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Effects of Critical Thinking Implementation On Enhancing of Teaching Quality in 9-Yer Schools of Gjakova Region

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Abstract

Enhancing the quality of teaching and increasing the productivity of schools is a goal of our state and society. Critical thinking program, respectively teaching organized according to the new teaching techniques and methodology increases the efficiency of teaching by mobilizing students in active and interactive learning. Schools that are implementing this program as a new professional innovation have been able to significantly improve their daily educational practices. They have also seen an increase in student learning outcomes as a result of improved teaching and student engagement in the active acquisition of educational content. In this paper we researched the effects of applying critical thinking on enhancing the quality of teaching in elementary schools in the Gjakova region which is one of the seven regions of Kosovo. We first addressed this paper from a theoretical point of view. In order to shine a light on the research, we also received the opinions of 517 students from schools where the philosophy of critical thinking is applied and from schools that still work according to traditional educational practices. For the same purpose, we obtained the opinions of 234 teachers through standard questionnaires from these two school environments. The data obtained from this research were processed through SPSS software and will be presented as findings through tables and graphs followed by concrete explanations.

Keywords: contemporary teaching, productive schools, quality of learning, interactive learning, learning results.

Entry

Up to now teaching in our schools was traditional and with low learning outcomes. This outdated practice has been followed by a whole range of formalities which the student has considered as an objective factor and is bound to memorize content without analyzing and comparing concrete teaching topics. Despite this, the application of the philosophical approach to critical thinking as an alternative to reforming this teaching practice has brought about professional freshness and notable improvements. Enhancing the quality of teaching and increasing the productivity of schools is a goal of our state and society. In this regard various efforts and improvements are being made, which are producing measurable educational results day by day. In the continuation of these positive changes, the Critical Thinking Program is being implemented s a successful and appropriate alternative to the standards of our schools. This new mindset in our school environments has made teaching attractive to students and has mobilized them for active use of teaching materials. By organizing different teaching modalities in the classroom and school workshops, analyzing data and debating different aspects of the teaching topic this teaching promotes active knowledge acquisition and enhances students' learning quality. This teaching therefore confronts students with learning problems by developing positive learning habits, and personalities with original and creative qualities. These qualities of contemporary teaching that have improved this process and the daily work of teachers will be the subject of analysis and treatment in this paper. The topic of this paper is addressed from a progressive and constructive perspective on which the critical thinking program itself is based.

Purpose and objectives of the research

The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of applying critical thinking on enhancing the quality of teaching in our schools. Whereas the specific objectives of this research are:

- The contemporary approach of critical thinking schools to teaching is compared to the traditional approach of schools which for various reasons have not yet begun reforming their teaching practices.
- Through this research we aim to emphasize the importance of implementing critical thinking throughout our educational system as a successful alternative to reforming our schools.

Research question and research methodology

The research question of this research are:

- Do critical thinking teaching strategies and techniques help enhance the quality of teaching in our schools where this new philosophical approach is implemented?
- What are some of the positive impacts of this teaching on improving the quality and learning of students and their learning outcomes?

The contemporary approach of critical thinking as a professional and pedagogical innovation of teachers in order to improve the teaching in this paper was initially addressed from a theoretical point of view. From this point of view we have emphasized the didactic-methodical advantages of this strategy for enhancing the quality of many aspects of teaching that enable learning as an organized process to be much more effective. In this paper we have emphasized the importance of this teaching for mobilizing students in the active acquisition of learning content. For a more complete treatment of this topic we have also conducted research in schools. Through standardized tests we have obtained the opinions of students and teachers from school environments that apply contemporary teaching approaches and in school environments that still work largely according to traditional approaches and strategies. We present these opinions as findings through various tables and graphs.

Teachers as students' instructor and partner in training program of "Critical Thinking"

We above mentioned that in order to be contemporary teaching, other teaching factors must also be built from the contemporary approach. Among these factors, the teacher is the subjective factor who gives life and soul to this very complex social process. With the reform of teaching, the position and role of the teacher in the classroom has changed, too. He/She is no longer as the center of attention and the primary source of the rays of knowledge. In teaching now, in learning topic to explaining and interpreting the subject, he/she is also an instructor, and leader of students in active group of learning topic. Now, as moderator and initiator of learning activities and projects, we find him/her mixed with student groups, conducting learning tests and experiments, and leading group presentations and discussion of learning topics. "It is important to add that teachers, in classrooms with the student in the center, do not lose their role for a moment; it is only modified, supplemented and refined to the best of the children's effective learning process." (Majlinda Zhitija – Gjelaj, 2011:78). The Critical Thinking Teacher has a contemporary approach to students and their education. He/she now shares the responsibility for student progress in lessons with his students and their families.

"Therefore, the sharing of decisions about the learning objectives and the codetermination of methodical teaching procedures involves not only the learner's needs, desires, interests,

motivations, opportunities, but also the responsibilities of all partners involved in learning." (Tahir Zajazi, 2003:137).

In teaching, the teacher follows the method of the master who teaches the prentice, the path of the instructor, the initiator of the tasks and learning topics. He/she becomes the student's companion, in learning content and learning experiences. A trained teacher in teaching Critical Thinking through teaching techniques and strategies develops students' critical and creative thinking. By developing these students' abilities he/she helps actively acquiring knowledge and learning experiences, which become more easily the intellectual property useful for their later life. By launching themes and learning tasks as problems that await the "mind and hand of the student" to provide solution and answers, the teacher develops in the students the motivation, interest, and sustainability to succeed.

This is what teacher achieves, exactly by analyzing the data and assessing their origin and truthfulness. This path develops students' common sense and ability to simultaneously compare different opinions and opinions within the current circumstances and places. When the topic is more theoretical, the Critical Thinking Teacher elaborates it with the students through questions, giving opinions in discussions and in class debates. Usually, he/she first forewarns students about the topic which is going to be elaborated. Then, through teaching techniques, encourages students' interests prepares them for the concrete lesson through telling their own knowledge and experiences. Ongoing explains the unit, interacting with students and keeping them engaged in the active and logical acquisition of new knowledge. Through individual and group assignments, the teacher guides and directs the students' learning activity toward meeting the learning objectives previously planned. Finally, through a natural flow of learning hour instruction leads students to the conclusion and reflection on what has been learned. Even at this stage of the class he/she closes the assigned class through open-ended questions that require analysis, creative answers and independent thinking. "However, whenever a teacher puts students to find, retrieve, discover or rediscover some elements of his or her exhibition (though it may be time-wasting), he or she teaches them the habit of being dissatisfied with what they know and the demand to deepen their knowledge." (Gaston Mialaret, 1995: 387).

When teaching units are of a practical and environmental nature, the teacher takes students out of the classroom, asking them to measure, construct various materials and data. Then, they process, analyze, and present their field data under the guidance of the teacher they process their research as results. Critical thinking as a strategy and project for education reform requires the teacher to create an appropriate learning environment. Only if the students feels at home he or she can mobilize and make the most of his or her learning opportunities. The teacher of the training program we are analyzing encourages students to ask as many questions as possible to each other and to their teacher. He/she also encourages and supports individual and group student's initiatives to try original solutions and approaches. These initiatives to find and prove intangible avenues of

recognition are especially important for students' intellectual development and for solving problematic multi-choice situations.

A Critical Thinking – trained teacher gives considerable importance and space to the presentation of thoughts and opinions through various writings. He /she also provides students with instructions and examples on how to write creative question and answers, assessment reports, and various argumentative essays. Through these writings students from habits and prepare for an important segment of their academic life. For Critical Thinking teachers, students' ability to write critical and creative thinking is just as important as speaking skills in various discussions and debates. Therefore, in their teaching, they cultivate the ability and culture of communication between students through discussion and various forms of writing. "When students are determined to share thoughts and ideas, they are making a decision about the learning community, their classroom, their school." (KEC, 2004:26). The teacher of this training program follows a contemporary approach in assessing students' knowledge. In this process he is cooperative and objective with the students. The evaluation and qualification of students for the acquired knowledge is also used as a means and opportunity to inform and support them in the way of their education.

The effects of applying Critical Thinking on enhancing the quality of teaching

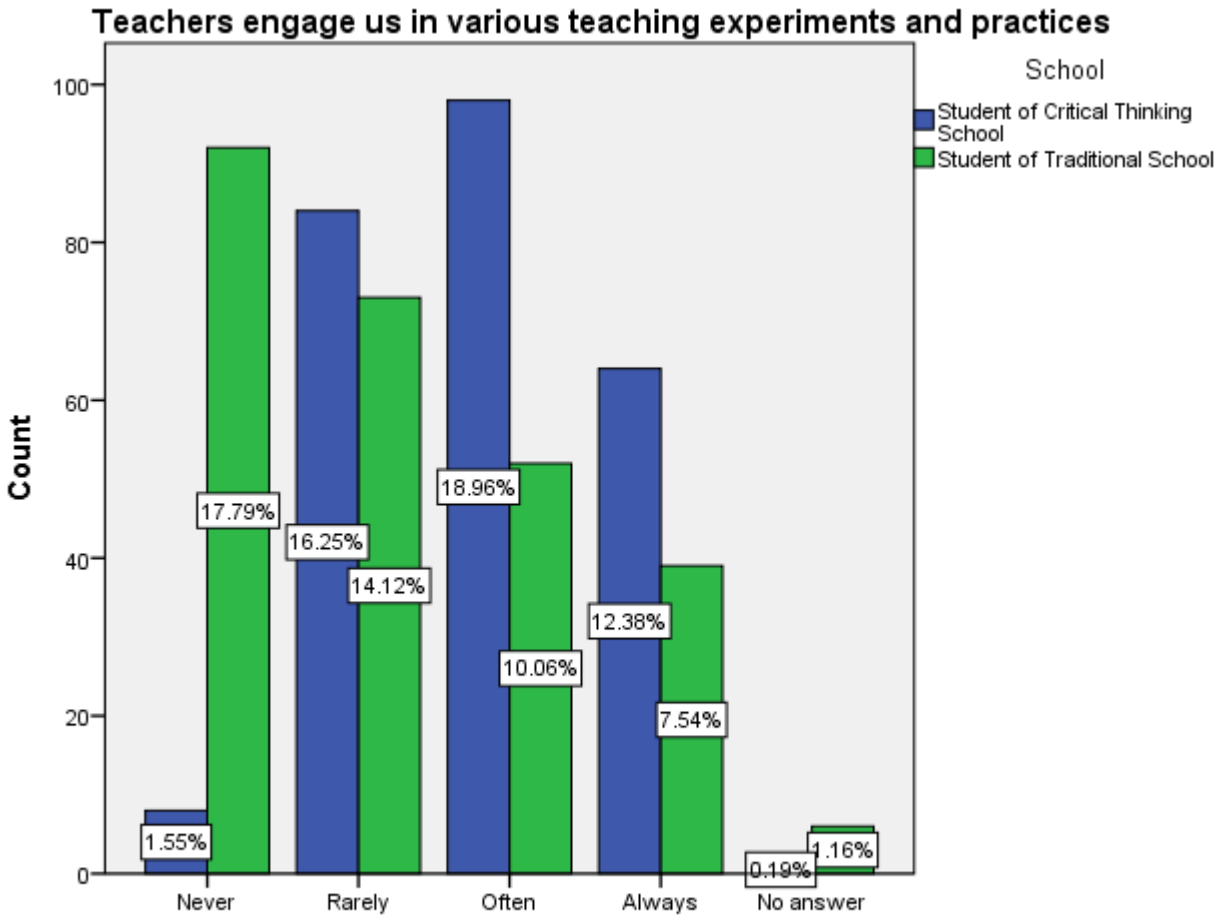
The qualitative implementation of Critical Thinking training program in our schools has brought about positive changes in general pedagogical practice. These improvements are significant and measurable in all aspects of student life and school mission fulfillment. The rumors that the modern teaching techniques and teaching strategies utilized by Critical Thinking have not proved effective are wrong and unscientific. The eventual ineffectiveness of this teaching methodology in concrete schools should be addressed by the poor quality of implementation and other factors within and outside the school that impede the implementation of pedagogical innovations. For some aspects of the impact of this methodology on improving teaching in elementary schools where we conducted the research, we obtained the opinions of students and teachers. We present these findings for analysis and comparison in common tables and graphs for both school environments. At this point in the treatment we received students' opinions on how much their teachers engaged them in learning tests, activities and experiments. Their opinions, which we present as research findings, are:

Table 1

Teachers engage us in various teaching experiments and practice		School		Total
		Student of Critical Thinking School	Student of Traditional School	
Never	Number	8	92	100
	%	3.1%	35.1%	19.3%
Rarely	Number	84	73	157
	%	32.9%	27.9%	30.4%
Often	Number	98	52	150
	%	38.4%	19.8%	29.0%
Always	Number	64	39	103
	%	25.1%	14.9%	19.9%
No answer	Number	1	6	7
	%	0.4%	2.3%	1.4%
Total	Number	255	262	517
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The percentages of opinions are of students from schools applying Critical Thinking and those traditional schools. These findings in our opinion are faithful representatives of the education reality in these two different school environments. Schools of Critical Thinking engage students in independent work and active learning have education postulate and philosophy which is based on progressive and constructive theory of education, which is why the percentage of students in these schools who declare that their teachers never engage them in practice and teaching experiments. Whereas, as shown in the affirmative claim and favor of the above statement, the percentage of these students declaring is relatively higher than their peers from traditional schools. We also consider the opinions of students from the most traditional and delayed schools on the path of reform to be true and consistent with the educational agenda. They show that students in these schools are less engaged in teaching activities and interactive learning. The percentages of this table are better illustrated in the following graph:

Graph 1



The graphs above highlight the tabular findings and the research topic we are addressing. Seen from the students' point of view prove improving the quality of teaching and enhancing students' engagement in the process of active and logical learning of knowledge. Whereas, the percentage of students' opinions from traditional schools in our opinion is their call for changes in the philosophical approach to pedagogical practice in their schools. Proper disengagement of students in teaching activities indicate that there is no suitable pedagogical environment for developing their interests and creativity in those schools and, consequently, in those school environments students are not sufficiently the focus of attention in their classrooms. These schools unfortunately still apply formal teaching and mechanical learning and other traditional practices that bind the student to the desk and to the teacher's word. Another important aspect of teaching is encouraging

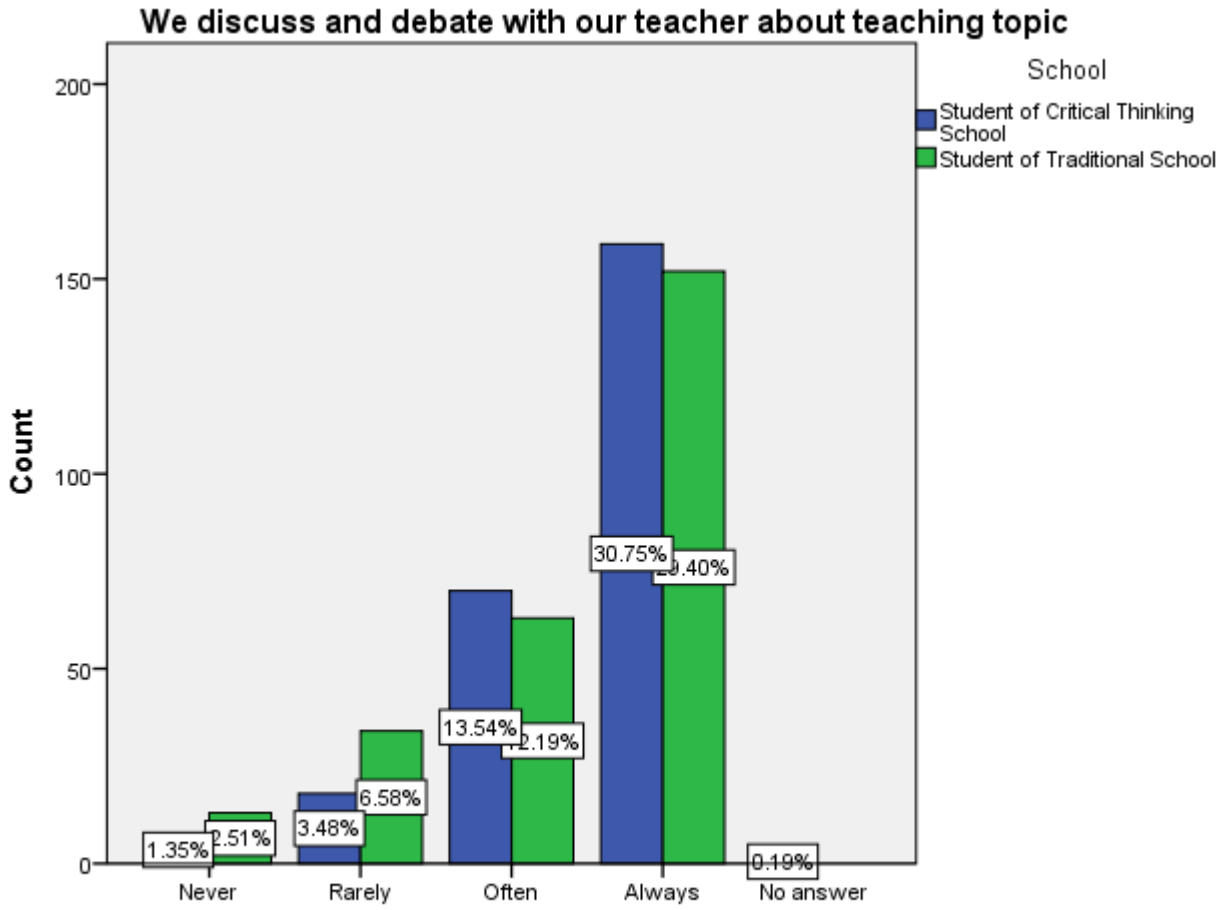
the students in learning discussions and debates that arise as a result of active and interactive learning. For this aspect of teaching we also asked the opinions of students from both school environments

Table 2

We discuss and debate with our teacher about teaching topic		School		Total
		Student of Critical Thinking School	Student of Traditional School	
Never	Number	7	13	20
	%	2.7%	5.0%	3.9%
Rarely	Number	18	34	52
	%	7.1%	13.0%	10.1%
Often	Number	70	63	133
	%	27.5%	24.0%	25.7%
Always	Number	159	152	311
	%	62.4%	58.0%	60.2%
No answer	Number	1	0	1
	%	0.4%	0.0%	0.2%
Total	Number	255	262	517
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As it can be seen, the percentages of students' options are clearly different between schools. The above table provides four options for which students must declare. Of these, two of the options are negative (never, rarely) and the other two are positive (often, always). Critical Thinking school students for the two negative options of this assertion have a lower percentage of declaring. Whereas, for the two positive assertion options they have higher percentages. This shows that, in school where contemporary teaching techniques and strategies are applied, students are freer to ask and explain many aspects of the teaching topic. This percentage of stating these students is an opportunity and space that effective and contemporary teaching provides them with logical, active and argumentative learning. Despite these views of students from Critical Thinking schools, traditional school students have other opinions. They have higher percentages for the two negative options and lower percentages for the two positive options they have compared to students in Critical Thinking schools. Our findings from more traditional and more conservative schools prove that students have the least opportunity to question and give their opinion on aspects of a particular teaching topic. The above research results, which we are dealing with, can be seen from the following graph:

Graph 2



The differences are clear and emphasized. They testify the differences in pedagogical practice in these two school environments. The percentages are overall at the regional level. What if we compared a quality school of Critical Thinking with a traditional school the differences in students' views would certainly have been more emphasized. However, despite these general findings that for us are real representatives of educational practice, prove the differences of teaching practice. They also demonstrate the positive effects of implementing the Critical Thinking training program in our schools as a viable alternative (with our economic and financial circumstances) to reforming our educational system.

For similar aspects of the impact of Critical Thinking training program on the improvement of teaching we also received the opinions of teachers who implement educational innovations in

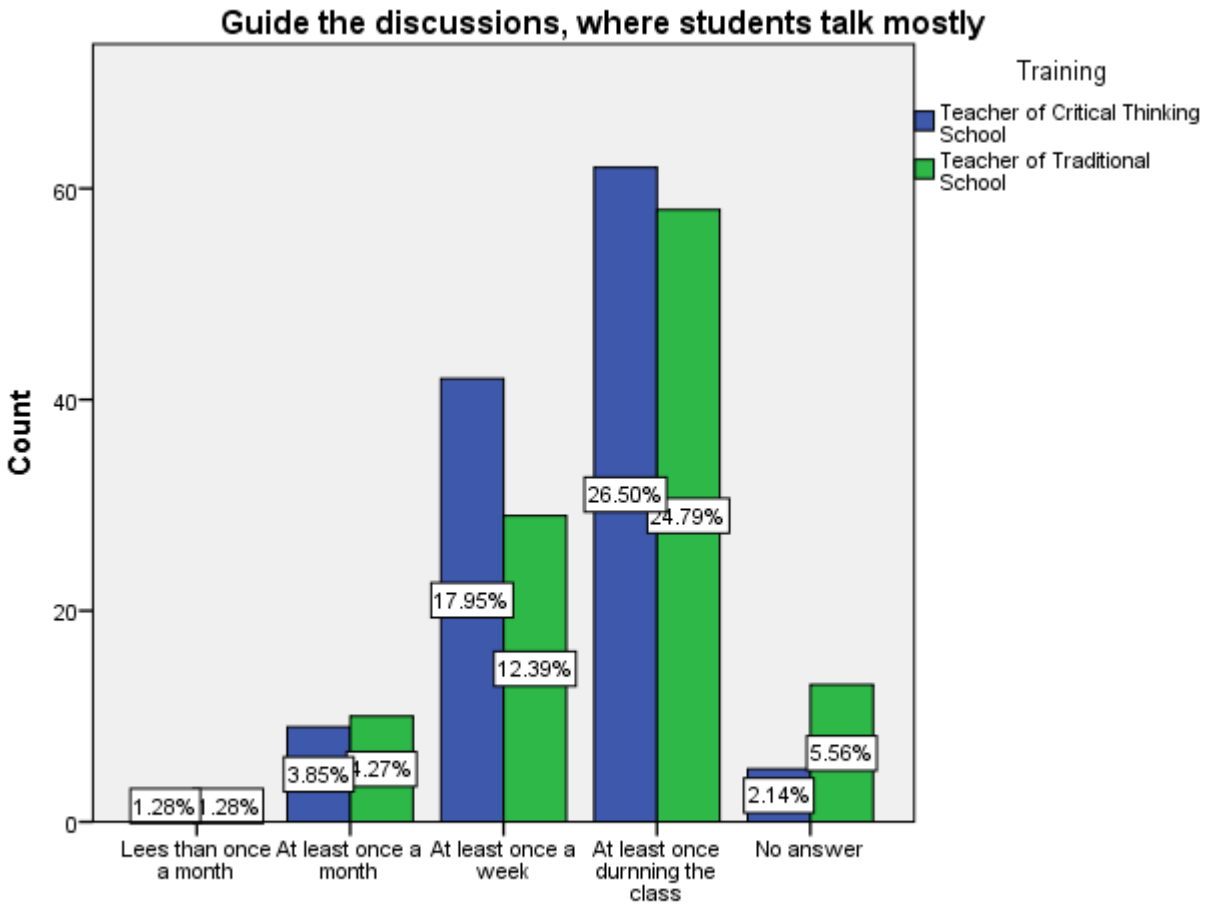
learning. Through our questionnaires we asked them to give their opinions on how often they organize discussions where students talk mostly. Opinions of teachers from these two school environments, expressed as a percentage, are:

Table 3

Guide the discussions, where students talk mostly		Training		Total
		Teacher of Critical Thinking School	Teacher of Traditional School	
Less than once a month	Number	3	3	6
	%	2.5%	2.7%	2.6%
At least once a month	Number	9	10	19
	%	7.4%	8.8%	8.1%
At least once a week	Number	42	29	71
	%	34.7%	25.7%	30.3%
At least once during the lesson	Number	62	58	120
	%	51.2%	51.3%	51.3%
No answer	Number	5	13	18
	%	4.1%	11.5%	7.7%
Total	Number	121	113	234
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Noticing the percentages of declarations, there are differences between the opinions. Traditional school teachers, compared to their Critical Thinking colleagues, have stated that they rarely organize teaching discussions and debates during their teaching. Interesting and significant in this case is the case is the percentage of teachers who did not respond at all to the above statement. This, in our opinion, is a signal that the teachers of these schools are often faced with dilemmas in their professional work. They seem to be in teaching techniques and strategies that offer solutions to specific learning situations and units. These percentages shown in the graph look as following:

Graph 3



The graphs we are interpreting represent the views of the 2 subgroups of our research. Those 2 – color data express ratio and proportion within the same research subgroup. Thus, the percentages of the blue graph shows the extent of the teachers of Critical Thinking schools' only. Thus seen in this way, the graph of these teachers, in general, shows that they often organize class discussions and debates during the class. They give their students more space and opportunity to get the word out and give their opinion on the specific instructional topic. Organizing discussions with students in Critical Thinking schools is more routine. It is also closely linked to other aspects of contemporary teaching. First of all this percentage of teachers declares that their teaching is more democratic and more based on the philosophy of education, which aims at developing children's

innate talents and potentials. The smaller percentages of Critical Thinking teachers who did not declare the statement presented on the graph also indicates that these teachers have less dilemmas and uncertainties in their teaching work. They have clear educational goals and as such feel more secure and comfortable in their daily teaching work.

An important aspect of teaching in general and of contemporary in particular is the student' learning activity. Teaching Critical Thinking, which is based on the achievement of educational goals and competencies, decide the theory and reading books, engages students in practical activities and in various teaching experiments. Their engagement in active learning where the student is the subject of learning responsible for their own successes is a constructive philosophy based on the achievements of the scientific disciplines of education. For this, through questionnaires we asked teachers' opinion on how much their students do in practical work and teaching experiments. The percentage of teachers declaring this question is given in the table below:

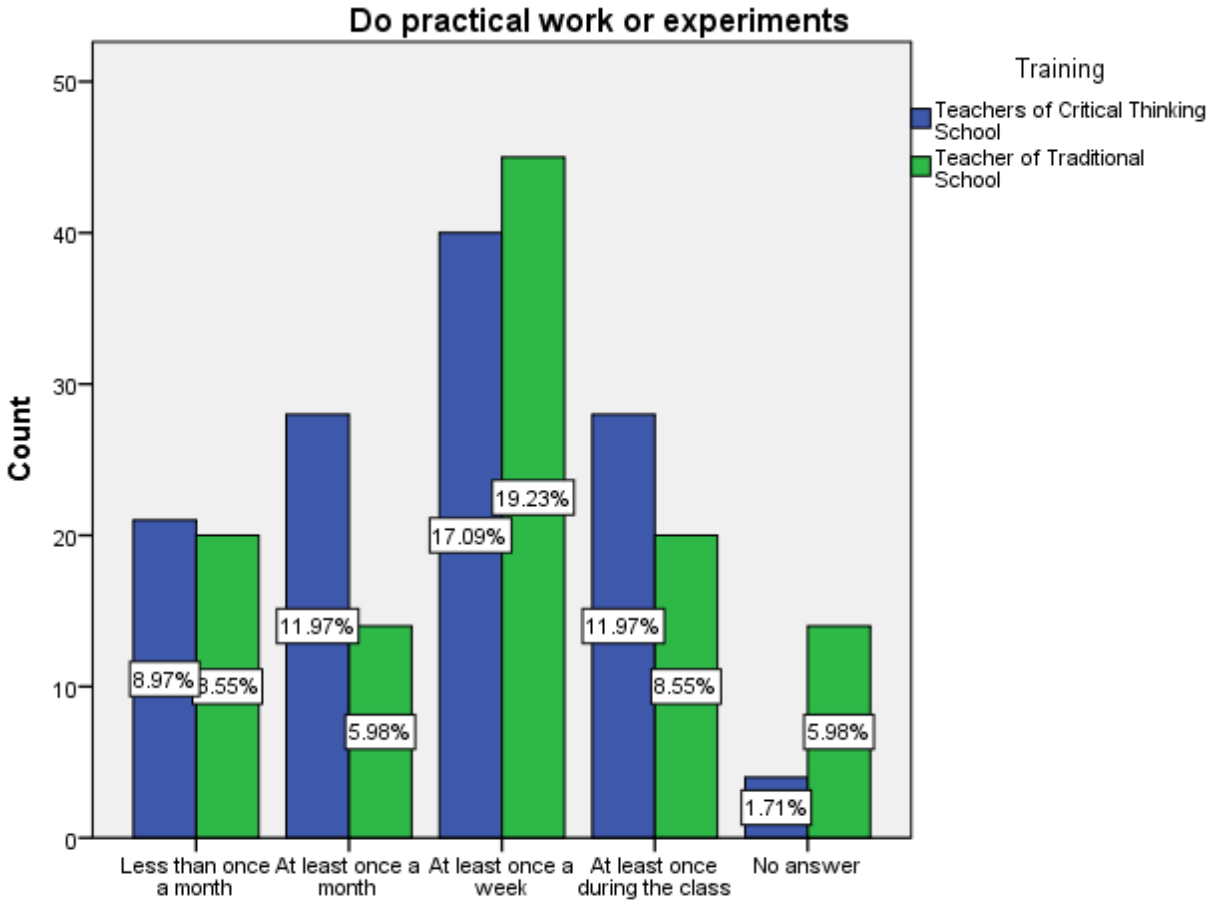
Table 4

Do practical work or experiments		Trainin		Total
		Teachers of Critical Thinking School	Teacher of Traditional School	
Less than once a month	Number	21	20	41
	%	17.4%	17.7%	17.5%
At least once a month	Number	28	14	42
	%	23.1%	12.4%	17.9%
At least once a week	Number	40	45	85
	%	33.1%	39.8%	36.3%
At least once during the lesson	Number	28	20	48
	%	23.1%	17.7%	20.5%
No answer	Number	4	14	18
	%	3.3%	12.4%	7.7%
Total	Number	121	113	234
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Looking at the percentage of teachers' declarations from both school environments spread across the offered options, we notice significant differences and findings. The percentages of school teachers working according to the techniques and strategies of the Critical Thinking training

program are almost evenly distributed. So they as a percentage value are not very far apart. Therefore this means that for the teachers of these school environments the students' performances and practical work are a daily and common practice. Even the percentage of teachers who did not declare Critical Thinking schools for this question is much lower than their homolog's from traditional schools. This demonstrates professional assurance and competence in successfully teaching and fulfilling the mission of the school. The table data in the graph, looks like:

Graph 4



The graph explains the percentages even better. The percentages of teachers' declarations from traditional schools are more divergent. Also significant is the percentage of these teachers who did not respond at all to the statement. Overall, these percentages show these teachers do not have enough of the students, practical activities, test and learning experiences in their daily work in their

educational agenda. It follows from this that the teaching in these schools is based more on textbooks and teacher's speech and, conditionally, the student of these schools are also more attached to the school desk and to formal learning.

Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions of this research can be summarized as following:

1. From the theoretical approach of this paper we conclude that schools that apply the methodology of critical thinking teaching have increased the quality of teaching by using techniques and strategies that mobilize students to actively acquire knowledge.
2. These schools encourage their students to be active and contributing to the development of their personality as an individual with initiative, intellectual skills and creative abilities.
3. Through this new philosophical approach, teachers have also contributed to improving the quality of students' learning and enhancing their learning outcomes.

Recommendations of this research are the following:

1. Schools that work according to contemporary critical thinking philosophy should continue to train their teachers on the methods and strategies of this new educational approach with the aim of enhancing the quality of their teaching.
2. Schools that are still working on traditional methodologies to prepare the educational teaching personal and begin to implement this new mindset in educational that consider students active and interactive subjects in learning.
3. The Ministry of Education and the relevant municipal directorates should help implement this philosophy of education across the country's school network as a viable alternative to reforming our education system.

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