



COMMENTS *From You*

Project CRISS: It's A Brain Thing ~ Learning How to Learn! Partners well with READ 180

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As a READ 180 teacher of struggling readers, I am constantly looking for materials that will help my students improve their reading comprehension skills. (Read 180 <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/read180/overview/> is a reading intervention program published by Scholastic.) As a CRISS District Trainer at Joseph L. Carwise Middle School within the Pinellas County School District in Florida, I am fortunate to have at my fingertips some of the most dynamic tools to help my students. This year I have been incorporating *Project CRISS for Students: It's a Brain Thing ~ Learning How to Learn!* into my small group rotation with my struggling readers. If you are unaware of the READ 180 model, it is a block class consisting of a 30-minute whole group time and three 20-minute rotations (small group, computer, and independent reading) with a 10-minute wrap-up. Such a model seemed a perfect fit for CRISS!

For the past four years, CRISS has become a permanent part of my READ 180 curriculum. It serves as the great way to jump-start the school year in August by tying in perfectly with my multiple intelligence unit. In addition, the use of the pre-CRISS survey from *It's a Brain Thing* helps me determine at what level of CRISS understanding and use my 7th and 8th graders are starting the school year. Students include their pre-surveys in the "All About Me" section of their portfolios. At

the end of the year, they take the post-CRISS survey and are amazed, when they compare the two surveys, how much they have learned over the year.

Small group time focuses on five students which means I can work one-on-one with them, thus making *It's a Brain Thing ~ Learning How to Learn!* a perfect way to concentrate on the use of CRISS tools. My students have

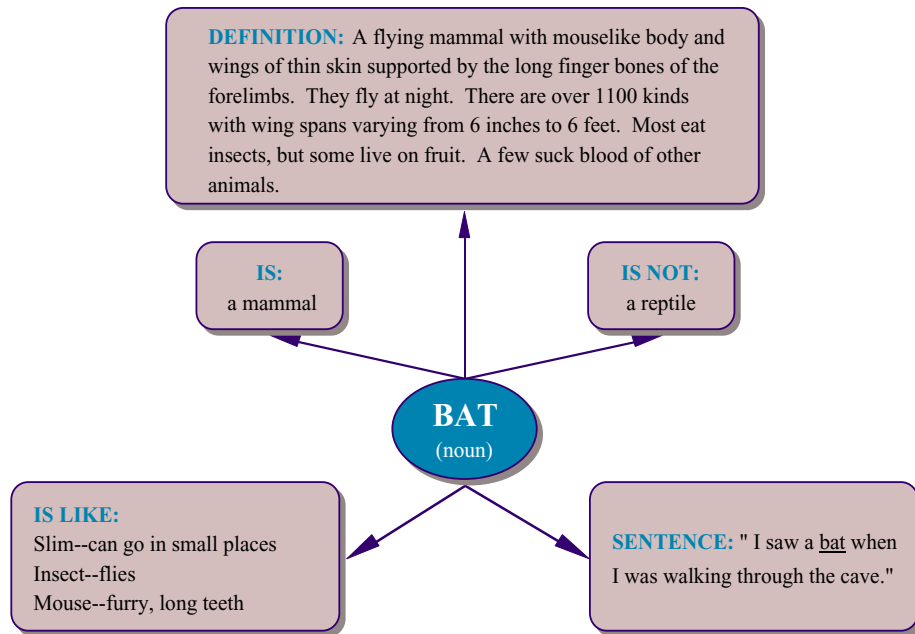
enjoyed learning about the "tough terminators" (*Tough Terminators*, a non-fiction trade book about predators, is part of the CRISS for Students curriculum) and applying the CRISS strategies.

We have taken the review of the CRISS tools a step further by designing posters to go with each strategy learned in *It's a Brain Thing*. These posters provide a way to review the material learned and to establish ownership of the tool. The posters are stored in a manila folder that has been secured on both ends to make it like an envelope. Students decorate the outside of the folder with the name of the strategy just learned. (We also list this strategy on our CRISS word wall.) Such an activity allows my students to create their own CRISS reference files. At the end of the school year, they can take their files with them to the next grade level as part of their student portfolios. Also, it is another addition to their student portfolios.

This year, after completing six chapters of *It's a Brain Thing*



~ *Learning How to Learn!*, our class celebrated Halloween by publishing bat books using the CRISS tools learned. Through the use of K-W-L and an Anticipation Guide, I surveyed students to determine their prior knowledge of bats. While listening to bat stories and reading bat information during whole group time, students created word maps, selectively highlighted, and developed Power Notes to organize the information they gathered from their research. Through this process, students found it easier to write their bat stories and felt comfortable knowing they had not committed plagiarism during the process of “publishing” their own bat books.



The use of CRISS strategies did not end there. Students completed the project by writing test questions for their books using QARs. This part of the project was done during independent rotation so each student could concentrate on the material in his or her bat book. Not only did they develop QAR questions, they also created their own answer keys. They were given grades for the tests and answer keys they developed. The next step was for each student to select randomly another student’s name and then read his or her bat book. Afterward, each student took a test that consisted of teacher-generated questions based on bat knowledge learned during read alouds and student-generated questions based on information from their individually authored bat books. The grades students received from this test were equally weighted with the grades received on the QAR tests they created. Each student received a final blended grade based on the two scores.

My students understand CRISS strategies are the keys to interpreting, organizing, and using information they learn in my reading class and in all their other content classes. Whether they are reviewing FCAT test taking vocabulary through the use of a Pattern Puzzle or writing a RAFT to show how they connect with a character in a story, *It’s a Brain Thing ~ Learning How to Learn!* has found a home in my READ 180 classroom. I look forward to discussing and applying the tools of compare and contrast–Venn Diagram and Content Frames–with my READ 180 students for our upcoming hero versus superhero unit!

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READ 180 and Project CRISS Partnership ~ Research Results

In the spring 2006 *Comments from CRISS*, we featured an article by Cindy Bowen, a CRISS District Trainer and READ 180 teacher. In it, she described how she successfully combined CRISS with her READ 180 curriculum. Cindy was curious to see what impact CRISS had on her students' achievement test scores and has provided us with a summary of her research. The summary of her results begins on the next page.



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*Lights, Camera, Action: A Look at Snapshot Data and Video Data
In Measuring Student Reading Comprehension*

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Picture yourself as a photographer for a prestigious magazine on assignment to take the perfect photo for next month's cover story. Timing, proper lighting, and prepping your subject are crucial for you to reach your goal for the perfect snapshot! Now imagine yourself as producer of a multi-million dollar film; organizing the set crew, prompting the cameramen, and selecting the flawless video to develop an Oscar award winning movie. In the area of assessments, educators play both roles. Snapshot data and video data is on our minds constantly. After completing my first year using It's a Brain Thing ~ Learning How to Learn! by Lynn T. Havens and Bonnie J. Valdes in my **READ 180** classroom, it seemed appropriate to look at some snapshot and video data generated from my students to see what impact the incorporation of learning strategies from the Project CRISS student learning program would have on their overall development in the area of reading comprehension.

As a teacher in the Pinellas County School District of Florida, I am responsible for administering the following assessments: the **Kaplan Achievement Test**, the **FCAT** (Florida Comprehension Achievement Test), the **SRI** (Scholastic Reading Inventory) and four state fluency checks. As a Reading 180 teacher and **CRISS** District trainer I utilize the **READ 180** software program and infuse my lessons during whole and small group with the use of **CRISS** to enhance our reading intervention program (see Comments from **CRISS** Volume 19 Number 3). **Kaplan**, **SRI**, state fluency checks, and the **READ 180** software program (formative assessments) provide ongoing or "video" data, which I can use to measure growth in the areas of comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and spelling during the school year. The **FCAT** (summative assessment) provides "snapshot" data, which measures growth from the previous school year's **FCAT**. As a **READ 180 CRISS** trained teacher my primary concern has been to focus on improving student comprehension of text and thus increase student achievement. In order to show how the use of **CRISS** with the **READ 180** model helped achieve this goal, first let me focus on some background knowledge of these assessments for you as the reader.

Formative versus Summative Assessment Characteristics

A comprehensive look at the characteristics of formative and summative assessments is one way of identifying the balance needed of both types of assessments. Also such a "look" will give a clearer picture of how well a struggling student is improving and in this study, improvement of student reading comprehension.

The seven key characteristics of a formative assessment are:

- ✓ fostering an internal locus of control (student-driven/teacher-driven)
- ✓ based on educational standards
- ✓ objective and data-based
- ✓ ongoing measurement of growth over time
- ✓ involving a variety of assessment tools
- ✓ interactive and collaborative
- ✓ responsive to the development of individual student needs

Summative assessment tool characteristics include:

- ✓ fostering an external locus of control (state/national mandates)
- ✓ focusing on broad educational standards at the end of a time period
- ✓ providing accountability
- ✓ checking on level of learning at end of a program

- ✓ involving one predominant assessment tool
- ✓ being comprehensive in nature

Characteristics of both the formative and summative assessment tools will be used to analyze the data generated from my students' **Kaplan, READ 180, SRI** and **FCAT** assessments in the area of reading comprehension. In addition, student score improvement over the year as they were introduced to various **CRISS** tools in It's A Brain Thing ~ Learning How to Learn! to improve their reading comprehension will be discussed.

Student Demographics

My student population consists of 45 students (27 seventh graders, 18 eighth graders) who range from a high level 1 to a low level 3 on the **FCAT** and may also be part of the ESE (Exceptional Student Education) and/or the ESOL (English Students of Other Languages) student population. The students are divided among three Reading 180 classrooms that follow block scheduling and cap at 15 students. Thirty-seven percent of the students are designated ESE with two percent ESOL. Racial make-up consists of 76% White, 16% Black, 4% Hispanic, and 4% Multi-racial.

Fostering an Internal Locus of Control

Of the three types of assessments used with my students, the **Kaplan Advantage** tests were administered three times a school year and the **FCAT Reading** portion was administered in the spring. Both focus on state educational grade level achievement standards. The **READ 180** software program is experienced daily for a 20 minute block focusing on individualized adjusted reading instruction based on lexile data generated from student **SRI** testing. "Lexile measures exist for both text and readers. A Lexile text measure is the measure of reading difficulty given to text, based on syntactic complexity (sentence difficulty and length) and word frequency (how often the word is used in the English language). A Lexile reader measure indicates the reading level of the reader. This measure is best determined by administering the **SRI**. By matching a Lexile reader measure with a Lexile text measure, you ensure a positive reading experience — one in which the right level of challenge and comfort exists." (Scholastic.com / Product Information: Scholastic Reading Counts) **CRISS** works hand-in-hand with all types of assessments because it is "a way of thinking about learning" while also providing strategies to become a better independent reader through the use of graphic organizers, active reading, listening and learning, discussion, writing/reflection, and metacognition.

Based on Educational Standards

Kaplan FCAT Advantage Reading tests, **READ 180** software program, **SRI, FCAT** and **CRISS** are all based on either national or state specific educational standards. E.D. Hirsch Jr., author of Cultural Literacy and The Schools We Need stated in his article "Building Knowledge: the Case for Bringing Content into the Language Arts Block and for a Knowledge-Rich Curriculum Core for all Children" (American Educator, spring 2006) that "if schools wish to meet "adequate yearly progress" as required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) they should systematically teach and then test for the knowledge that leads to proficient reading comprehension. This means that schools must have a specific, grade-by-grade curriculum designed to systematically build the knowledge that an educated reader needs-and a test that has been carefully aligned with that curriculum. The curriculum must be clearly laid out in literature, science, history and the arts, for these are the large domains that constitute the background knowledge required for reading comprehension."

Objective and Data Based/ On-Going Measurement of Growth Over Time or End

The Kaplan FCAT Advantage Reading Assessment uses "a scaffolded approach to prepare students for the unique challenges of the exams and help them practice with test-like questions to improve results." (www.KaplanK12.com) The READ 180 software "utilizes sophisticated software, motivating literature, and the latest research in literacy instruction to help students break out of the failure cycle and become

confident, successful readers.” (Scholastic.com/Product Information: Scholastic READ180) Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) is “a reading comprehension test that assesses students' reading levels, tracks students' reading growth over time, matches readers to text, and helps guide instruction according to students' needs.” (Scholastic.com/Product Information Scholastic Reading Inventory) The FCAT is “a test given to Florida students to measure what they know and are able to accomplish in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The test is part of Florida’s plan to improve student achievement. It measures challenging content standards, called the *Sunshine State Standards*.”
<<http://www.fldoe.org/bii/curriculum/sss/>> Finally, all four tests are data based.

CRISS “It’s a Brain Thing ~ Learning How to Learn!” was used with all my students during small group rotation of 20 minutes per day. Also, students received CRISS training during whole group rotation three times per week using strategies such as word maps, semantic feature analysis, concept definition maps, QARs, KWL, Venn Diagram, two column notes, power note-taking, think-pair-share, RAFT, reciprocal teaching and framed paragraphs to aid in the comprehension of text before, during, and/or after I read to the students.

Involves a Variety of Assessment Tools/One Assessment Tool

READ 180 students receive the best of both worlds in the area of assessment. The READ 180 model provides feedback on a daily basis during whole group literacy instruction, small group and independent reading, which I have infused with CRISS to serve as a comprehension tool box for my students, and instructional reading during computer time. On the other hand, Kaplan assessments use multiple-choice questions based on short articles that are lengthened over the three test dates to build stamina and include more information based on curriculum taught. In addition, FCAT measures what students should know based on particular grade level Sunshine State Standard Benchmarks set by the Dept. of Education in a multiple choice format and short answer response. Thus both snapshot and video data are provided to teachers, students, and parents.

Interactive and Collaborative

The READ 180 model and CRISS way of thinking go hand-in-hand to make the reading experience an interactive and collaborative one. Students use hands-on activities with the infusion of CRISS tools during whole group, small group, computer rotation and/or independent reading time to show what they comprehend and can explain the how and the why behind text comprehension either independently or as a group using their tools from their CRISS tool box. The preparation for Kaplan and FCAT can be interactive through the use of online practice Kaplan tests and FCAT Explorer.

Responsive to Development of Individual Student Needs/Comprehensive in Nature

The purpose of READ 180 software program is to engage students in individualized, adjusted instruction, which helps them to develop background knowledge to aid in building comprehension. Ironically CRISS can have this same purpose when students select the tools they feel will best help them breakdown, organize, and decipher information to build comprehension. On the other hand Kaplan and FCAT are more comprehensive of the needs of the overall student population at a particular grade and are not responsive to individual student needs.

Results

A Snapshot Look at READ 180 Student Performance

FCAT Percentage Gain 9/05 to 5/06	62%
SRI Lexile Score Gain 9/05 to 5/06	60%
Kaplan Percentage Gain 9/05 to 1/06	47%
READ 180 Comprehension Gain 9/05 to 5/06	44%

In the results (above), a gain in student improvement is defined as any increase in performance achieved from one testing period to the next. The percentages reported are measures of how many of the 45 students in the population improved their performance. The data show that a significant percentage of the students made gains on their FCAT, SRI, Kaplan and READ 180 Comprehension scores over the course of the school year.

A Video Look at READ 180 Student Performance

READ 180 Gain: Sept-Jan	38.28%
READ 180 Gain: Jan-May	1.02%
READ 180 Gain: Sept-May	39.69%
Kaplan Reading Gain: 1-2	2.16%
Kaplan Reading Gain: 2-3	-12.00%
Kaplan Reading Gain: 1-3	-10.10%
SRI Lexile Scores Gain: Sept – Jan	51.32%
SRI Lexile Scores Gain: Jan - May	-15.06%
SRI Lexile Scores Gain: Sept – May	28.53%

Results of the Video Look are the actual numeric gain or loss achieved by students in the aggregate at the various points in time. The percentages reported above are measures of the increase or decrease in student scores for the given time periods. As reported, READ 180 gains showed a significant gain in the Sept.-Jan and Sept.-May time periods but only a 1% gain from Jan. to May which may reflect the increase in state and county assessments given in Feb. and March. Kaplan results indicate a minor gain in student performance between the first and second test with decreases in student performance from test two to test three. Overall, a decline in student performance can be seen when tests one and three results are compared. These decreases may indicate that too much student testing is taking its toll on performance. SRI results yield very positive results from Sept. to Jan and then again from Sept. to May. A major decrease in SRI scores from Jan. to May might again indicate that too much student testing is taking its toll on performance with an increase in state and county assessments given in January, February, and March. Further research certainly seems warranted on all of these issues and possibilities raised by the results of this research.

So what does this all mean?

After reviewing the data from the four assessments many questions still are left unanswered. First, why didn't the use of READ 180 software show a larger percentage gain in comprehension for READ 180 students when considering those students who made gains in relation to the entire student population? Perhaps the increase use of traditional testing tools like Kaplan multiple choice tests three times a year may have caused students to become "numb" to the multiple choice framework of the comprehension section of the READ 180 software program thus effecting performance as shown in the video look January to May performance. Was CRISS a factor in helping students understand what they were reading on the Kaplan, and FCAT written tests? Did the READ 180 model with the combined use of a CRISS tool box enhance comprehension so much that it was reflected in the percentage increase in lexile scores?

A closer analysis of the video look summarized in the above table and visually represented in the appendix leads one to believe that the addition of the Kaplan test into the assessment framework may have had a negative effect on individual student performance. Perhaps we need to look at next year's data to see if answers to these questions can be found. Also perhaps a closer look at the use of written multiple choice tests as a sole indicator of student comprehension performance may not be accurate and help promote highest student achievement. Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe in their book Integrating +

Differentiated Instruction Understanding by Design state “To make valid inferences about learning, teachers need to allow students to work to their strengths. A totally standardized, one-size-fits- all approach to classroom assessment may be efficient, but it is not “fair,” because any chosen format will favor some students and penalize others.” On the positive side, the percentage gains made by these READ 180 students on the various assessments taken shows me that the infusion of CRISS into my READ 180 curriculum has had a positive effect on student comprehension. It verifies that both snapshot (summative) and video (formative) data are needed to capture a complete picture of student achievement. Knowing this truly makes this teacher want to smile for the camera!

Appendix: Graphs of Video Results

