

Florida Center for Reading Research

Project CRISS

What is Project CRISS?

Project CRISS (CRISS) is a professional development course designed to help teachers incorporate learning strategies for reading, writing, and learning into their regular content instruction. *CRISS* is the acronym for Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies. A small group of high school teachers developed practical approaches for helping their students learn as a response to their concern about student's inability to comprehend assigned reading materials. These science, social studies, English, math, and reading teachers combined their own ideas with information from professional literature and teacher-researcher studies to develop *CRISS*. The professional development training, provided by *CRISS* certified trainers, is conducted at the adoption site. Enrollment is limited to 30 participants for workshops that vary in length. These two, three, or four-day workshops present similar training, the biggest difference lies in the extra time teachers are given to develop lesson plans with integrated *CRISS* strategies. *CRISS* recommends attendance of at least two teachers from each content area plus an administrator from each building. There is no specialized content provided for the administrators. The workshop topics include: Understanding the *CRISS* Philosophy; Learning to Incorporate *CRISS* Strategies; Assessment Techniques; Supervision for Learning Plan Development.

Although *CRISS* was originally designed for high school students, the program has been revised for teachers of third through twelfth grade students. "*CRISS* is based on the philosophy that comprehension and learning can be improved when students build on prior knowledge and are actively involved in the learning process through organizing information, discussion and writing" (Santa, 2004, p. 1). Research on reading comprehension, reading engagement and school change are all represented in Project *CRISS* curriculum and methodology, and all are supported by research from Dolores Durkin (1978), Michael Pressley (2000), and the National Reading Panel (2000). Durkin found that while teachers spend much time testing comprehension, very little time was spent teaching it. Pressley found that not much had changed in the two decades following the Durkin study. The content, methods, strategies, and philosophy of *CRISS* in comprehension, vocabulary instruction, and staff development are aligned with the findings reported by the National Reading Panel. *CRISS* is not a comprehensive reading program nor does it provide comprehensive professional development for reading instruction; therefore the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency are not addressed.

The materials include a copy of the *CRISS* Materials Packet and the Training Manual. The Materials Packet is a collection of reading selections and strategy forms to be used during the training. Teachers are asked to bring copies of their current curriculum materials in order to adapt the *CRISS* strategies to their own lessons. Once the teaching strategies have been modeled, the participants are referred to the Training Manual for a more detailed description of the strategy and for additional activities; thus the manual becomes a resource for further lesson plan ideas.

The Training Manual includes a *Theoretical background* that discusses the principles and philosophy of *CRISS*. The *Textbook analysis* section includes information on teaching the author's craft (how authors structure



their writing), how to teach students to use identification of the author's craft to enhance comprehension, and a teacher checklist to use for analysis of content materials. Students are also taught to use the same checklist to analyze text. The *Main ideas* section of the Training Manual incorporates techniques for teaching students to identify the main idea through teacher and student examples. *Learning strategies* provide organizational formats and forms of note taking to use once students master finding the main idea. The Training Manual also includes *Writing strategies*, both formal and informal, that can be applied to all content areas and a *Vocabulary* section that encompasses learning concepts and word meanings using strategies such as word maps, charts, writing, and discussion. The final section of the Training Manual contains *Assessment*, which involves using *CRISS* strategies for students to assess their own learning, teachers to evaluate their students' learning, and districts to assess the effectiveness of *CRISS* within their schools.

CRISS provides research-based evidence to support the incorporation of these strategies, using direct teaching methods that are both explicit and systematic, and can be adapted for use across the curriculum. The Training Manual and the Materials Packet are error free. A matrix that crosswalks the program's components with Florida's Reading Competencies is not available at this time.

What processes are in place in Project *CRISS*?

The instructional design of *CRISS* is not explicitly stated with clearly defined goals and objectives, rather the objectives are embedded within the text of each chapter. The activities offered in each chapter provide sufficient depth of knowledge. The strategies and methods are modeled in face-to-face delivery, by *CRISS* trainers. Alternative delivery models such as online training and CD-ROM are not offered.

Implementation of *CRISS* strategies requires no additional teaching materials, since a change in teacher philosophy, not curriculum, is advocated. The goal is to help students gain maximum understanding by learning to incorporate *CRISS* strategies in every learning environment. First, the trainers demonstrate, encourage, and model the active learning strategies. Then the participants are to practice integrating the strategies with feedback from the *CRISS* consultant and other participating teachers.

CRISS ensures fidelity in the delivery of the content by requiring that *CRISS* Certified Trainers be trained only by the *CRISS* Project Master Level Trainers, by providing a detailed trainer manual, and by requiring at least one year of follow up for the participants. The program includes a pre-training and post-training teacher survey that closely matches the program's content. A certificate of attendance is presented to participants who complete the course.

Does Project *CRISS* address the context in which the program will be implemented?

CRISS offers detailed information concerning the implementation process and organizational requirements that should be in place for successful application of their strategies. A twelve to eighteen-hour in-service training with a maximum of 30 participants, two teachers from each content area and an administrator from each school, is designed to prepare teachers and administrators to implement *CRISS*. Specific details are provided for workshop accommodations and materials that are needed to conduct the training including room size and equipment, such as an overhead projector and a screen. For the most successful implementations, *CRISS* suggests that districts or schools designate someone in-house to act as the Local Facilitator (LF). The LF visits *CRISS*-trained teacher's classrooms at least bi-weekly for implementation assistance, and

arranges follow-up sessions for collaboration purposes. If the district or schools become committed to *CRISS* the LF can receive further training to become a *CRISS* Certified Trainer (CT). The CT can provide follow-up assistance and support individually, through group meetings (after school or through release time), and newsletters. *CRISS* strongly recommends a follow-up session within three to six months of the original training, and or monthly newsletters in order to keep the *CRISS* philosophy and methods current. *CRISS* notes that the most successful implementations have occurred when teachers and administrators are involved with training on a voluntary basis.

Research Support for Project *CRISS*

CRISS was originally developed as a secondary program (*Content Reading In Secondary Schools*) in the late 1970's by a small group of teachers in the Kalispell School District in Kalispell, Montana. In 1985, the program received federal validation and funding through the National Diffusion Network of the U.S. Department of Education. At that time the program was for teachers who taught grades 10-12. In 1988, the first edition was published and the name of the program was changed to *Content Reading Including Study Systems* to reflect the growing use of the program in middle schools. Again, in 1993, the program was expanded to include grades 4-12 and earned another 6 years of validation from the U.S. Department of Education.

In 1996, the second edition of the *CRISS* manual was published and once again the name was changed this time to emphasize the student ownership of strategies, *Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies (CRISS)*. As before, the principles remained the same although new strategies, adaptations and examples for teacher use were added.

This year, 2004, the third edition will be published. The name of the program and the principles of learning remain the same. However, there will be more emphasis placed on student ownership, reflective conferencing, and reflective based teaching strategies.

A research study was conducted in one large Utah school district during the 2001-2002 and the 2002-2003 school years. Within this district low-performing schools were designated as experimental sites and control schools were matched to these on socioeconomic and demographic factors. Teachers within the experimental and control schools volunteered to participate in the study and those at the experimental schools received *CRISS* training in the fall of the school year. Intervention and control groups of teachers were matched by grade level and subject taught and by school demographics. Elementary, middle, and high school students in a variety of content areas (e.g., English, biology), were assessed at the beginning of the year (pretest) and the end of the year (posttest) on a free recall comprehension measure. Although in some classrooms, students with *CRISS* trained teachers showed significantly stronger performance at the posttest, it is questionable whether the differential gains can be attributed to *CRISS* for two reasons. First, as schools were not randomly assigned to receive *CRISS* training, pre-existing school differences may have influenced the results. Second, the repeated measures ANOVA procedures used to analyze the data were not able to correct for pretest differences between groups of students.

In conclusion, although the content, methods, strategies, and philosophy of *CRISS* in comprehension, vocabulary instruction, and staff development are aligned with the findings reported by the National Reading Panel, better-controlled research is needed on *CRISS* to establish that it is effective in increasing student performance.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Project CRISS*:

- The high quality professional development standards help to ensure the fidelity of delivery of the content and methods of instruction.

Weaknesses of *Project CRISS*:

- Adding specific goals and objectives would improve the instructional design of *CRISS*.

Which Florida districts have implemented Project CRISS?

Alachua	352-955-7880	Baker	904-259-0401
Brevard	321-633-1000 ext 402	Broward	754-321-2600
Charlotte	941-255-0808	Citrus	352-726-1931
Clay	904-284-6510	Collier	239-377-0212
Dade	305-995-1428	DeSoto	863-494-4222
Duval	904-390-2115	Escambia	850-469-6130
Flagler	386-437-7526	Hardee	863-773-9058
Hernando	352-797-7001	Hillsborough	813-272-4022
Lafayette	386-294-4107	Lake	352-253-6510
Lee	239-337-8301	Leon	850-487-7147
Manatee	941-708-8770	Martin	772-219-1200
Nassau	904-321-5881	Okaloosa	850-833-3109
Osceola	407-870-4008	Pasco	813-794-2648
Pinellas	727-588-6011	Polk	863-534-0521
Putnam	386-329-0510	Santa Rosa	850-983-5010
Sarasota	941-927-9000	Seminole	407-320-0006
St. John's	904-819-7502	St. Lucie	772-429-3925
Union	386-496-2045		

For More Information

www.projectcriss.com

References

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