

Implementation of *CRISS for Students*: Research into Effective Practices



By Jocelyn Downs

In the fall of 2005, my job title read Secondary Language Arts/Reading Resource Teacher for Brevard Public Schools (BPS). If you don't know where Brevard is, think "I Dream of Jeannie" and Kennedy Space Center. My task was to improve literacy learning levels of approximately 37,000 secondary students, no small feat. My colleagues and I provided *CRISS* training to all instructional staff; however, too often the training was not effectively implemented in the classroom. The teachers embraced *CRISS* as a "teacher toolbox," but many times the point of *CRreating Independence through Student-owned Strategies* didn't transfer to the students.

When *Project CRISS for Students: It's a Brain Thing ~ Learning How to Learn!* <http://www.projectcriss.com/criss_for_students.php> came out, I knew this could be that missing link. From a district perspective, the curriculum was relatively inexpensive, so that wouldn't be a problem. I had to address several issues, however, including: configuration of schools, constraints of the curriculum, willingness of teachers to add material, and conflicts of product over process. The question was, when and where would this fit in? Students who score below grade level have a reading class, but I really wanted all students to participate in this curriculum. In the end, implementation of *CRISS for Students* landed in the seventh grade language arts classes.

A crucial piece of this project included the support of reading coaches. In Brevard, the middle school coaches were in their third year and proving to be highly effective. All coaches were *CRISS* trained, and most were or would become *CRISS* trainers. Therefore, the training for implementation was carried out over three days. All seventh grade language arts teachers received the standard two-day *CRISS* training. On day three, Cathy Denman, media specialist at Jackson Middle School and *CRISS* trainer who had piloted the curriculum the year before, trained the teachers and shared her own experiences with implementation. The reading coach and the language arts teachers determined where and when to fit this in.

Implementation of Professional Development * From Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1989)

Training Steps	Knowledge/ Mastery	Training Stages/Skill Acquisition	Classroom Application
Theory/Lecture	40-80%	5-10%	5%
+ Demonstration	80%	10-40%	5%
+ Practice	80%	80%	5%
+ Coaching	80%	80%	80%

The preceding chart from Joyce and Showers shows the power of classroom coaching in implementing training and curriculum. In this study, as with anything in education, it is almost impossible to separate whether it was the curriculum, the coaching, and/or the classroom teachers that provided the gains, and of course there are myriad other factors that also influenced the gains.

The chart on the next page shows a comparison of reading scores for seventh and eighth grade students in Brevard County. The chart was pulled from the Florida Department of Education Web site. The shaded boxes (in 2006) show the students who received the *CRISS for Students* curriculum. The students tested as seventh graders in spring of 2006 on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT). While there are fourteen middle schools in Brevard, I focused on the schools with the highest proportions of free and reduced lunch and exceptional education populations. I also wanted to know if students would retain these gains in the following years, so the same matched students would be eighth graders in

School Mean Scores—Reading			
Grade Level	2005	2006	2007
CLEARLAKE MIDDLE SCHOOL			
7	298	*312	310
8	305	299	300
JOHN F. KENNEDY MIDDLE SCHOOL			
7	312	*318	320
8	310	311	310
RONALD MCNAIR MAGNET MIDDLE School			
7	310	*320	321
8	302	301	306
STONE MIDDLE SCHOOL			
7	311	*319	316
8	306	303	317
THOMAS JEFFERSON MIDDLE SCHOOL			
7	321	*330	326
8	322	320	321

Every school made gains in the initial year of using *CRISS for Students* compared to the previous year (2005). Even in 2007 as eighth graders, the average scores were higher as most schools, which is significant as the eighth grade reading test includes written performance tasks, which usually result in a dip in test scores for eighth grade students. Interestingly, Stone Middle School had the largest retention of gains. Whether the increase resulted from instruction by the eighth grade teacher or the fact that Reading Coach Maria Peebles made sure students received the instruction by modeling many of the lessons with the teachers would be the basis of another research study, although coaches Toniamae Lopez-Dykes at Clearlake, Sandra Quinlan at Kennedy, and Linda Britton at McNair also provided modeling and support to the teachers at their respective schools. It is safe to conclude that implementation of *CRISS for Students* did support student learning and achievement gains in Brevard Public Schools.

Reference:

Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1983). Power in staff development through research on training. Alexandria: ASCD.



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