

UP-TO-DATE APPROACH OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING TO STUDENTS IN ADUCATIONAL PROCESS IN GJAKOVA REGION

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Abstract

Teaching of Critical Thinking as a Project for Reformation of Schools in Kosovo has changed traditional approach for students and educational process in general. According to this philosophy and new approach in education the student is considered to be active and responsible subject in the formation of his intellectual and human development. Therefore, the teaching of Critical Thinking is building partnerships with its students through different teaching tasks and projects. They are encouraged to question and discuss different aspects of the concrete teaching topics. The teacher in his daily pedagogical practice starts from the interests of the students and through the tasks and problems he treats within his teaching subject tries to further develop these interests and creative skills. In this function this teaching raises tasks and learning problems that require their critical thinking and creativity. Learning situations that require mental engagement of students put them in need of individual and group mobilization. In this way, students cooperate with each other to find alternatives and solutions to problems and tasks. Interaction of students in joint assignments and projects also creates the opportunity for cultivating healthy social relationships in the group for exchanging different intellectual experiences. During group work they analyze different aspects of the topic, discuss and compare sources of information for their authenticity and originality. Discussion and constructive debate on topics dealt with are exchanges of views relevant to the formation of democratic attitudes that are initiated through the teaching of Critical Thinking. These are some aspects of this philosophy of education that will be addressed in this paper.

Key words: *Modern teaching, interactive learning, creative students, democratic view.*

Entry

Teaching is a planned process and activity, but also influenced by many factors. To be qualitative and up-to-date, all links of this chain should be up-to date and constructed from the approach of modern education philosophy. What is now known as a school curriculum contains of teaching plan and textbooks, base school material, the organization of teaching and many other factors that directly or indirectly affect the quality and productivity of schools. Critical Thinking Teaching as a strategy and project for reforming our educational system also, for successful application, requires some of the standards of these factors and teaching circumstances. Compared to traditional teaching, Critical Thinking in Schools applies a higher quality teaching. Processing content is deeper and based on analysis, comparison and evaluation of teaching facts. Critical Thinking Teaching is based on up-to-date theories that this educational process treats from different dimensions. Initially, its pedagogical practice harmonizes with learning theories, which emphasize the importance of logical, active and interactive learning. To achieve these teaching standards, this program creates appropriate learning environments and circumstances that encourage the acquisition of knowledge with active involvement of students in discussions and other learning activities.

Purpose and objectives of the research

The main purpose of this research is to explore the contemporary approach of schools of critical thinking to students and to the educational process in general. While the specific objectives of this research are:

- Contemporary approach of schools to critical thinking on students and the educational process should be compared to traditional pedagogical practice and the treatment of students in schools where this teaching approach is not applied.
- Through the theoretical approach and comparative findings in these different school environments we intend to emphasize the importance of contemporary teaching approach as the need for positive change in our educational system.

Research questions and research methodology

The research questions of this research are:

- In schools where critical thinking strategies are implemented, is the philosophical approach to students and the educational process more contemporary compared to traditional schools?
- Contemporary teaching strategies implemented by critical thinking schools are also suitable for reforming other schools in the country?

Contemporary teaching in schools of critical thinking to students and the educational process in general has been addressed in theory. From this perspective, we have highlighted the psychopedagogic advantages of treating students as active and conscious subject in the teaching process. In this new approach we have emphasized that students are encouraged to be builders of their knowledge and experiences by having their partner and instructor teacher during their active and interactive learning. For the fullest research of the work we have received through the standardized tests the opinions of students and teachers from the school environments that implement the new philosophical approach to education and from the schools that have not yet changed their traditional educational practice. These data from the opinions of students and teachers have been elaborated with the SPSS software.

Contemporary teaching in the Critical Thinking program

Critical Thinking Teaching encourages students' reflection on certain teaching contents. It provokes curiosity, conscience of student thinking through open questions and other problematic questions. This teaching deliberately does not completely explain the teaching themes. It requires that some aspects of knowledge, which remain under the shadow, be illuminated by the students themselves through interactive research engagements and constructive discussions. "Of course, a measure of ambiguity is not always a bad thing." (Alec Fisher 2011: 64). Putting and elaborating topics in the form of requests and problematic tasks invite students to mobilize and take action to complete their solution. Teaching Critical Thinking is teaching a senior stage. It develops the curiosity of the students and gives them the opportunity to rejoice in their learning success. "If children feel good about learning activities, they take the initiative to engage fully in them." (Daniel Gartrell 2000: 59). This phenomenon where the student is valued for achieving the successes has also emphasized Maria Montessori. She, the joy that children experience when they achieve success in learning, viewed it as a reward with powerful influence for further engagement.

Critical Thinking Techniques and Strategies do not provide readily available knowledge. They open discussion topics and initiate tasks and problems, the completion and resolution of which requires student activity and intellectual mobilization. The Mobilizing Teaching of Critical Thinking dictates the active participation of students in the learning process. It is varied and connects the theory with life practice, proof and expression in school environments. Here finds implementation the John de Janey's postulate "Learning by doing," which actually introduces the essence of active and interactive teaching.

The knowledge explained in the school is supplemented by students' experience, imagination and group discussion. These knowledge gained in the classroom and school environments are analysis, implementation and evaluation of concrete learning topics. Therefore, we say that this teaching also

aims at achieving higher learning objectives. It does not keep students connected to books and school desks. Rather, this teaching brings students to the yard and the workshop to prove the practical implementation of what is learned from books and other sources of information.

Critical thinking in education through diverse sources of information develops different interests, trends and potential intellectual differences. "Information can come from a wide variety of forms and if you want it to be useful you will need to practice extracting data from a variety of sources." (John Butterworth and Geoff Beadies 2013: 86). This curriculum fits into different interests and skills. Pupils make progress in lessons according to their developmental tempo, giving individual contribution to common group tasks. It is important to note that the teaching of Critical Thinking is not related solely to a form or method of teaching work. In practice, almost all methods and other active teaching processes apply. Successfully different techniques and strategies of this teaching applied to problem-based learning, team and project teaching. Common to these methodical approaches is the inclusion of students in learning activities, analyzes, discussions and joint conclusions. An interest in this teaching is the articulation of the class, whether it is done in classroom or in other school environments. This articulation of the classroom at ERR stages is in line with the philosophical basis of this program with the logical order psychology of learning. The program we are analyzing, creates an appropriate learning environment where students are stimulated to ask. In fact, questioners are considered as need of the philosophy of knowledge and the master to be taught. The discussion itself, the debate and interactive group work dictates the need for students to ask. Through the questions, different aspects and points of view are presented, which are a valuable subject of discussion and constructive debate. Discussion and debate on concrete topics also develop the ability of fluently speak, express and articulate thoughts in question. "Clarity of language is extremely important for the ability of Critical Thinking."(B.N. Moore and R. Parker 2012: 93). The Mastery of Critical Thinking Teaching initiates confrontation and brainstorming on problematic issues and vital dilemmas, which are a good source for cultivating independent thought and democratic attitudes. This approach develops free and independent personalities and reveals hidden and unfamiliar aspects of the concrete subject. "If everyone agrees, there is no conflict, no innovation." (Sherry Diestler 2005: 193). Interaction of group students and discussion on learning topics expands their knowledge and experiences and at the same time develops many psycho-social aspects.

With the mobilization of students in building their own knowledge, the teaching of Critical Thinking realized in their everyday practice also the progressive and constructive theories. Whereas, another important theory with which this teaching adapts its techniques and methodology is humanistic theory. Abraham Maslou and other theorists of this theoretical power emphasize the importance of motivating and supporting students to achieve learning outcomes. Teaching this program in accordance with the views of this psychological school, through questions and other forms of active communication, urges the development of pupils' interest and potentials and thereby also helps meet their development aspirations. By adapting the curriculum, affinities, developmental needs, and student learning styles, the teaching of this program creates other theoretical perspectives that the personality development is seen as the product of many educational factors.

The Effects of the Implementation of Critical Thinking in Implementing Up-to-date Access to Students and the Educational Process in the Schools of Gjakova Region

Schools that teach and practice the Critical Thinking program create a school environment that stimulates active learning and the development of students' creative interests and creative skills. Below, to highlight some of the general aspects of these positive impacts on reforming our schools, we present the opinions of students and teachers. These data, taken from schools that practice Critical Thinking and traditional schools for analysis and comparison purposes, are presented as in findings in common table and graphs. In this regard, we first received the opinions of the students from the

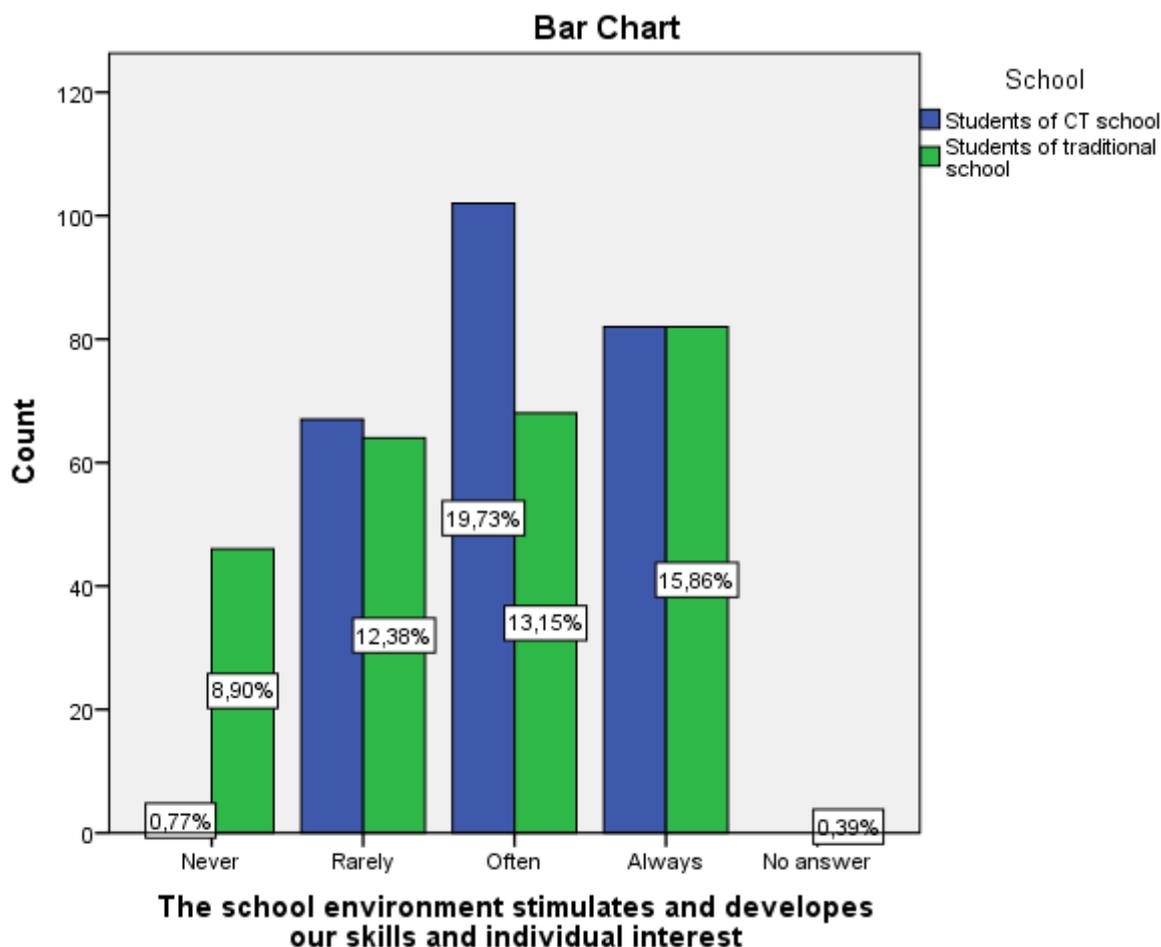
schools working according to the traditional strategies and those schools that are applying the techniques and the teaching strategy from the Critical Thinking program, which is the subject of this research. The findings are interesting and distinct from the point of view of treatment. They confirm the reality of the educational practice highlighted in the hypothesis of this research.

Table 1

School environment urges and develops our individual interests School		School		Total
		Students of CT school	Students of traditional school	
Never	Number	4	46	50
	%	1.6%	17.6%	9.7%
Rarely	Number	67	64	131
	%	26.3%	24.4%	25.3%
Often	Number	102	68	170
	%	40.0%	26.0%	32.9%
Always	Number	82	82	164
	%	32.2%	31.3%	31.7%
No Answer	Number	0	2	2
	%	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%
Total	Number	255	262	517
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In the opinion of how appropriate the school environment for the development of students' abilities and interests, as noted by the table, we received different opinions from the surveyed students. Critical Thinking School students, compared with their peers from traditional schools, had a much lower percentage of the statement in the variant than the school environment never promotes and develops their skills and interests. The difference of this percentage from these two groups of students, surveyed by 1.6% for the students of critical thinking schools and 17.6% for traditional school students is significant. Thus, traditional school students emphasized that their school environments are not sufficiently urging and stimulating learning. While, from the Critical Thinking program schools, the number of students for the same option was much lower. This shows that students in these schools feel more secure, more comfortable, and more stimulated in teaching activities. From the table it is noticed that there are differences in percentages in the other grades of the students' declaration. For variants often and always the percentage of these students was higher and more massive. The data in the table above is better seen in the graph below:

Graph1



In our point of views, these findings are realistic and match the hypothesis of our research. In schools, where the program is implemented, efficiently and qualitatively Critical Thinking creates an appropriate educational environment that fosters the activities and initiatives of students to withstand with learning problems word. These and many other negative practices of the traditional school are factors that hinder the creation of an appropriate learning environment. These educational circumstances faced by students in school life were reflected in their opinions given by these school environments that we are comparing.

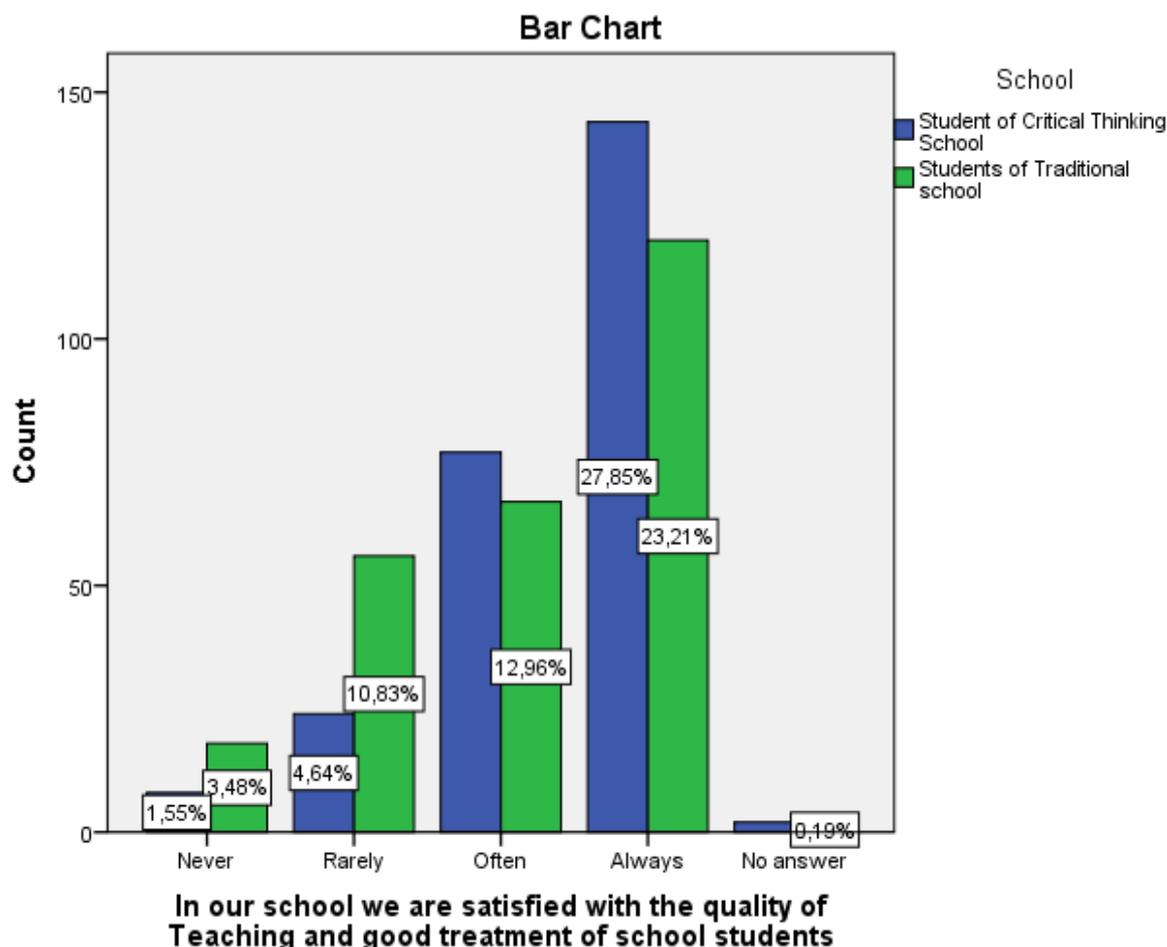
Interesting and distinctive were also the views of students on the quality of teaching and their treatment by the school staff. School students who apply up-to-date thinking strategies of Critical Thinking had higher and more positive estimates for the quality of teaching and for the good treatment of students. Whereas, the students' opinions of these schools compared to the peers from the critical thinking programs were lower also with regard to the democratization of the relations between teachers and students in their schools. The students of these two groups of subjects seem to reflect on the realities and different educational practices in their school environments. Therefore, these opinions are a clear signal of the need for positive change in our educational system. These differences in the opinions of students from these different school environments given in the research questionnaire are:

Table 2

In our school we are satisfied with the quality of teaching and good treatment of school students		School		Total
		Students of CT school	Students of traditional school	
Never	Number	8	18	26
	%	3.1%	6.9%	5.0%
Rarely	Number	24	56	80
	%	9.4%	21.4%	15.5%
Often	Number	77	67	144
	%	30.2%	25.6%	27.9%
Always	Number	144	120	264
	%	56.5%	45.8%	51.1%
No Answer	Number	2	1	3
	%	0.8%	0.4%	0.6%
Total	Number	255	262	517
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As noted in the table, the percentage of unsatisfied students was higher in traditional schools with the quality of teaching and their treatment compared to the group of students of progressive and up-to-date schools. In spite of this, the school students of the Critical Thinking program in percentage have higher and more positive estimates of the quality of teaching and the up-to-date pedagogical treatment in their school environments. Involvement of students in teaching activities and their assessment and support to ask and participate in learning debates has certainly raised their assessments of active and interactive teaching of contemporary schools. While, the above findings prove that in schools that still work according to traditional strategies and of up-to-date schools. While the above findings prove that in schools that still work according to traditional strategies and forms of work, student are not sufficiently motivated and involved in active learning. The data in the table above is even better seen in the following graph:

Graph 2



For the impacts of the program's implementation of Critical Thinking in Schools also we got the opinions of teachers from the school environments that work under this program, but also those of traditional schools. Teachers implement education legislation, pedagogic innovations and other initiatives to reform pedagogical practices in schools, so the success of educational reforms and the qualitative implementation of Critical Thinking in our schools depends greatly on professional preparation and quality of teacher's training. Meanwhile, qualitative learning and students' preparation for permanent education and active participation in discussions and learning debates are the reflection and success of pedagogical work of teachers. To see these and other aspects of reforming pedagogical practice in the two school environments we are comparing, we present the opinions of teachers given through tables, percentages and graphs. In our questionnaire we asked the teachers to declare how they agree with the statement: I decide on the way the curriculum elaborates. The percentage of these statements of teachers from these school environments are:

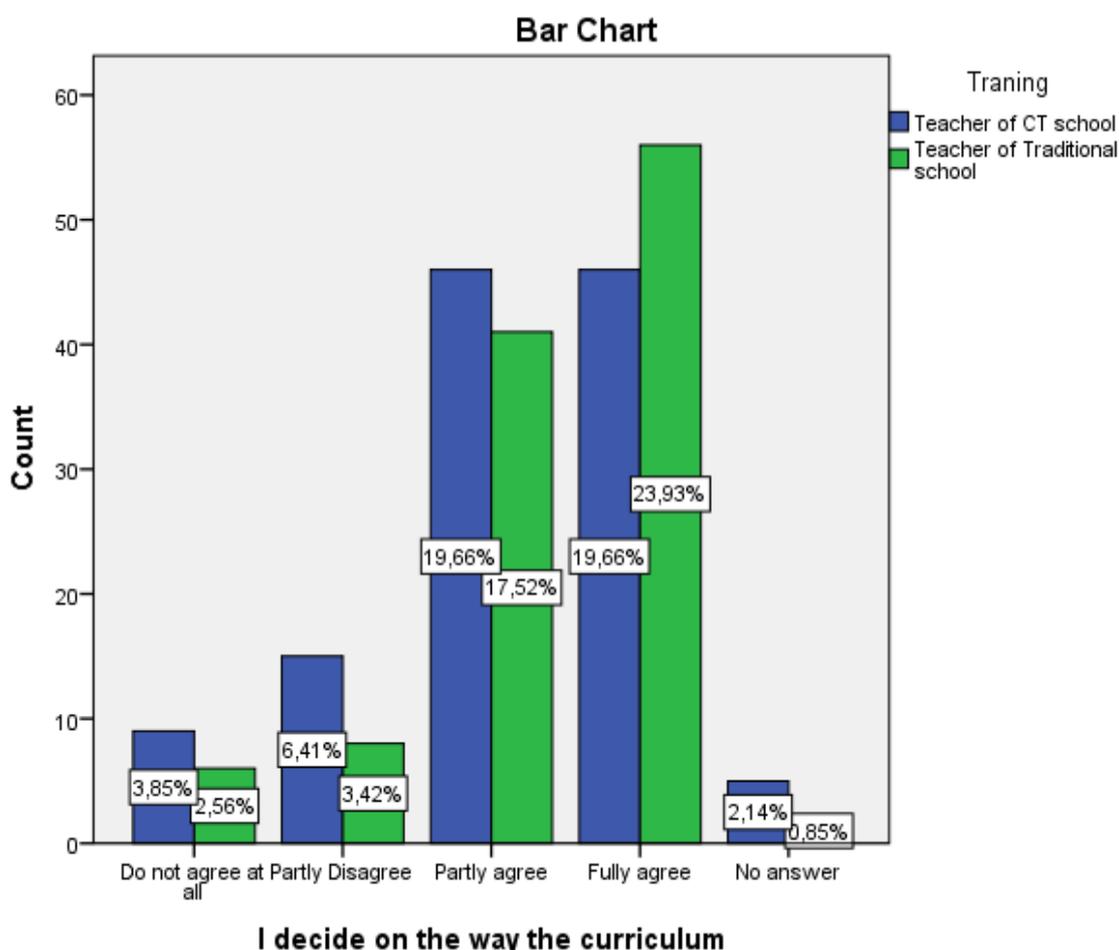
Table 3

I decide on the way the curriculum elaborates		Training		Total
		Teacher of CT school	Teacher of Traditional school	
Do not agree at all	Number	9	6	15
	%	7.4%	5.3%	6.4%
Partly disagree	Number	15	8	23
	%	12.4%	7.1%	9.8%
Partly agree	Number	46	41	87

	%	38.0%	36.3%	37.2%
Fully agree	Number	46	56	102
	%	38.0%	49.6%	43.6%
Do not know/No answer	Number	5	2	7
	%	4.1%	1.8%	3.0%
Total	Number	121	113	234
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

If we look at these opinions expressed in percentages, we notice that school teachers applying this program have expressed higher degree of disagreement with this statement compared to their colleagues from traditional schools. With this measure of disagreement, they have opposed traditional philosophy, according to which teachers in this respect do not sufficiently consult students and other important educational factors. These findings obtained in the field through the survey are seen in the following graph:

Graph 3



Thus, the percentage of compliance with the abovementioned statement is higher for teachers who still work according to traditional strategies of teaching. From the graph it is also noticed that the differences in percentages in the views of teachers from the two school environments that we have subject of analysis and comparison are not very great. These findings from our point of view are interesting and very realistic. There are general findings of 21 schools from all three of the cities in

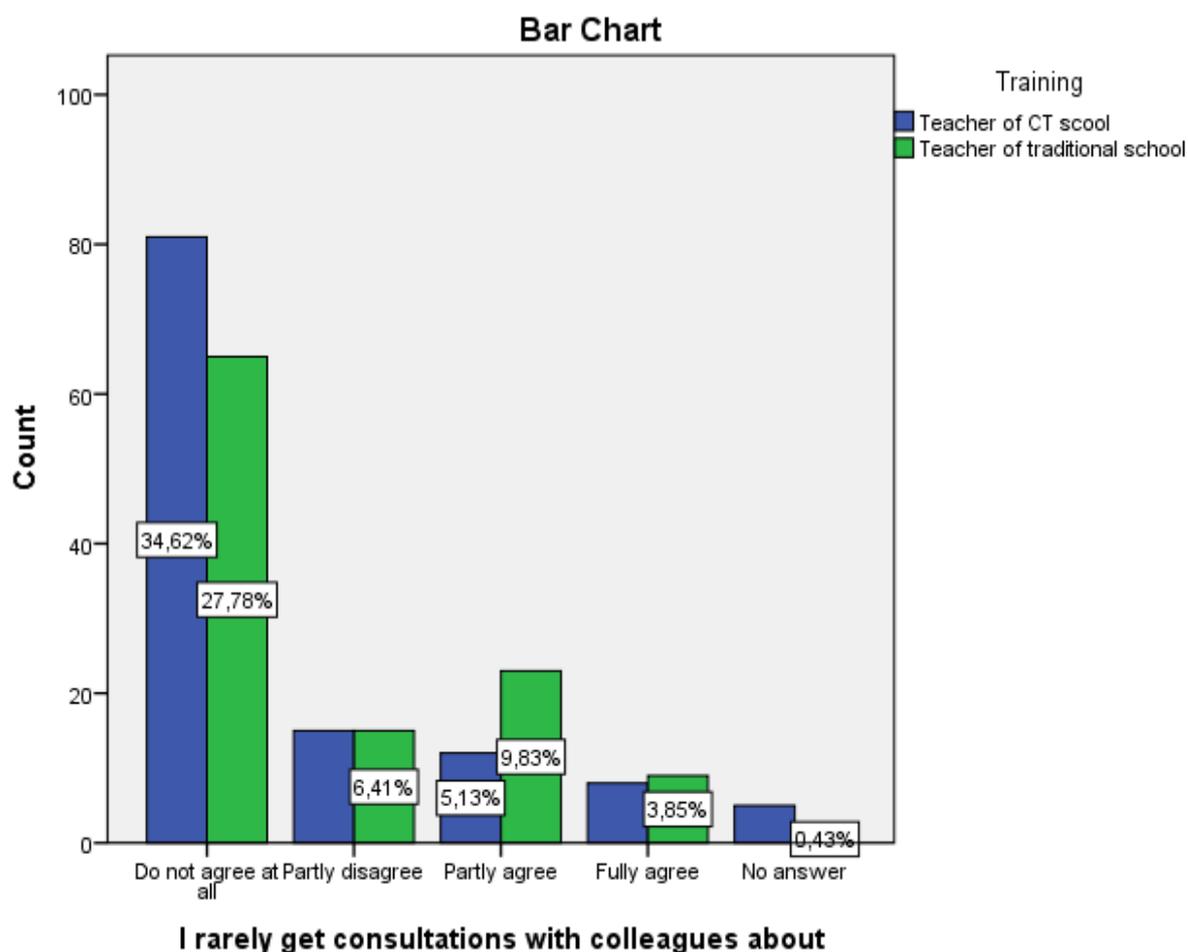
the region where we conducted the research. Some of the schools in which we surveyed teachers have not yet been consolidated and stabilized in the implementation of the Critical Thinking curriculum techniques and strategies. While presenting the data for special schools, the findings are more diverse. In those schools where the critical thinking program is implemented with effectiveness and professional creativity, the opinions of teachers for teaching and about their general pedagogical practice are more distinct compared to traditional school teachers. Yes, as the subject of this research is the analysis of the effects of the Critical Thinking program in the 9 – year schools of Gjakova Region, we are not getting into analyses of the schools and concrete research subjects. In the next question to teachers about how to talk and consult with colleagues about teaching, through the survey, we received their opinions:

Table 4

I rarely get consultations with colleagues about teaching		Training		Total
		Teacher of CT school	Teacher of Traditional school	
Do not agree at all	Number	81	65	146
	%	66.9%	57.5%	62.4%
Partly disagree	Number	15	15	30
	%	12.4%	13.3%	12.8%
Partly agree	Number	12	23	35
	%	9.9%	20.4%	15.0%
Fully agree	Number	8	9	17
	%	6.6%	8.0%	7.3%
Do not know/No answer	Number	5	1	6
	%	4.1%	0.9%	2.6%
Total	Number	121	113	234
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Even these percentages from the table above show differences in teaching views and teaching practice from the schools we are analyzing. Teachers of Critical Thinking Schools, compared to those of Traditional Schools, strongly oppose the statement seldom consultations with colleagues about teaching. While, on the other hand, traditional school teachers agree more with this view, which in fact is also a practice in their environments. These findings are even better distinguished in the following graph:

Graph 4



In this graph, the percentage of teachers' opinions in the first and the third option are more distinct. Thus, school teachers who implement the up-to-date teaching strategy of this program, according to these findings, have paved the way for the cooperation and exchange of their teaching experiences, despite the more traditional and more conservative teachers who are more isolated in their daily pedagogical practice. These are some of the students' opinions and teachers on teaching and about contemporary approach to students and the educational process in general. These findings convincingly demonstrate the advantages of implementing the Critical Thinking program as an effective alternative to reforming our education system.

Conclusions and recommendations

As a conclusion of this research we can find:

1. From the theoretical approach of this paper, we conclude that schools that apply the critical thinking teaching methodology have improved their approach to students and educational practice in general.
2. These schools encourage their students to be active and contributing to their intellectual, social and creative thinking and creativity in their school life.
3. Research findings also show that the opinions of students from critical thinking schools are more positive for their teaching and training from their teachers comparing to students from traditional schools.

As recommendations of this research emerge:

1. Schools that work according to contemporary philosophy of critical thinking to continue with their teachers' training on interactive learning methods and techniques with the aim of improving overall educational practice.
2. Schools that still work according to traditional methodologies to prepare the education framework and start implementing this new mentality in education which considers students active and interactive subjects in learning.
3. The Ministry of Education and relevant municipal departments should assist in the implementation of this education philosophy across the country's network of schools as an appropriate option for reforming our education system.

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