this purpose to achieve the best results: “The condition of time has two dimensions, length, and endurance. People must have a sufficient amount of time to open up and see things flexibly and creatively, particularly if working in a conflict situation where they are operating primarily in a critical mode” (Coleman & Deutsch, 2006, p. 407). The third component is

described as cultivating an atmosphere that is perceived as serious and playful at the same time. "As Howard Gruber indicated, playfulness is often central to a creative process. Humour, play, and a sense of fun can all contribute to releasing tension and opening one's view of things, ultimately leading to development of a novel point of view" (Coleman & Deutsch, 2006, p. 408). The fourth would be fostering the optimal amount of tension that motivates the creative process instead of hindering it. The fifth condition requires an overall open-mindedness and a safe space, since it elaborates on the importance of confidently taking the risk of being outlandish. Encouraging thinking outside of the box on an educational level can provide a mindset that enables complex and transdisciplinary problem solving later. This is the exact approach, that many contemporary scholars are advocating for in different scientific fields, like the authors of the book *Doing Rebellious Research* (Burnard et al., 2022), for example. The next aspect of creativity in the Coleman and Deutsch summary is the balance of open (divergent) and closed (convergent) thinking. The search for creative solutions primarily requires divergent thinking, but making a decision in favour of only one of the solutions/options is more the result of convergent thinking, so it is worth applying both methods equally in order to achieve the best possible result. Clarifying these processes may be helpful in optimizing project and group work in the classroom. The last point is adequate problem definition. In a workplace context, skipping this step can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of teamwork (Coleman & Deutsch, 2006, p. 406-411). In education, we must also bear in mind that students are only able to solve a task effectively, in the best case, creatively, if they first examine its nature carefully and take time to interpret it.

The concept of organizational climate was established in the 1960s. Balázs gives the following summary on the topic: "...climate is to be understood as the dominant atmosphere around the organization, the level of morality, and the strength of feelings, attachment, care, and goodwill among organizational members. The atmosphere affects the attitudes that determine the workplace performance and personal relationships of the members of the organization. The extent to which employees accept the organizational culture has a significant impact on the atmosphere" (Balázs, 2014, p. 39). Organizational culture, on the other hand, describes the essence of the organization, while climate is to be understood as the feelings and attitude of the members/colleagues towards the culture. The two exist independently but influence each other. The term creative climate refers to environmental factors that support creativity, and was first formulated in connection with the workplace environment in Göran Ekvall's study in 1983, that Krisztina Gaskó and Ida Szűcs summarised as follows: "The climate, when contrasted with the concept of culture, is a much more tangible phenomenon, which is determined by the physical environment, social relations and expectations" (Gaskó & Szűcs, 2021, p. 90). It is important to emphasize that climate is "... a complex characteristic of the organization. It is similar to the meaning of personality in the case of an individual, that is, the specific individual image of the organization that distinguishes it from other organizations." (Halpin & Croft, 1963 as summarized by Kozma, 1985, p. 86)

Ekvall denominates daily behaviour and attitudes as the base elements of the workplace climate which influence "problem solving, decision-making, communication, learning, commitment, motivation, and these processes are determinants of subjective well-being, satisfaction, efficiency and creativity" (Péter-Szarka, 2014, p. 8). The factors that can potentially further creativity are e.g. the setting of appropriate goals and the effort to achieve them, the necessary

freedom and independence to perform tasks, feedback, recognition, encouragement, support for trying out new ideas, which goes hand in hand with supporting risk-taking and accepting the possibility of making mistakes. These are also considered in studies researching the creative climate of schools, because cooperation-based learning is becoming a frequently applied method in 21st-century education, and, due to these tendencies, workplace/organisational dynamics and patterns are becoming more recognizable and determining in schools. Traditional education expects knowledge acquisition, memorization, and the reproduction of knowledge based on the teacher's presentation from students, but the new interpretation of "learning emphasizes the role of student activity on the one hand, and the role of the learning environment on the other. It is no coincidence that perception, imagination, emotions, wills, action, and thinking are prominent in this approach" (Vass, 2012). It must be emphasized that there is an increasing need to facilitate creativity in education, primarily through the introduction of new educational methods and teaching practices. Today's education must prepare children for a future that even we ourselves aren't familiar with, so recognizing real abilities, interest, and developing flexibility is the only way for students to get the most out of themselves and become productive (Ekvall, 1999 and Robinson, 2010 as cited Péter-Szarka, 2014, p. 13).

Learning stems from curiosity, wonder and openness instinctively present in humans, and this is related to the activity of playing. Traditional education models consider play, and the self-forgetfulness that is naturally associated with it, to be appropriate primarily before school age, at most in the first two years of elementary school grades. However, both experience and countless research studies prove that learning can only take place in a stress-free state and environment, a stressful situation forces a person to defend himself or escape, but learning requires a relaxed individual in a relaxed state.

Above all, a modern school must take this fact into account and ensure the basic conditions for effective learning: a safe, accepting environment. Obviously, the primary condition for this is an empathetic, accepting teacher who knows the students and is professionally trained to deal with different personalities, providing them with appropriate tasks. Furthermore, the teacher's responsibilities also include creating an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and acceptance in the classroom. Rogers and Freiberg talk about psychological safety and psychological freedom in relation to a school climate that stimulates creativity. Psychological safety means an accepting environment free of criticism, which ensures that the students can open and be spontaneous. Psychological freedom allows freedom of expression, the disregard of conventions, thereby enabling the development and use of the student's abilities. (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). The next factor of the motivating atmosphere for learning is the attitude towards schoolwork, i.e.: teaching, practicing and advocating for independent learning, in this context, continuous, regular feedback, developmental evaluation, the possibility of asking questions, listening, considering, and accepting student suggestions and ideas (which is proof of the functioning of creativity). These are the conditions for learning how to deal with criticism, the possibility and even the necessity of making mistakes. For all this, it is necessary to develop a teacher-student and student-student relationship that can accept jokes and is open to humour, which also helps us learn that we can get lost several times on the way to the right solution, but this is not fatal, since we can turn back and try again, so slowly, the students understand that it is natural to try and not know everything at first try. As far as specific classroom work is concerned, the right balance between freedom and rules within defined frameworks is impor-

tant (Morais et al., 2019). The different tasks and problem solving methods encouraging this kind of open and creative learning environment can be summarised as the following: “Descriptions of the school’s creative environment include the importance of classroom tasks containing stimulating, real-life problem situations and open-ended tasks, group work, play, discussion, research-discovery and the use of the project method, the use of digital tools, the focus on partners, and the importance of the peer group are emphasized” (Báthory, 2000; Vass, 2012 as cited in Péter-Szarka, 2014, p. 12). In addition, classwork must also be goal-oriented, the students must be aware of what goal they need to achieve by the end of the current workflow (Hapsari, 2020, p. 387). It should also be mentioned that the environmental conditions that support creativity are also extremely important: the classroom must be bright and well-ventilated, the placement of benches, chairs, and other equipment must allow for light, barrier-free change of location, especially during group, pair, and individual work.

A creative learning climate has, for a time, been regarded as the basis for developing complex skill sets, which is the essential foundation for the proficient use of transversal key competences. “The EU Key Competences Framework for lifelong learning [...] introduces 8 key competences and highlights the role of cross-cutting skills such as critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking and constructive management of feelings in all of them. The report [...] suggests that particular efforts are needed for the transversal key competences that are crucial for more creativity and innovation, and for success in the labour market and society at large. These transversal key competences include, for example, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness” (Cachia et al., 2010, p. 14). These also have to be considered when discussing creativity and creative climate – after all, our final goal is to establish and develop these competencies and abilities in order for our students to be able to stand their ground in the increasingly digitized and globalized information society.

Context: The Serbian education system

The Serbian educational system might seem like a peculiar one by global standards, but, then again, not so by post-Yugoslavian or even Eastern European ones. Serbian is the main language used in our schools, but certain ethnicities, like Slovaks, Rusyns, Croats, Romanians and Hungarians, have the opportunity to learn in their native languages to varying degrees. Our research examines one of these specific learning environments in the Serbian school system, the language and literature education of Hungarian native speakers, more precisely, the state of creative climate from the perspective of the students, and how cultivating it can be beneficial for furthering skill development.

While the native language and literature education of the above-mentioned ethnicities rely on curricula written by their own experts and educators, there are of course certain guidelines and regulations prescribed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia that apply to all. The education reforms implemented, and strategies developed (the most recent ones mostly in accordance with EU practices) in the past decades brought positive and negative developments in deferring areas, but as a whole have yet to produce significant or overarching results in skill advancement. Due to the leniency of the educational system, as well as the devaluation of the grading system, most of the students not only manage

to finish elementary school, but also graduate secondary school. In the past three years, this educational stage was concluded within the highest grade range by 40-45% of the students; furthermore, 14% of these students graduated with the highest certificate of merit issued by the Serbian educational system, the so-called “Vuk Karadžić” diploma (Ivić et al., 2021, p. 89). In 2021, a summary of the data on literacy and overall language competences of the students of the Serbian education system was published. The statistics were alarming, and some dire conclusions regarding these were formulated:

“The key finding is that between 40 and 50% of our fifteen-year-olds are at a level that qualifies them as functional illiterates. Such a finding should have been alarming, because it means that almost half of our students enter secondary education with a poor starting point for secondary and further higher education. The situation of secondary education (its quality, structure, inflation of high grades) and higher education (the quality of which has been called into question due to hypertrophy, insufficient capacities, increased pass rate in exams, etc.) opens the issue of the quality of all formally acquired diplomas. This consequently highlights the problem of the actual educational and cultural level of the population of Serbia and the question of whether this state could be the driving force of the total development of Serbia” (Ivić et al., 2021, p. 104)

These data illuminate a quite paradoxical situation. The Serbian educational system is simultaneously producing poor and astonishingly excellent results in the 21st century. Unsurprisingly, the education of national minorities suffers from the same problems as the whole system. The curriculum is still burdened by its Prussian roots, as it focuses on acquiring academic knowledge, and it is heavily performance oriented, mostly expecting to regurgitate facts without critical thinking or a creative approach. This means that the weight of developing a methodology for cultivating skills falls almost entirely on the teachers, under constant pressure to follow the mandated curriculum. To determine the actual state of creative climate in the classrooms of Hungarian students we could not rely on statistics of the Serbian educational system as a whole, so targeted research was implemented in a form of an online questionnaire.

Subjects: Hungarian students in the Serbian education system

As already mentioned, our research subjects are the Hungarian native speakers in the Serbian educational system. Official statistics show that the number of students enrolled in secondary schools has been on a decline in the whole country for the past decade. The total number of students in 2010 was 285 596, and in the current school year it is 246 638, which is roughly 14% less. The drop in number of Hungarian native speaking students is more alarming, with approximately 35% for the same interval starting from 6635 in 2010 to 4331 in 2023. In the 2022/23 school year, Hungarian native speakers had the option to learn in their native tongue in 5 school districts, altogether, in 35 secondary schools, with 76 departments of secondary schools, of which 20 offered three-year courses of study, while 56 offered four-year courses.¹

¹ Data collected and processed by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (<https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-US/oblasti/obrazovanje/srednje-obrazovanje>) and the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority in Serbia (https://www.mnt.org.rs/sites/default/files/attachments/mnt_3_ules_osszefuzott_javitott.pdf)

The three-year courses are secondary trade schools that students conclude without a general certificate of secondary education. Most of the four-year courses fall in the secondary vocational schools (*srednje stručne škole, szakközépiskola*), and the minority in this category are grammar schools (*gimnazija, gimnázium*), both are completed with a general certificate of secondary education, providing the necessary credentials for academic studies.

Hypothesis, methodology and framework

Considering the orientation and the strict and binding institutional system the educators in public education experience in Serbia, our original assumption was that the conditions for developing a creative climate are most likely lacking or non-existent in most of secondary schools. Teachers as adult and educated participants in mentoring and leading positions also tend to be overly critical, constantly striving for what could be accomplished and are only on rare occasions pleased with the present circumstances and current achievements. Therefore, it was crucial to access the situation at hand from a nonbiased point of view that comes from inside the system. While considering applicable research methods, we deliberated between several approaches and examined studies into the subject. In the end, we decided to apply a questionnaire developed by Hungarian authors, because their approach, examining the climate in the classroom through the students' perceptions, was in accordance with our interests and aims. Although there are some key differences between the Serbian and the Hungarian educational systems regarding the curriculum and overall approach to education, they are definitely comparable, and therefore the methods were deemed as applicable. The Creative Climate Questionnaire for Schools we decided to employ was created by Péter-Szarka, Tímár and Balázs. The authors have considered multiple approaches. Most of those were developed to assess creative climate in the workspace, and, therefore, these methods had to be adapted and amalgamated with questionnaires created for schools. The considered sources were the following: CCQ, Creative Climate Questionnaire; KEYS, Assessing Work Environment for Creativity, and the Hungarian version; SSSI, Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation; TCI, Team Climate Inventory; Tanítási Klíma Percepció [Teaching Climate Perception]; Tóth-féle Kreativitást Becslő Skála [Creativity Assessment Scale by Tóth] (Péter-Szarka et. al., 2015, p. 116).

The questionnaire is based on five groups of key dimensions: group, open-mindedness, encouragement of diversity and autonomy, challenge and curiosities, limits. The presence or deficiency of these dimensions are evaluated by the students on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 standing for "not at all characteristic", and 7 for "fully characteristic" through 47 statements all together.

For purposes of further differentiation, we also asked the students their department type and what year of secondary school they were in. As you can see, secondary art schools are a category of their own because our assumption was that the subject and the nature of that specific education is more inclined to encourage creative approaches and to cultivate a creative climate.

Results: Overview

The Creative Climate Questionnaire for Schools consisting of 47 statements was filled out anonymously by 675 Vojvodinian Hungarian high school students online in the spring of 2023. The largest group of students consists of secondary vocational school students, with 414 such students who filled out the questionnaire (61.33%). This group is followed by grammar school students, with 132 individuals (19.56%), and 92 students who frequent three-year secondary trade schools (13.63%), and, finally, 37 secondary art school students (5.48%). Of those who completed the questionnaire, 23.92% are in first year of secondary school, 22.14% are in second, 28.53% in third, and 25.41% in fourth year of secondary school studies.

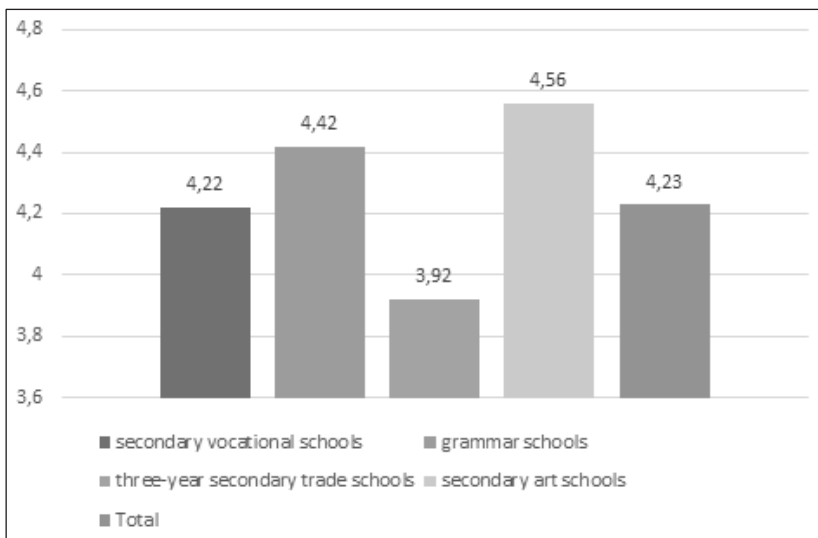


Figure 1. Creative climate according to school type

Overall, the students evaluated the creative climate of their school to be higher than the middle score. Looking at the results, an average score of 4.23 emerges. Although there are no significant differences according to school type, some conclusions can be drawn. Our hypothesis, according to which the learning environment that allows for the most creativity can be found in secondary art schools, has been proven. The second most creative climate is attributed to grammar schools, and the lowest average score is found in three-year secondary trade schools. The results show that there is room for improvement, but the situation gives reason to remain optimistic. A more detailed analysis of certain statements supports this further.

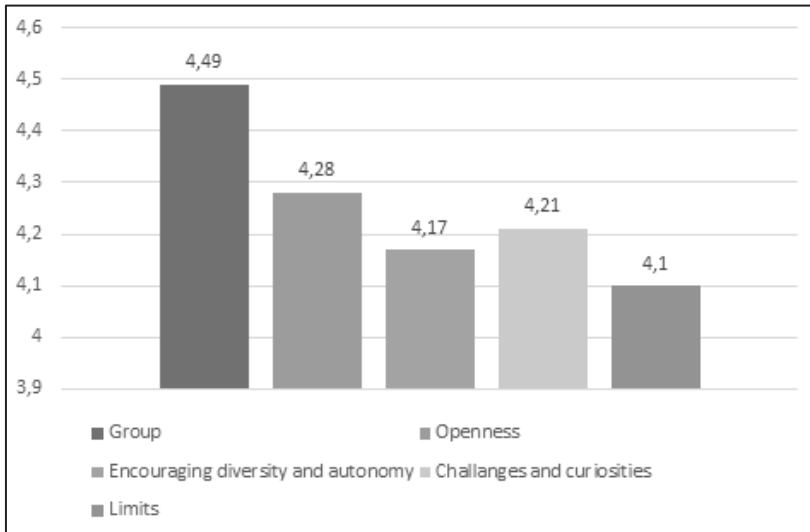


Figure 2. The averages of the groups

If we examine the statements' groups, we can see that the students evaluated group cohesion to be the strongest, that is to say, they feel that cohesion is moderate, it is only a little characteristic of classmates to bully others, it is fairly characteristic that classmates play together, members of the class like each other moderately, lack of trust, respect, as well as conflict are not characteristic in the surveyed students' classes, and cooperation within the class is rather characteristic. If we look, however, at the specific results behind the average score, we can see that while 375 students answered that classmates picking on each other often is not characteristic of their classes, 83 students answered that it was moderately characteristic, and 211 surveyed students answered that it does, indeed, happen often that students pick on each other.

The second-best scores concerned openness. Teachers in grammar schools encourage students to find new solutions to a problem the most, while students at the three-year secondary trade schools have the least opportunities for this. It is most characteristic of secondary art schools that students are encouraged to find a solution to a problem, even after erring. It is rather characteristic of grammar and art schools that teachers show openness towards students' ideas. This, however, is uncharacteristic in three-year secondary trade schools according to the surveyed students. Solving a problem in more than one way is also an option more grammar school and art schoolteachers are open to, rather than three-year secondary vocational schoolteachers. Flexibility in class is only a little characteristic of each of the examined schools. Examining a question from multiple perspectives is, on average, only a little characteristic, moderately so in grammar schools, and it is only in secondary art schools that the average approaches "fairly characteristic" (4.76).

As far as challenges and curiosities are concerned, secondary art school students consider school expectations to be the most realistic (4.56), whereas grammar school students the least realistic (3.89). Considering the overloaded grammar school curriculum, this is not a surprising

outcome. According to the results, the material studied in school is moderately useful in everyday life. Overall, the students consider studying to be more important than the average score (4.73), but it can be observed that grammar school students raise the average considerably, as it is quite characteristic of them that they consider studying to be important (5.32). The majority of students consider class material as rather uninteresting, and the statement "In school we learn interesting things" was evaluated the lowest among the students at the three-year secondary trade schools (3.59), but a similar result can be observed among grammar school students (3.64) and four-year vocational school students (3.79) as well. Secondary art school students evaluated class material to be more than averagely interesting (4.46). Most of the students have well-defined goals in terms of their studies; this is supported by the strong average score awarded to this statement (4.73). Art school students are the most decisive (5.42), students from the rest of the schools examined gave mediocre scores.

As far as creative climate is concerned, it is important that teachers motivate students in terms of diversity and autonomy. While it is fairly characteristic of grammar school and art school students that they are given an opportunity in class to listen to each other's ideas and share their opinions, three-year secondary trade school students have less such opportunities. The value assigned to having opportunities for free debate is mediocre (3.98) on average, and there are no significant differences between school types. Based on this, we can conclude that a chance to voice one's own opinion is only given if doing so does not generate debate. Secondary art school students report being free to make the most decisions (5.08) in class while solving problems, and three-year trade school students report the least opportunities for this (4.07). Altogether, the average is 4.41; nevertheless, it is less characteristic that classes as a whole make decisions after having considered everyone's perspective (3.55). Diversity in classmates did not inspire students (3.65); it is perhaps unsurprising that secondary art students value diversity the most, but even in these schools, the results were mediocre on average (4.42). Three-year secondary trade school students value diversity in class the least (3.21). Dealing with the pressure of unsolved tasks is not something teachers encourage in students (3.73), independent thinking, however, is more encouraged (4.69), mostly so in art schools (5.43). According to the surveyed students, teachers care about what students think about a certain topic to a moderate degree (4.24). Results were best for this statement in grammar schools (4.77), but even this score is far from optimal.

The fifth group consists of factors that limit students' creativity, such as time constraints, a negative reaction to humour or insistence on habits. Students feel they can allow themselves a humorous remark or two, to an extent, as most teachers value humour. They do not consider time constraints to be a real problem, as is the case with insistence on habits.

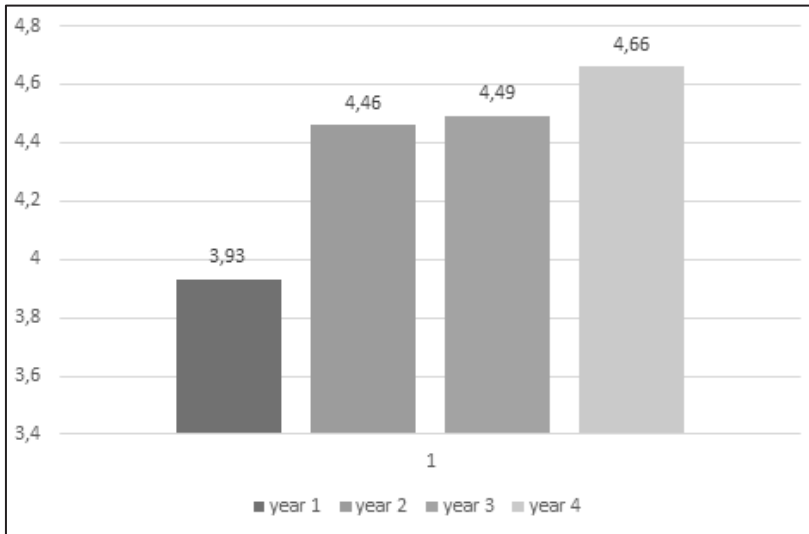


Figure 3. Evaluation of statements in the group, according to year of study

While examining the statements related to the fifth group, it is important to look at the students' year of study. Results show that group cohesion, along with the peers' effect on one another, becomes proportionally stronger with the passage of time. It is not only in this category in which a significant difference can be observed between the grades, as it is also evident in one of the statements concerning encouraging diversity and autonomy. The "I can speak freely and begin a debate if I do not agree with something" statement received an average score of 3.52 among first-year secondary schoolers, 3.69 among second-graders, 3.81 and 4.33 among third- and fourth-year students, respectively.

Despite this, the average score for creative climate does not follow the observable growth in the group's statements according to grade level. The average is 4.28 in first-year high schoolers, 4.16 in second-, 4.12 in third-, and 4.32 in fourth-grade students.

Conclusions and potential remedies

After carefully considering the results of our questionnaire, we can conclude that creative climate is present to a certain extent in most of the Hungarian education in secondary schools in Serbia. Still, this, of course, leaves plenty of room for improvement. Furthermore, another assessment is needed to compare the thoughts and insights of the teachers on this matter.

Although the evaluation of the questionnaire's statements does not diverge on average from "moderately characteristic", some important differences can be observed. The factors of creative climate are most pronounced in secondary art schools, whereas they appear to be least present in three-year secondary trade schools.

The responses also draw attention to certain issues arising from systematic problems, such as flexibility in class, or the fact that the curriculum does not elicit interest in most students. It is enough, in some instances, to change the attitude of teachers, in the case of openness to

considering students' ideas and opinions, for example, or in developing students' debating skills. Furthermore, it is also of paramount importance that we pay attention to group dynamics and individual students, as well, especially considering the mass shootings of May 2023.

The language and literature curriculum is a highly debated subject (particularly in terms of changes in the field of required reading). As stated already, academic knowledge tends to overshadow a skill-oriented approach in the Serbian education system. In the current situation, the educators' role is certainly crucial, since due to a lack of overall financial resources, the creation, cultivation, and sustainment of a creative school climate must be achieved through the educators' own creative efforts.

Integrating different approaches of creativity across the curricula and stimulating discussions on the topic can provide a substantial starting point. Secondary school students, depending on which class they are in, may already be familiar with the concept of creativity. Eliminating the related myths may result in a stimulating conversation; nonetheless, there seems to be no universal method, because the dynamics of the class community and the degree of potential creative climate given from the beginning can have a tremendous impact on this discourse. Moderating the alienating tendencies of the education system could play an important role in cultivating a creative learning environment. Young adult and popular culture in classroom discussions, projects and tasks can be a valuable resource in this regard, because the current curriculum is heavily focused on classical literature. Therefore, finding the possible points of access unfortunately falls entirely on the educators.

Cultivating multimodal literacy would also be a beneficial approach in language and literature classes, since it includes several of the key transversal competences that rely profoundly on creative skills, such as digital, social and civic competence, and cultural awareness. Integrating basic knowledge of visual culture into a discourse about creativity would also be feasible, since visual artistic expression is usually regarded as the primary outlet for creativity.

Initially, cultivating multimodal competencies can be introduced in the classroom by studying the visual language of posters and memes. The majority of students probably interpret these forms of communication instinctively, without ever having to think about what the significance of perspective in an image changes, or what additional meaning the use of individual colours can carry. There are already plenty of useful methods for assessing and developing visual literacy. *Worth a Thousand Words*, for example, is a comprehensive source of basic knowledge on the topic that can be a valuable resource even for teachers who are reluctant to explore visual literacy and use comics in the classroom (Jaffe & Hurwich 2019). It would certainly be useful if these practices were officially integrated into the curriculum and textbooks, but currently there are no significant changes in development. Teachers who are already experimenting with multimodal literacy and other creativity furthering practices are essentially doing so out of due diligence.

As university lecturers, we believe that one of the fundamental conditions for a positive change is that future teachers of Hungarian language and literature start their teaching careers equipped with the basic knowledge that enables them to consciously cultivate a creative learning climate in the classroom, keeping the development of transversal competences and multimodal literacy in mind. In addition, we aim to elaborate on these topics in our teacher-

training seminars, and exchange methods and practices that are already being implemented by ambitious and hard-working colleagues.

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