

Debate as an educational method in Hungary: The policy environment and needs in teacher-training

BALÁZS VENKOVITS*  and MARIANN MAKAY

Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

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ABSTRACT

The benefits of using formalized debates in the classroom are widely known as debating develops various skills that students need both inside and outside the modern educational system. Such competences range from communication and research skills, critical thinking, team work, public speaking, and self-confidence (Kennedy, 2007; Medina, 2020; Snider & Schnurer, 2006). However, while debating is frequently used both in regular classroom settings and as extra-curricular activities in various countries, it is still largely neglected as an educational tool in Hungary. This is true both in secondary and tertiary education with the teaching of debate mostly absent from teacher-training programs as well. After an overview of research findings on the key benefits of using debates in the classroom, the paper examines the educational policy environment in Hungary concerning the use of debates and based on various surveys argues that the manifold benefits of debating could also be exploited in Hungary as it is not only enabled by the core and general curricula but also caters for a clear need both in teacher training and daily educational practice.

KEYWORDS

debating, debate method, National Core Curriculum, General Curricula, skills development, teacher training

INTRODUCTION – THE BENEFITS OF DEBATING IN THE CLASSROOM

Despite the widely-known benefits of formalized debating in an educational context, its international use in various levels of education, and the presence of the Hungarian debate movement

* Corresponding author. E-mail: venkovits.balazs@arts.unideb.hu

(Disputa) already from the early 1990s, debating is still not commonly and extensively used in Hungarian educational settings. It is not part of the daily practice of most secondary school teachers and it is not an integral part of teacher-training in Hungary despite the fact that both the National Core Curriculum (Nemzeti alaptanterv, hereafter NCC) and the General or Framework Curricula (kerettanterv, hereafter GC) heavily rely on both the skills developed by debating and the use of debate as a teaching method specifically for various subjects. Based on surveys and experience with organizing debate competitions, there seems to be an interest on behalf of students, and those studying in teacher-training programs also express a need to learn more about the method. The skills associated and developed by debating are wide-ranging and comprise those sets of abilities that are often emphasized by educational documents and echoed by the labor market, also reflecting the expectations towards modern schools.

Besides the most often mentioned abilities that formalized debate can be used to improve, including critical thinking and communication, Gary Rybold argues that debating may also be used to develop public speaking and a great variety of other skills, including note taking, organizing, researching, writing, listening, and people skills (Rybold, 2006). Debating encourages active learning and strengthens oral communication competences among others (Kennedy, 2007; Kennedy, 2009), while besides these key areas, debates are also often praised for boosting student's confidence and self-esteem (Zare & Othman, 2013). While they help students improve numerous key soft skills, the use of debates in the classroom also contributes to the better understanding of the contents of classes, and debating may have a strong role in the entire learning process (Hunya, 1998) as it shifts the focus from the teacher to the students and encourages both individual (research) and team work. As Kennedy also notes, "students learn more effectively by actively analyzing, discussing, and applying content in meaningful ways rather than by passively absorbing information [...] therefore, students benefit when instructors utilize instructional strategies that promote active engagement" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 183). Kassem (2021), when studying the effect of training English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in debates, also found that debating enhanced "EFL learners' oral and written performance, as well as their ideal L2 self", while "it also seemed effective in reducing their communication apprehension" (p. 1). As we will see below, many of these key concepts and issues also appear in the official educational policy documents of Hungary.

Studying the impact of debate across the curriculum on pedagogy, Christopher Medina in his dissertation provides a thorough overview of scholarly findings and surveys on how debate improves academic skills, oral communication, critical thinking, increases self-confidence and student engagement, providing evidence of the often mentioned benefits of using this method in both tertiary and secondary education (see, for example, Aclan, Aziz, Hashima, & Valdez, 2016; Bellon, 2000; Healey, 2012; Indire, 2019; Oros, 2007; Ryan & College, 2006; Semlak & Shields, 1977; Yang & Rusli, 2012; Zare & Othman, 2013; etc.). Other professionals using debate as an educational tool have also confirmed such statements:

Academic tournament debate has a proven track record of teaching critical thinking at the middle school, high school, and college levels. Many have used debate in the non-speech classroom as an instructional tool that meets multiple educational objectives: interactive instruction, student-teacher partnership, democratic dialogue, student ownership of learning, experiential education, communication skills of listening and speaking, argument construction, cooperative learning, critical thinking, research (traditional and computer), strategic note taking, logical organization, critical



reading, evaluation, and, not least, fun. Debate, both in and out of the classroom, is a profound example of cooperative learning that promotes critical thinking (Snider & Schnurer, 2006, p. x).

Debating may be used in a variety of classes and topics ranging from Hungarian language, history, foreign languages, etc. and also provides a range of opportunities for extracurricular activities and talent development because it teaches both content “as well as process and requires information acquisition and management” (Snider & Schnurer, 2006, p. 5). Debate clubs and competitions can be built on class experience that provide further outlets for students to practice their skills, increase student involvement, compete through cooperation, and prepare for 21st-century challenges they will need to face (an unprecedented amount of information reaching them, dealing with fake news, etc.).

In the past few years we have been organizing English-language debate competitions for Hungarian secondary school students and there seems to be a definite interest in the more extensive use of debating in Hungary as well. Although there are schools and teachers who have established debate clubs and use debates in both curricular and extra-curricular activities (participants of our debate competition also) and the benefits presented above are known and are also echoed by the key educational policy documents, further support for in-service teachers and changes in the training of future educators are needed for the more extensive use of debating in Hungarian classrooms. These should, first of all, reiterate the key benefits of the method on teaching practice and student learning, and provide resources and educational materials for teachers that they could rely on in their daily work.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The key scholarly aim of the paper is to explore why debates are not used more extensively in the Hungarian educational system at present despite the benefits associated with the method as outlined above. To do so, it first of all scrutinizes the key educational policy documents of Hungary to see if these actually encourage and enable the use of this method or not; thus whether they provide the necessary legal and methodological foundation for the more extensive use of debating in Hungarian classrooms. Second, with the help of our own surveys and studies conducted by others, it also aims to gauge the level of awareness of the method among Hungarian teacher trainees, assess feedback from students who have had the chance to engage in debating during their studies, and the needs and interests of teacher-trainees and in-service educators in this respect in terms of learning more about debate. These studies enable us to assess if Hungarian results are in line with international findings and if debating could be used more extensively in Hungary if there was more assistance and training provided.

METHODS

In order to examine the regulatory environment, we scrutinized two key documents of Hungarian educational policy, the National Core Curriculum (NCC) and the General Curricula (GC). The former defines the basic content and key competences that every Hungarian school needs to focus on, while the latter applies the basic principles of the NCC to specific school types and grades, also touching upon methodological considerations. We examined both general



statements about competences, skills, etc. that the documents aim to develop as well as specific methodological recommendations for various subjects to find out if these are in line with the skills developed by debating and to what extent the use of debates is encouraged or enabled by these key documents. Márta Hunya published her findings based on a similar survey in 2002 but with changes in the core curriculum in 2012 and 2020 a new study with similar goals is absolutely timely. We provide an overview of Hunya's findings and our results in our discussion.

To examine the awareness of and needs related to debating in the classroom, we also conducted two pilot surveys. The first was carried out to investigate the impact of debating mainly within secondary education and was based on self-assessment by students, while it also highlighted the key reasons why students might want to start debating as part of their curricular and extra-curricular activities. Makay asked respondents between 11 and 18 years of age and the survey consisted of several different types of tasks, such as describing one's own experience as part of short (open) answers, charts, multiple choice and true or false questions. The survey was shared in a closed Facebook group, where the only members are students (and teachers) practicing classroom debate (or ex-debaters), while contacts were also collected from debate teachers across Eastern Hungary (we were familiar with due to contacts during our debate competitions). Overall, 41 people answered the questionnaire (15 male and 26 female).

The second survey focused on teacher-trainees and was aimed at assessing their awareness of using debates in the classroom and their interest in learning more about it. Makay's study is based on an online survey taken in 2020 in the teacher-training program of the University of Debrecen. The participants were between 17 and 28 years old. Altogether 50 people took part in the survey (8 men (16%) and 42 women (84%)) that consisted of numerous task types, including multiple choice questions and short writing tasks. The survey was sent out to teacher trainees studying to become teachers of English at the University of Debrecen. Students from all years were present in the survey as 10 people (20%) were in their first year, 2 people (4%) in their second year, 30 people (60%) in their third year, 6 people (12%) in their fourth year, and 2 people (4%) in their fifth year. Respondents had the following majors besides English: 16 people (32%) were English language and Hungarian literature majors, 11 people (22%) were English language and history majors, 7 people (14%) were English language and German language majors, 4 people (8%) were English language and Biology majors, 3 people (6%) were English language and Mathematics majors, 3 people (6%) were English language and Russian language majors, 2 people (4%) were English language and Geography majors, 2 people (4%) were studying English language and Ethics, 1 person (2%) was an English language and Physical Education major, and 2 people (2%) were English language and Community Education majors.

In our conclusions, we also relied on surveys conducted by scholars and educators internationally as well as the feedback we have received over the years in connection with our debate competition and e-learning course developed for teachers interested in introducing debates in the classroom.

RESULTS

Our analysis of educational policy documents indicates that the use of debates in the classroom is in line with several of the key principles and objectives of the new NCC and GC, while these documents also specifically recommend the use of debates in such wide ranging subjects as



foreign languages, civics, biology, and geography. Therefore, the regulatory framework provides the basis for a more widespread use of debates in Hungarian classrooms as well. This confirms Hunya's findings from 2002 but while the inclusion of debates was to a certain extent a surprise for Hunya at the time, by 2020 the absence of debating as an educational tool of modern pedagogy would have been more surprising. The problem, however, is similar to earlier times as although the NCC and GC provide both a theoretical background and specific examples for the use of debates, these offer no detailed methodological support and therefore it is hard for educators to actually integrate debates into their classroom practice.

Such methodological support would be needed to bridge the gap between the principles and objectives of the NCC and the GC and the needs and interests of students and teachers. Based on the surveys introduced in the main part of this paper, few of the in-practice educators and those participating in teacher training are adequately familiar with the use of debates in their teaching practice, while many would be interested in learning more about the method already during their training. Most of the barriers to using debates could be overcome by proper training and methodological support. The survey conducted by Makay among students who have been involved in debates during their secondary school years indicates that participants also feel the benefits of debating and that it has contributed to the improvement of their skills, which is in line with international surveys of the same type.

All these mean that the policy framework supports (even more, expects) the more extensive use of debates and the development of "debate culture" in the Hungarian educational system, there is a positive attitude from the part of students who have already had experience with debates, and teachers and teacher trainees are interested in learning more about the methods; yet the proper methodological support is absent that could bring together all these aspects and contribute to the more widespread use of debates.

DISCUSSION – THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND DEBATE IN HUNGARIAN EDUCATION

Hungary has a three-tier curriculum regulation system of which we examine the top two layers in this paper as these provide the general framework that needs to be followed by all schools in the country.¹ The top-level regulation is the National Core Curriculum, issued by the Hungarian Government in 2012 (Government Decree no. 110/2012 (VI.4.) on the issuance, introduction and implementation of the National Core Curriculum) and amended most recently in 2020 (Government Decree no. 5/2020 (I.31.)). Those specified in the NCC are compulsory for all educational institutions and provide the basis (both theoretical and ideological) for the key areas of knowledge and competences that need to be provided and developed (thus including both content and tasks for various phases of education). The second level is called the "framework" curricula (in this paper referred to as General Curricula) that adapts the abstract principles of the NCC and provides more practical support in terms of curriculum and methodology.

¹For an overview in English, see: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/teaching-and-learning-general-secondary-education-2_en#:~:text=The%20National%20Core%20Curriculum%20is%20%E2%80%9Ethe%20core%20document%20regulating%20Hungarian,textbooks%20and%20other%20teaching%20aids.&text=The%20National%20Core%20Curriculum%20is%20issued%20as%20a%20government%20decree.



These curricula are issued by the minister responsible for education (with the most recent version from 2020) with separate curricula developed for different grades. The third level (not studied here) is represented by the local curricula developed by school teachers (and subsequently approved) based on the above two levels.² Therefore, the NCC is the core document that serves as the basis of the GC and the local curricula, outlining the key principles and objectives, the content of subjects, examination requirements, etc. By studying the two upper-level documents, we may gain insights into the general objectives of educational policy in Hungary and in this particular case explore the extent to which debates are integrated within this framework.

Our survey of these documents is not without precedent as Hunya conducted a similar study in 2002. She examined the then effective NCC and GC, as well as the available textbooks, to see the extent to which these provide opportunities for using/teaching debate and argumentation in Hungarian schools. Contrary to the original supposition, Hunya concluded that these key documents did include several references to debate, indeed, it appears as a desirable method of teaching. She also argued that the use of debates helps the implementation of the core values and principles of the Hungarian core curriculum as well as the realization of common standards and requirements (Hunya, 2002a, 2002b). Debates may play a significant role in such subjects (educational areas) as the mother tongue and literature, living foreign languages, sociology, environmental studies, IT, etc., while it is only mathematics and physical education where its role might be negligible. Based on Hunya's findings, our expectation was that the newer versions and amendments to the NCC would contain references to debating at least to the same extent or would integrate the method even more than before.

Tibor Oláh, in his article on the role of debate in education, also studied this issue with reference to the newer version of the NCC, and concluded in 2017 that the National Core Curriculum also considers the use of debates to be important, however, he also called attention to the difficulties with implementing the key principles outlined by the two upper levels of educational regulation in Hungary as these provide no methodological help for such implementation. As there is no abundance of textbooks, handbooks, and trainings that could help teachers acquire the necessary knowledge for the use of debates in the classroom the teachers are left on their own: "The teachers either learn about argumentation techniques and debate formats on their own, or they will not be able to adequately develop the relevant skills of students"³ (Oláh, 2017, para. 6).⁴

After several years of preparatory work, on January 1, 2020 Government Decree no. 5/2020 (I.31.) on the amendment of Government Decree no. 110/2012. (VI.4.) on the issuance, introduction, and implementation of the National Core Curriculum was published in *Magyar Közlöny* (Hungarian Gazette). The NCC is still specified by the government decree from 2012 but the 2020 amendment introduced numerous substantial changes. Therefore, the re-examination of the questions outlined above is timely and necessary. This involves the scrutiny of the key principles of the NCC as well as their "practical" application in the GC.

²The presence of debating in local curricula could also be studied as part of a nationwide survey but such a research project goes beyond the limits of this paper.

³Translations of Hungarian texts are ours.

⁴Let us add at this point that an online handbook titled *Dilemma, Disputa, Demokrácia. Kézikönyv a vitakultúra fejlesztéséhez* has been available online and it could provide a solid starting point for people interested in using debates (Takács, 2014).



Many of the central terms emphasized in our Introduction and often mentioned in connection with debates are now part of the educational objectives outlined by the NCC as well: it includes references to active learning, competence development, individualized learning options, learning based on student cooperation, multidisciplinary classes, etc. (p. 293). Skills development is even more emphatic in the new version of the NCC than before and it also communicates the significance of teaching argumentation (see, for example, pp. 313, 336, 349). Key competences outlined put a special emphasis on communication skills (both in the mother tongue and foreign languages) as well as personal and social competences, creativity, self-expression, etc. (p. 297) Thus several of the key principles echo those skills that debates have been shown to develop. The use of debate is also mentioned in terms of its significance in helping students differentiate between fact and interpretation, and also appears specifically in various sections of the core educational document as a method of teaching (see, for example, pp. 313, 343, 352–53).

Debates may be used to fulfil the basic methodological principles noted by the NCC, which emphasizes the need for redefining the learning process and student roles in learning, especially in terms of active learning and students' active participation. According to the NCC, the most important objective of active learning is to improve such learner competences that enable the creative application of knowledge in diverse situations (p. 293).⁵ To achieve such goals and create a modern pedagogical environment, activity-centred learning that is based on active and well-organized pair and group work should be promoted, which is absolutely in line with the methodology applied in the case of debating. The key principles argue that such learning processes should be enabled that change not only teacher-student collaboration but as a result also significantly alter the ways of traditional learning, thus both the student and the teacher appear in a new type of role (p. 295). Besides these general statements about skills and competences that may clearly be developed by debating, the use of debates is specifically encouraged in the case of several subjects (not only those that may seem most obvious at first thought) and the method of debating appears in the outline of related basic principles and learning outcomes.

Just to mention a few examples from the NCC, when describing the teaching of civics, the emphasis is put on developing students' abilities to express their own opinion, understanding the ideas of others, and improving "debate culture" that contributes to the foundation of a democratic attitude (p. 352). The organization of debates and the discussion of various topics through formalized debate/debate days are present throughout the description. As stated in the NCC, through debate students realize that the community experience of debate serves as a model in later stages of life as well. Cooperation with others, expressing one's opinion, developing arguments and counter arguments, recognizing the value of debates in society are all mentioned among learning outcomes (p. 353).

Debating appears in connection with a great variety of other subjects, which indicates that the values and benefits of debating have been recognized even more widely. The development of "debate culture" based on a clashing of arguments is mentioned in the case of geography, film studies, history, Hungarian language and literature, etc. According to the NCC, debates support student learning about history, for example, by making the difference between historical fact and interpretation clear for the students (p. 343), while the need for developing proper arguments and learning about debate appears even in such subjects as biology (formulating scientifically-

⁵Quotes from the NCC have been translated by the authors of the paper.



founded arguments in debates and discussions, p. 375) and physics (where students should be able to defend their scientific knowledge and formulate and articulate their opinion, arguments and counter arguments in debates, p. 387).

The examination of the general principles outlined in the NCC was followed by the analysis of the GC, which is supposed to adopt the NCC in a more subject and school-specific manner. The variety of examples introduced below clearly show how the GC also support (expect) the more widespread use of debate in Hungarian schools. Debating is mentioned specifically in the learning outcomes that should be achieved as well as among the recommended educational methods. The examples included here come from the GC specified for grades 9–12 as this is the age/grade group where the most extensive use of debates may be expected.⁶

Debating is mentioned specifically in a great variety of subjects in the GC, including Hungarian language and literature where practicing debating, developing students' arguing skills, and their ability to support their opinion with proper arguments are mentioned as key objectives, while "constructive debates" are specifically included as a recommended teaching method (p. 56). Besides the specific references to debating, numerous skills that are developed by participation in debate are also listed, including public speaking, recognizing false arguments, rhetorical skills, developing competences needed for effective presentations, expressing one's opinion, etc. (e.g., pp. 4, 29–30, 43). Similar values are also mentioned in connection with the teaching of history, whereby by the end of secondary school the students are expected to possess those competences that enable their effective orientation and participation in social life (concerning the consumption and processing of information, arguing, expressing their opinion, etc.). Similarly to the previous case, the organization of debates (e.g., about the positive and negative sides of the French Revolution or the causes for the defeat of the Hungarian War of Independence, the advantages or disadvantages of globalization, etc.) is recommended specifically to achieve the desired learning outcomes (e.g., pp. 7–8, 20, 24).

It is not surprising that the use of debates and exercises promoting their use are present in the teaching of foreign languages, in this case "debate forums" are encouraged in a variety of topics to help students better understand and use complex content, improve problem-solving skills, creativity, while providing outlets for expressing their opinion (p. 6). Specific topics for debate are mentioned in the GC that may be used by educators in the classroom (e.g., on the role of reading in the 21st century, advantages and disadvantages of living in the countryside, social media, etc.). After the above overview, it is not surprising either that debates are mentioned specifically in civics with an emphasis on developing skills that enable students to differentiate between well-founded, scientific and false conclusions, participate in debates, while also learning to respect the opinion of others (p. 1).

It is probably more surprising that the GC emphasize the need for debates in such subjects also as biology (recommending debates, for example, when discussing theories about the beginning of life or climate change, p. 13), geography (the GC claiming that the teaching of geography also contributes to the development of debate culture built on the clashing of arguments, and in the process of interpreting geographical information the debating skills of students are also developed, p. 2). Thus such an overview of the NCC and the GC indicates that

⁶The General Curricula are available online. Retrieved from https://www.oktatas.hu/kozneveltes/kerettantervek/2020_nat/kerettanterv_gimn_9_12_evf.



the core educational documents not only mention but also encourage and expect the more widespread use of debates. What is more, they do so not only with regard to those subjects where such an application is more straightforward (civics, Hungarian literature, foreign languages) but also more extensively in such areas as biology or geography.

As noted by Oláh, however, the problem arises because the educators have no access to proper methodological support and training in the use of debate, thus the benefits of debating probably cannot be exploited in full. In our surveys, we set out to gauge the awareness of and interest in the method, as well as surveyed the perceptions of those students who have experience with the use of debates in the secondary school to see if they can confirm the presence of benefits outlined above and also emphasized by the key educational documents.

PILOT SURVEYS

Various international surveys and studies have gauged the impact of debate on the development of various skills of students, while we also conducted two pilot surveys at the University of Debrecen to gain more insights into the perceptions of debating. The aim of the surveys was twofold. On the one hand, we wished to assess if the benefits about skills development mentioned in connection with debates are also perceived by participating students, while on the other hand, we wished to gauge the level of awareness of debating as an educational method among teacher trainees, along with their openness to learning more about debates as a way of improving the skills of their future students.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF IMPROVING SKILLS THROUGH DEBATING

[Medina \(2020\)](#) provided a thorough overview of various quantitative and qualitative surveys that were conducted internationally with the aim of measuring the extent to which debates contribute to skills development and how much students themselves feel such an improvement. Among other studies,

“[Catterall \(2002\)](#) documents that speech and debate education, at the high school level, translates into higher academic achievement for all students who participate. Students who have debated improved their reading scores up to 25 percent more than their counterparts, regardless of their skill level. Debaters typically become independent learners, allowing them to take control of their educational experience and continue intentionally learning throughout their lives ([Carroll, 2007](#)).” ([Medina, 2020](#), p. 28)

In their qualitative study with students who participated in classroom debates, [Zare and Othman \(2013\)](#) found “that because of the multitude of learned and developed skills, students who participated in classroom debates were three times more likely to finish high school and achieve the college-readiness scales on the English, Reading, and Science sections of the American College Test (ACT)” ([Medina, 2020](#), p. 19). Moreover, “[Semlak and Shields \(1977\)](#) concluded that students with debate experience were significantly better at employing a variety of communication skills, including analysis, delivery, and organization” ([Medina, 2020](#), p. 30).

To test if the improvement of these, and other, skills was actually present in the case of Hungarian students who have had experience with debate during their secondary school years,



we also conducted our own studies. The survey presented was built on self-assessment and reflection and all the 41 participants claimed that they had felt that their skills had improved tremendously due to ability to debate through participation in curricular and extracurricular activities. This proved to be true for all participants irrespective of their gender, age and school type.

95.1% of the people practiced debate in the same school where they received their secondary education. 70.7% of the respondents claimed that they attended a debate club session on a weekly basis. Even though 31.7% of them stated that they had never won a debate tournament, they still enjoyed debating both in contests and in class. When focusing on the reason why respondents started to attend debate clubs in their secondary school many different reasons were mentioned (multiple answers were possible). Out of 41 participants 23 stated that they wanted to become more articulate, 40 people said that they were interested in debating as such, 7 people stated that they wanted to improve their presentation skills, 38 participants of the survey wanted to engage in more interesting and important topics with their peers. 5 participants were anxious when they had to deliver a speech or speak in front of others in a classroom environment or in public, so they wanted to conquer this fear by practicing debate. These suggestions indicate that students also associate debates with the development of such skills and actively participated in debating to improve their competences and various personal skills.

Participants were asked to assess if any of their skills improved due to their participation in debates. The results are the following: out of the 41 participants 41 claimed that they had become more confident, 39 people said that they dared to share their ideas even if others disagreed with their opinion. 39 participants considered themselves to be better speakers and 30 people admitted that their self-perception had improved a lot. 25 participants thought of themselves as more patient due to the ability of listening to others' opinions and feelings. 24 people think they considered themselves to be success-oriented and emerged as leaders in challenging situations. 36 people claimed that they had become more open and tolerant and 37 people were no longer afraid to deliver speeches in any situation. 34 participants felt they could react faster than non-debating students or adults and 36 people thought they could differentiate true information from false information better. 39 people felt they improved their ability of critical thinking, 24 people felt they had started to speak more nicely and more articulately than before debating and 37 claimed they had become more persuasive. 27 people claimed that they had a lower anxiety level when speaking with new people due to their participation in debates.

The results of the survey show that each and every participant felt some improvement in their confidence, patience, ability to identify accurate information, and reported better use of rhetorical skills and logic when discussing important issues in a group. This confirms the international research findings about the skills debating improves and also means that students themselves perceive and are aware of such improvement. The survey may also have pedagogical implications, as a well-trained mentor or teacher of debates can thus have a huge impact on the skills development of their students (along with students' self-perceptions), besides teaching the content of the subjects which is also in line with the expectations of the NCC and GC outlined above.

DEBATE AND TEACHER TRAINING

As already noted, one of the key obstacles to the more widespread use of debates in Hungarian schools could be the lack of awareness of the method among teachers and the absence of proper



methodological materials, textbooks, and trainings that they could rely on. It seems it is not that teachers are not interested in the method but the use of debates is not an integral part of teacher training and thus they are not familiar with the method itself (and probably had limited experience with debates as students also). Thus we wished to examine if current students of the teacher-training program were familiar with debating or not and if they would be interested in learning more about it.

Makay's pilot survey aims to gauge the level of familiarity with debate and the interest of teacher trainees in courses training them in the use of this method. From the perspective of this paper, the main objective of the survey was to find out if current teacher trainees were familiar with the use of debate as an educational tool and if they would be interested in learning (more) about it as part of their training. Based on the responses we can see that only 18% of the students claimed that they were familiar with debating (from another question it is revealed that 16% had extracurricular debate clubs in their secondary school) while 14% have never heard about it and the great majority (68%) although heard about it was not really familiar with it.

When assessing their interest in learning more about argumentation and debating as part of their training, they had to use a scale from 1 to 5. 1 meant that they were very unlikely to attend a course improving their argumentation skills and/or teaching them about the use of debates, while 5 meant they were very likely. 74% of the respondents gave a 4 or 5 when asked if they would be interested in improving their own argumentations skills (2% gave a 1), while 34% gave a 5 when asked if they would take an optional course on argumentation/debating (22% gave a 4, 16% a 3, 16% a 2, and 12% picked 1).

When asked about their openness to taking an optional course for teacher trainees about the use of debates in the classroom (to help their future students prepare for their exams) 50% gave a 5, thus claiming that it was very likely that they would take such a course if it was available (22% gave a 4, 14% a 3, 8% a 2, and only 6% marked 1, which means that only very few felt it was unlikely they would take such a course). The figures for the same question but concerning required-optional courses were the following: 46% gave a 5, 22% a 4, 16% a 3, 6% a 2, and 10% of them marked 1.

This survey shows the need for opportunities in forms of university courses, where future teachers have the possibility to improve their own knowledge and skills to become better teachers in an education system which requires students to take not only matriculation exams but also state accredited oral language exams that require the ability to provide arguments and form opinions alongside with reasoning in different situations and tasks.

CONCLUSION

Our research, as the next step, could be expanded to include local curricula nationwide in order to study how the general principles and objectives of the NCC and the GC are implemented on the level of schools and more extensive surveys should be conducted to assess the actual extent of using debates in Hungarian schools. It is clear, however, already from the review of the NCC and the GC, as well as the results of our pilot studies, that the regulatory environment in Hungary enables and encourages the use of debates in both primary and secondary education, and there is a need to learn more about this method, which also means that the teaching of



debating as an educational tool should become an integral part of teacher training on the level of university education.

The more extensive use of the debate method, however, has two important prerequisites. The benefits of debating and its obvious link to the key competences and objectives of the NCC and GC should be made even more straightforward and proper training and methodological support should be made available for in-service teachers and teacher trainees as well. The e-learning material developed by Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka and Balázs Venkovits in 2019 could cater for the second need (see its description in Venkovits, 2018; Lénárt-Muszka, 2020), while hopefully this article and our research contribute to the former as a result of which Hungarian educators will be able to integrate the use of debates into their daily teaching practice, while it may soon also become a part of teacher-training.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Balázs Venkovits, Ph.D., dr. Habil, is Associate Professor in American Studies, Institute of English and American Studies, University of Debrecen. His broader academic interests include migration studies, travel writing studies related to Mexico, the United States, and Canada. He teaches courses on American civilization, history, travel writing, and translation, incorporating the use of debates into most of these classes. He has been organizing DEbate, an English-language debate competition for Hungarian high school students for years, and together with Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka created an interactive e-learning course on the use of debates in education.

Mariann Makay is a student in the teacher-training program of the University of Debrecen, majoring in English language and culture and Russian language and culture. She is the member of Imre Bán College for Advanced Studies, a participant of numerous debate competitions and tournaments, also working as a judge. She is currently working on her thesis studying the use of debating in education.

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