

CRISS AND THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Can CRISS and its philosophy be applied to areas other than the traditional content subjects? Of course they can! In the following article by Margie Sterling-Moore, an elementary guidance counselor in Kalispell, Montana, Margie shares with us a CRISS unit she used with fifth graders to help improve their classroom environment.

CRISS PROVIDES HELP FOR A SCHOOL COUNSELOR

As a school counselor and psychologist and as a CRISS National Trainer, I have found the CRISS strategies to be most helpful in my individual, group, and classroom counseling and teaching situations. Any topic is approachable when we remember the CRISS philosophy and strategies. I find I am able to tackle any problem or issue on any subject with confidence.

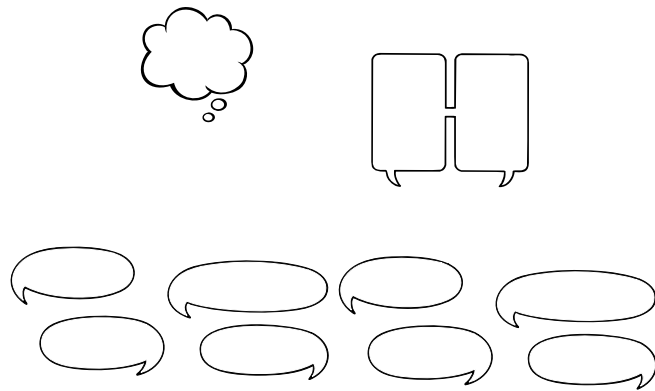
In my school, the fifth grade teachers asked me to teach a five-week unit that would help create a safe, user-friendly, and respectful environment in their classrooms. We agreed that I would have a 45-60 minute period once a week. One of our goals was to create a common vocabulary about classroom environment that both the teachers and the students would understand, so that everyone would be on the same level. I chose to emphasize the theme of a “peaceful environment.”

The first day, after introducing the students to our plan, we began with the CRISS

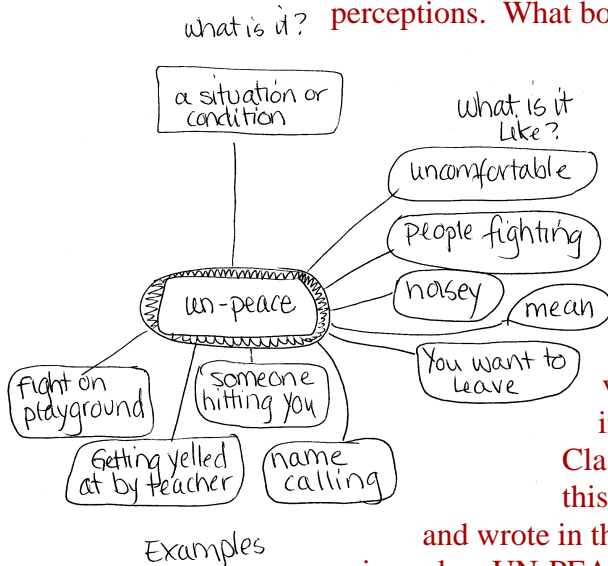
Concept of Definition vocabulary map (pp.197-204, CRISS manual). Students were asked to define the word UN-PEACE. (I know this is not a real word, but keep in mind we were dealing with the *concept*.)

The students then paired up and, using *Think-Pair-Share* (p.56, CRISS manual), completed the vocabulary map. After the pairs had finished their vocabulary maps, I asked them to draw a line to the left of the word UN-PEACE and write any feelings they had that were associated with that

idea. The purpose of this last writing activity was to broaden their “feelings vocabulary.” Most children define their feelings with three words: mad, sad, or happy. Through my modeling, I was able to draw out more specific terms, such as frustrated, lonely, confident, ashamed, abandoned, rejected, and loved. Expanding their feelings vocabulary is an integral part to changing their behaviors. After the students completed this activity, we met again as a class and the pairs shared their vocabulary maps. The class discussion that followed was lively, and I was pleased to see that most students participated. During this discussion time, the concepts and vocabulary were broadened. I posted the vocabulary maps on the bulletin board for all to see. Finally, I asked the students to write in their journals about their reaction to this particular lesson. Their comments showed that they enjoyed the activity and understood the idea of UN-PEACE.



The next week, we reviewed the maps from the previous week and talked about the idea of peace being broken down by conflict and, many times, by our perceptions. What bothers some people doesn't always have the same effect on others. Pairing up again and this time using a *Concept Map* (pp. 92-96, CRISS manual), the students brainstormed the times, places, and events of life that were peaceful for them. We shared *Concept Maps* with the entire class and generated a rich feelings vocabulary. Using the newly created *Concept Map* and the feelings vocabulary, the students paired up again and wrote down specific events that evoked various peaceful feelings in their daily life and they included how they reacted to those feelings. Classmates then shared with the whole group. After this, the students referred to their maps on UN-PEACE and wrote in their journals about a time in their lives when they experienced an UN-PEACEFUL situation and how they felt about it.



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For the third lesson, I prepared a *Pattern Puzzle* (pp. 44-45, CRISS manual), that detailed a situation with steps that lead to UN-PEACE or PEACE. I cut up the sentences, put them in envelopes, and asked the students to read and arrange them in chronological order. After the students shared their solutions, they decided if the puzzle ended up as peaceful or un-peaceful. See the following example.

MOM WENT UPSTAIRS TO WAKE JACK UP FOR SCHOOL.
 JACK ROLLED OVER AND BURIED HIS HEAD IN THE COVERS.
 MOM CALLED TO JACK AGAIN.
 MOM YELLED FOR JACK TO GET UP RIGHT NOW!!!
 JACK ROLLED OUT OF BED YELLING ANGRILY, "WHY DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO DO THIS TO ME?"

Other *Pattern Puzzles* I made up had to do with peer arguments, playground behavior, and lunchroom incidents. As we talked through the scenarios of the pattern puzzles, I emphasized feelings and alternative outcomes. As a conclusion to the lesson, the students completed *Framed Paragraphs* (See Writing Templates, pp.175-178, CRISS manual). See the following example.

Jack was feeling (adj.) _____ because (complete the sentence) . . .
 . Jack could have avoided the situation by . . . The remainder of the day was hard for Jack. At school, he . . . Jack's Mom felt _____ because . . .

The topic explored the fourth week was what kinds of things we could do to make our classroom more peaceful. The students had many ideas, such as: raise your hand when you want to speak, don't call names, don't make fun of others, stay in your seat, do your part of the work,

etc. In groups of four, the students made posters depicting the rules they thought would help to create a peaceful environment in the classroom. We hung the colorful and insightful posters all around the room. For the rest of the year, teachers and students used these as references to describe and correct any behavior concerns.

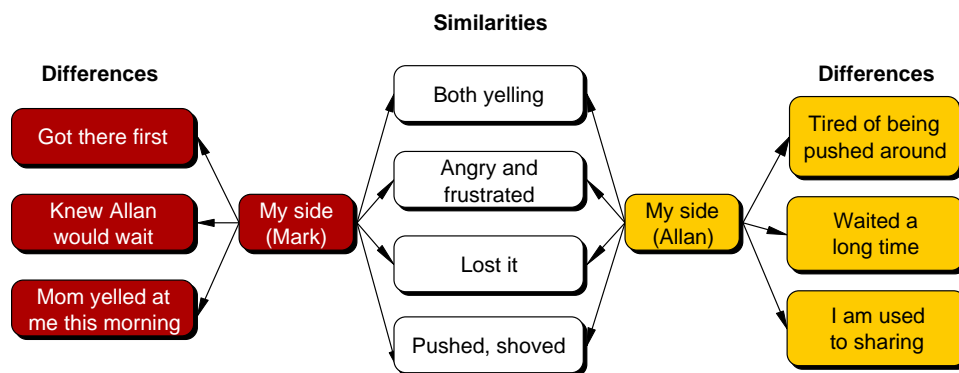
During our last class, we talked about the most important factor to having a peaceful environment, which the students decided was cooperation. We went back to our pairs and tried to figure out what they could do when faced with certain conflicts or uncooperative people. For example, what if someone repeatedly called you names? How would you feel? Instead of contributing to the conflict, what options do you have? Again, *Concept Maps* worked well. The students wrote a specific conflict in the center bubble and the spokes generating outward described the various actions they could take, such as: ignore it, ask him to stop, tell an adult, go somewhere else, ask her why she is doing that, fight back, cry, etc. All of their ideas were shared with the class. At this point, the students were asked to be metacognitive and write in their journals about the strategy that worked the best for them and about another one they would be willing to try in the future.

Several weeks after the lessons were completed, I checked back with the classes to have them share with me what the classroom environment was like now. We reviewed the posters on the walls and revisited any concerns. Without exception, the classroom environments had improved. When problems did arise, the children’s thoughts and feelings were aired and posted so that all could hear and see them. Both the students and the teachers were pleased to share with me the safe, user-friendly, and respectful atmosphere in their classrooms.

I appreciate the many strategies I have learned through CRISS which have helped me to handle the daily problems and situations I face as a school counselor.

More sharing from Margie

Margie also shared with us other ways for using CRISS strategies in counseling kids at school. One of these is a *Comparison Map* similar to the *Venn diagram* (pp. 96-103, CRISS manual). This strategy works extremely well for mediation. Each of the parties involved gives his side of the issue and tries to determine common behaviors and feelings. In the following example, the mediator/counselor helps two second grade boys who have been fighting to see how their behaviors are alike and to see the other person's side. Then, the counselor helps them to resolve the issue and come up with some solutions so that both students are comfortable with the outcome. A couple of the solutions that Mark and Allan came up with were that they could



share the swing and take turns. They also agreed that they needed to control their tempers better in the future.

Problem-Solution Notes (pp. 130-135, CRISS manual) are ideal in a situation where you have students involved in a behavioral issue. The students are able to work through their behavior problem, look at all aspects of it, and come up with solutions.

Both of these strategies actively involve the students in personally handling their own behavioral issues.

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