

The Sociological Survey of “Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking” Project in Lithuania: Expectations and Reality, 1999

Lithuania is one of the 20 countries involved in the project “Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking” (RWCT). Internal evaluation was the natural part of the project. Different types of questionnaires, writings, and interviews were made by project coordinators during project implementation in Lithuania since 1997.

The survey was made by sociologists Egle Grazyte, Jolita Jankauskaite, Kamile Karpyte, Jolanta Piliponyte.

External evaluation – the sociological survey was made in 1999 due to extra funding. The survey consists of three parts:

1. Evaluation of the credit course “*Critical Thinking Development through Various Disciplines*” at Vilnius Pedagogical University.
2. The survey of the efficiency of “*Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking*” workshops for the teachers.
3. The survey of efficiency of the “Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking” project: case study at Vilnius S.Daukantas secondary school.

Aims of the survey:

- To evaluate the efficiency and improvement perspectives of “Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking” project.
- To compare the results of internal and external evaluations.
- To clarify the weak and strong points of the project.
- To make conclusions and to plan the further development of the project.

Methods of the survey:

Sociological quantitative method: *questionnaire-based survey*;

Sociological qualitative method: *focus group* and *observation* method.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY

1. Evaluation of the credit course “*Critical Thinking Development through Various Disciplines*” at Vilnius Pedagogical University.

Methods of the research: focus group, questionnaire-based survey.

In focus group there were interviewed 7 students who had participated in summer school of Critical Thinking, which was held in Marcinkonys, June 1999. In questionnaire-based survey there were questioned 45 fourth-year students of mathematics-computer science, who attended the course of “*Critical Thinking Development through Various Disciplines*” at Vilnius Pedagogical University in year 1999.

Main conclusions:

- Critical Thinking Development course met students’ needs and distinguished itself by the interest, good preparation as well as informal communication. The students positively assessed the lecturers’ efforts to introduce a new-style-teaching course into Vilnius Pedagogical University.
- Knowledge acquired in the course influenced some positive changes: the change in the quality of interpersonal discussions; the change in the quality of the studies, which is revealed through the need to analyze more and raise questions more freely; the change in the attitude to the studies, while being able to select significant and useful subjects.
- The majority of the students have applied the knowledge acquired during the Critical Thinking Development course in various spheres: in the studies, pedagogical practice, working at school or improving oneself. Those who had not applied the knowledge presented during Critical Thinking Development course were passive to use it, or they had been prejudiced against it, or were unable to apply the knowledge.
- Further promotion of critical thinking in universities ought to reveal more extensive possibilities of critical thinking application and its usage in Lithuanian secondary schools. This could be done through introducing and presenting its best application examples to the students who are offered to implement in their future work the ideas as well as methods of critical thinking.

The results of this survey exceeded our expectations. The course changed the attitude of the students towards the studies and their professional orientation as future teachers. They admitted that the course was quite new experience during their four years studies. The weak point – difficulties to apply acquired knowledge in the practice. But it is the common problem of all pedagogical universities in Lithuania.

The extraordinary courses get lost in the whole context of Pedagogical University. It was as exception and argument that the studies can be interesting and useful at the University.

chart N° 1

What has prompted you to choose Critical thinking development course? (%)

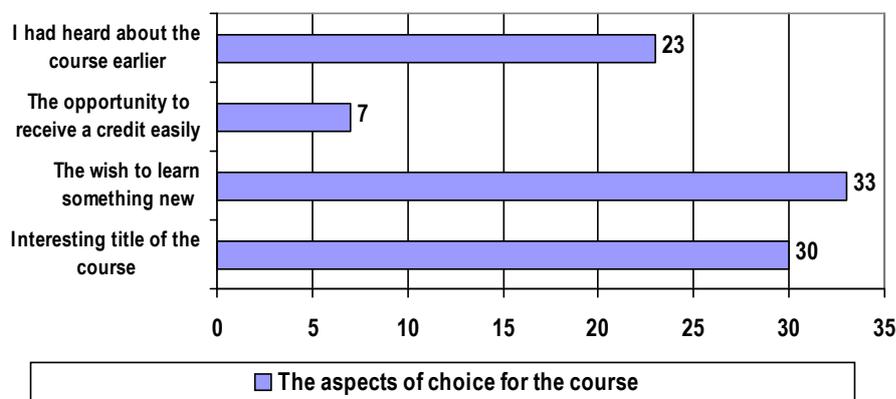


chart N° 2

Which of the adjectives presented below could best reflect what was the most important in the lectures on Critical thinking development? (%)

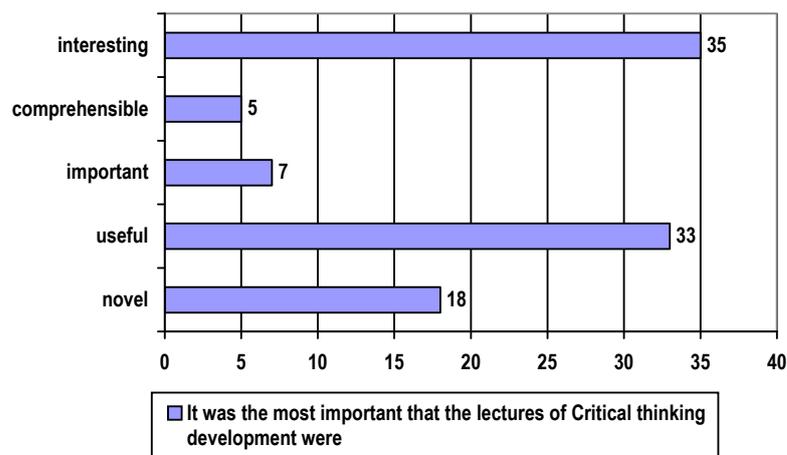


chart N° 3

The lectures on Critical thinking development were:

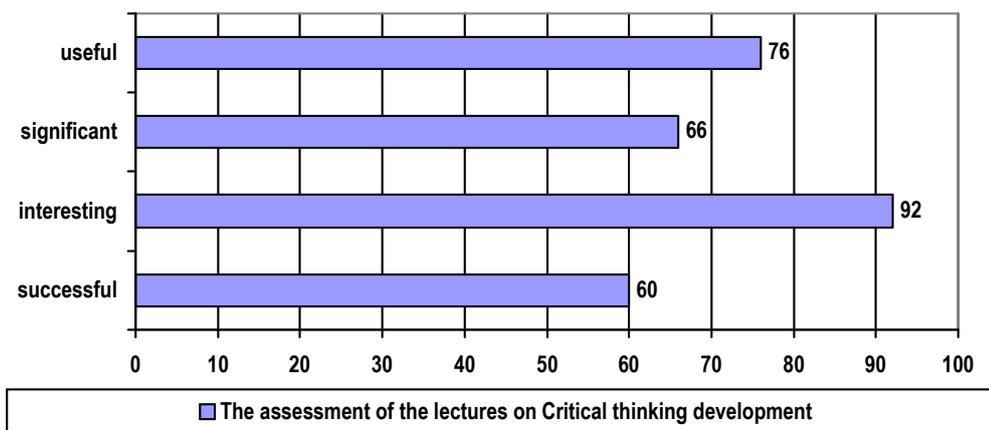


chart N° 4

Which of the statements provided below could best define Critical thinking? (%)

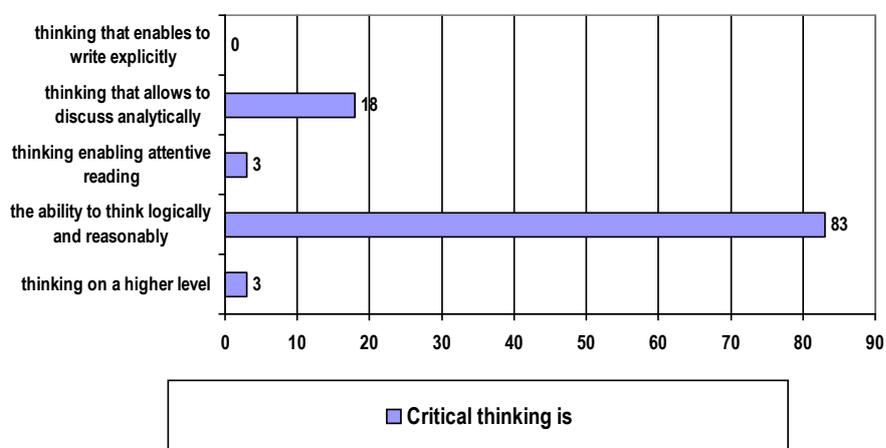


chart N° 5

Which of the statements, in your opinion, could best suit the purpose that the lecturers might have put for themselves in Critical thinking development course? (%)

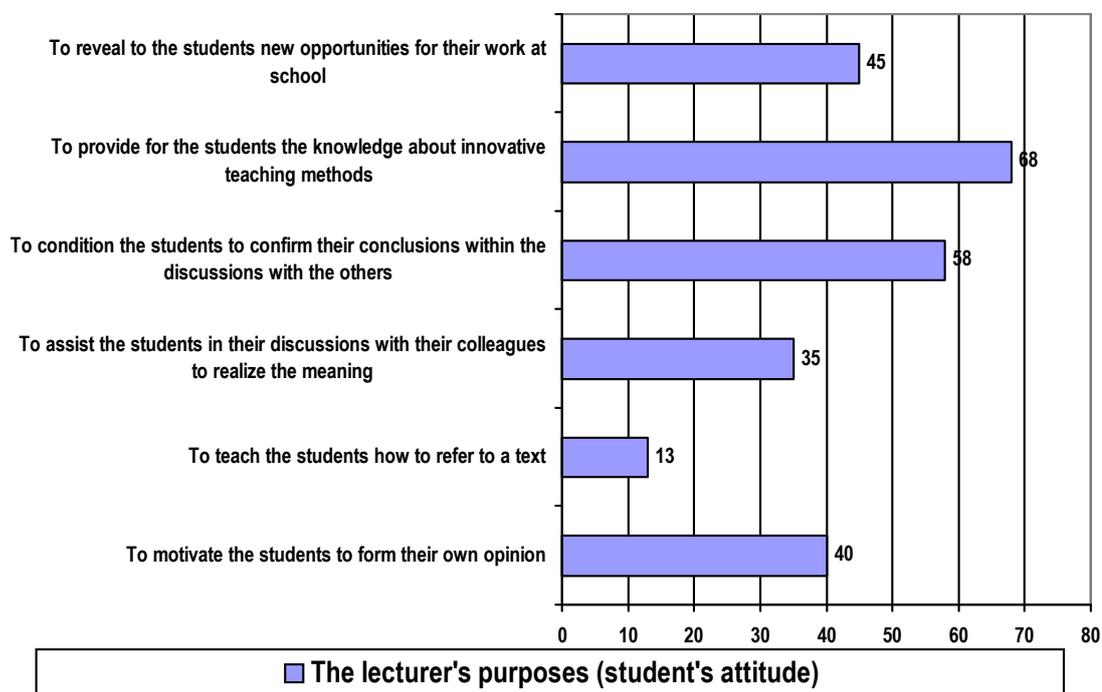
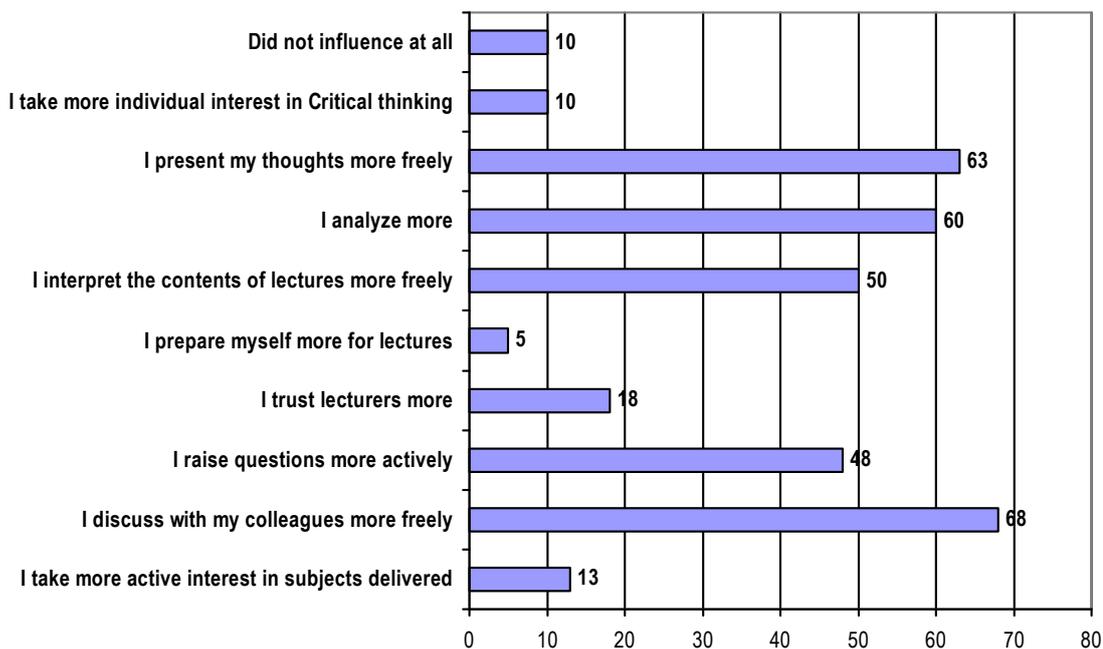


chart N° 6

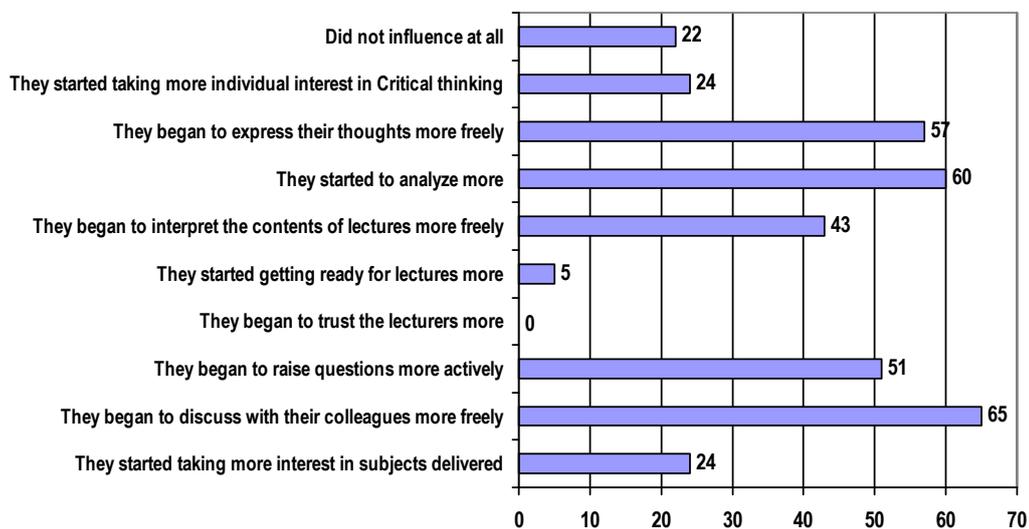
Evaluate the effect of Critical thinking development course on your studies: (%)



■ The effect of Critical thinking development course on personal studies

chart N° 7

Assess the influence of the course on your fellow-students who also attended the lectures: (%)



■ The effect of Critical thinking development course on the colleagues

chart N° 8

The influence of Critical thinking development course on the studies: (%)

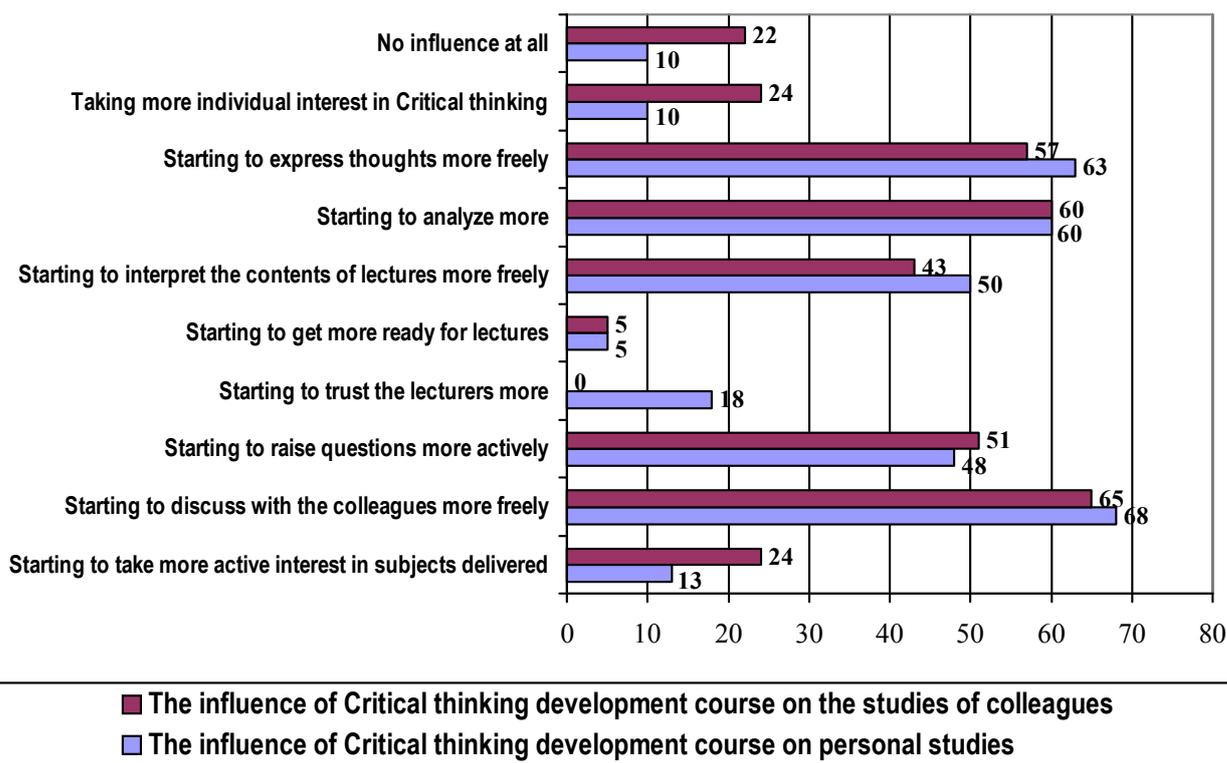
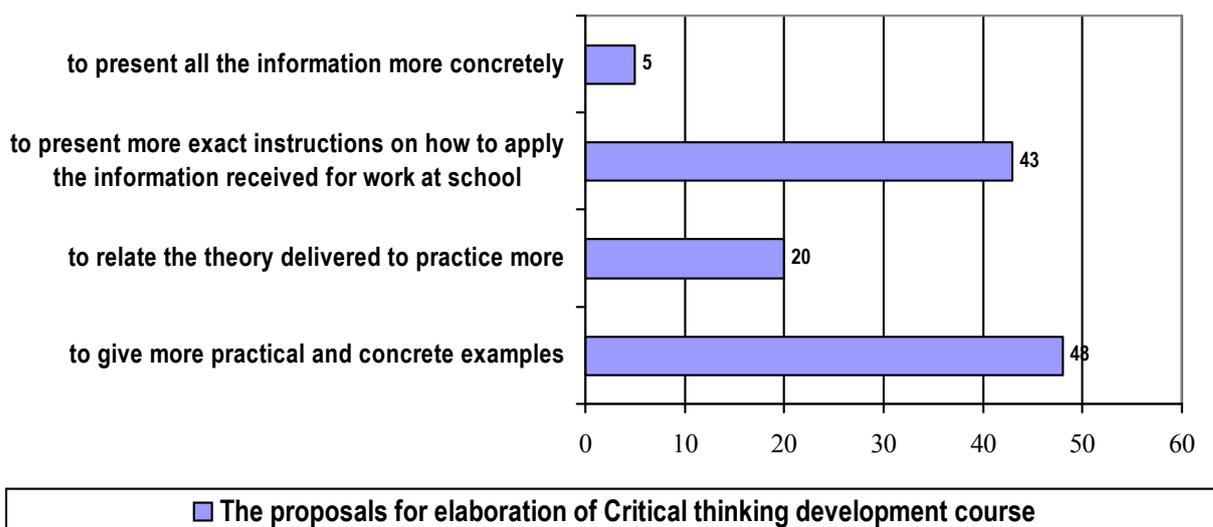


chart N° 9

During Critical thinking development course it would be necessary: (%)



2. The survey of the efficiency of “Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking” workshops for the teachers.

Subject of the survey: teachers, participated in in-service training RWCT workshops.

Methods of the survey: focus groups (10 respondents have participated in it), questionnaire-based survey (the survey conducted on 114 respondents).

Main conclusions:

- In generalization we must highlight that an influence of Critical Thinking workshops on teachers’ work both on personal-internal and external-communal levels was noticed. Where the first shows the changes in the viewpoints of teachers and school administration representatives who have participated in the workshops. The second presents how the workshops have influenced the process of setting up a lesson plan, its structure, etc.
- What concerns the personal level, we have found out that during the workshops the teachers acquired: self-confidence, wish to improve their working skills further, wish to think, discuss and argue their opinion.
- While discussing the changes on the communal level, we must note that the teachers began: to cooperate with their colleagues more, to share their experience, to apply the new methods to their lessons.
- The most positive aspects that were revealed in the Critical Thinking workshops were: the synthesis of theory and practice, the new knowledge about the preparation for lessons and how to conduct them, the new methods.
- During the analysis, the following important facts have been brought to light: very high assessment of the lecturers, the interdependence between answers of respondents and their age and work experience, it is emphasized that there is lack of practical examples and concreteness, lack of information about the selection of the methods before a lesson, lack of more exact guidelines how to apply the information obtained to the work at school.

This case study confirmed the outcomes of our internal evaluations. New teaching strategies, new educational materials, assessment innovations were introduced into the field of secondary education in Lithuania since the early 1990. So, we didn’t expect very big impact on the secondary school level, comparing with the impact on the initial teacher training. There is a big difference between big cities and country-side teachers. In spite of economical, social difficulties the country-side teachers are more open to new ideas and have a desire and will to change their teaching. About 70% of the participants were from country-side.

chart N^o 1
**What has encouraged you to participate in Critical thinking project?
 (reference to age) (%)**

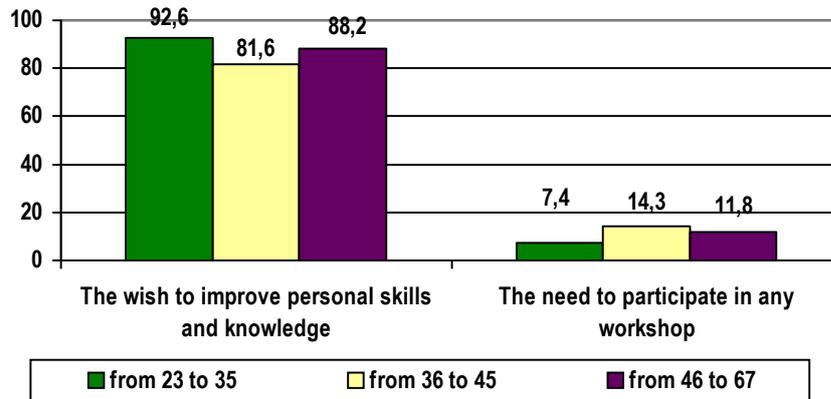


chart N^o 2
**What has encouraged you to participate in Critical thinking project?
 (reference to work experience) (%)**

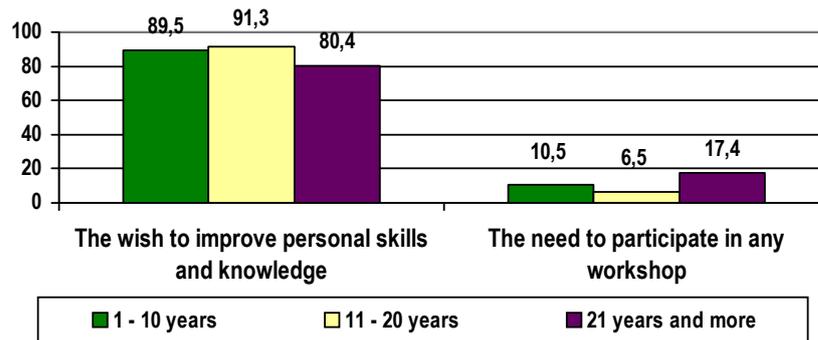


chart N^o 3
The most important points in Critical thinking course were (reference to the age) (%)

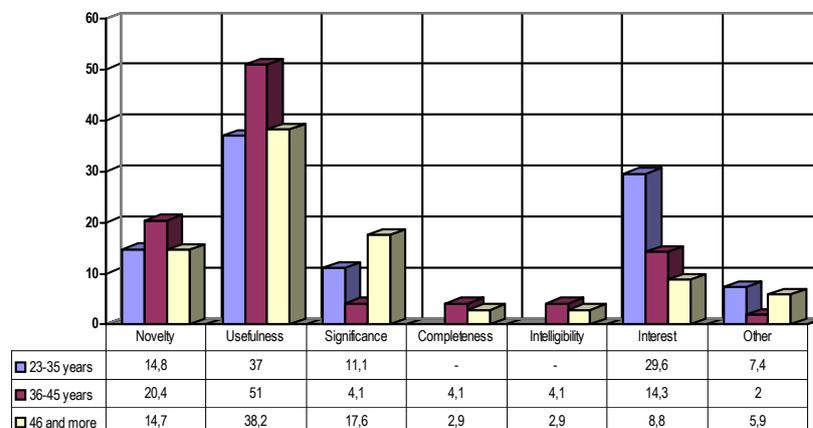


chart N° 4
**By means of Critical thinking methods I conduct almost all my lessons
 (reference to work experience) (%)**

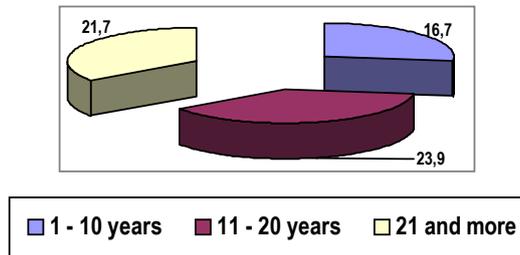


chart N° 5
**Why don't you frequently apply Critical thinking methods in your lessons?
 (reference to work experience) (%)**

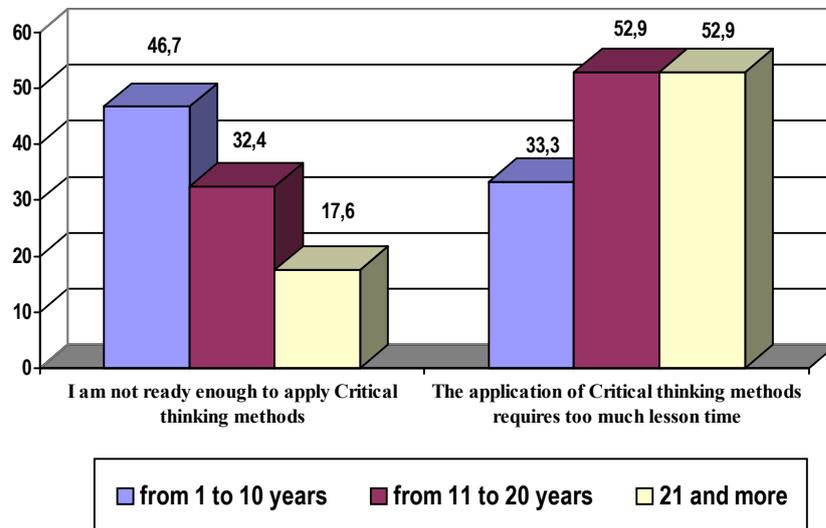
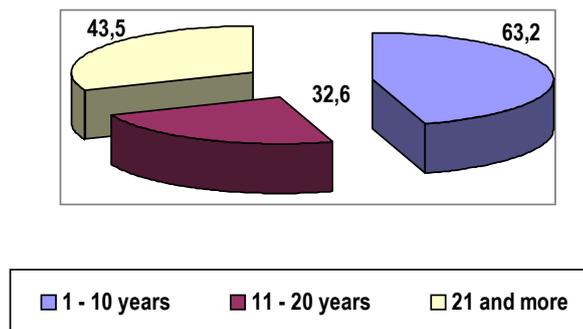


chart N° 6
**During the Critical thinking workshops it is necessary to provide more exact guidelines how to
 apply the information obtained to the work at school
 (reference to work experience) (%)**



3. The survey of efficiency of the “Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking” project: case study at Vilnius S.Daukantas secondary school.

Subject of the survey: teachers participated / non-participated in the activities of RWCT project and students taught / not taught by means of RWCT project methods at Vilnius S. Daukantas secondary school.

Methods of the survey: focus group, observation of students’ ability work with a text; observation of students’ discussion.

Aims of the survey:

- To investigate the efficiency of teachers’ participation in the activities of the project.
- To investigate the efficiency of teaching students by RWCT project methods.

Conclusions:

- The theoretical background acquired in the workshops on RWCT project has been flexibly applied to practice.
- During the period of two years, there were no radical changes with the implementation of the project at the school, but the changes that have taken place are very important and significant.
- The participation in a discussion and the work with a text of the students taught by the critical thinking methods in the lessons were very much different from those who have not been taught by the project methods.

Vilnius S.Daukantas secondary school is modelling school of the project. We expected to have more impact on the teachers of this school. The first generation teachers work together with the second generation teachers and have possibility to share their experience and help each other. The teachers admitted that:

- the time was too short for big changes;
- the school is involved in many other projects and is familiar with new teaching strategies;
- the teachers are tired of the permanent changes of education reform.

Students survey fulfilled all expectations. The text analysis showed that the students taught by project methods are more capable to work with the text, to analyse, to identify difficult places, to look for new concepts and terms, to express their own opinion, to ask and to look for the answers.

The discussion showed that the students taught by RWCT methods are more active, defend their opinion with arguments, listen to the classmates and discuss with them, raise questions and look for the answers.