

You've Had Your CRISS Training – Now What?



By Jeannie Wager

Background

During the school year 2005-2006, Amphitheater Middle School, in Tuscon, Arizona, focused on literacy by recommending that all teachers and instructional aides be trained in CRISS (CREating Independence *through* Student-owned Strategies). Professional development is one key to student achievement, and we knew the training would be beneficial. Six 2-hour sessions during the fall of 2005 gave participants a common language and shared experiences with the Principles and Philosophy of CRISS.

The 301 Pay for Performance Plan

The Amphitheater Public School District has a “301 Pay for Performance” plan that emphasizes student engagement and data analysis. To work toward our 301 plan and to build capacity at Amphitheater Middle School, we wanted to embed the CRISS principles and strategies into all of our classrooms. In addition to the CRISS part of our plan, we asked teachers to work with peers and observe their partners’ CRISS Strategic Learning Plans (CSLP), specifically looking for student engagement. We trained the teachers on what to observe and how to conduct a feedback conference. Each teacher observed another classroom twice and was observed twice. To document the 301 plan, the teachers provided copies of their CSLPs along with their partners’ feedback.

There was a great deal of autonomy about how to implement the peer observations. One note from the 301 committee read, “You will decide the parameters of the observation with your partner, i.e., do you want your partner to observe one or two students or would you prefer to have the class as a whole observed? This is not to be an evaluation; rather, this observation is a way of sharing information about active, engaged student learning. There is no mandatory number of boxes that need to be checked on the observation sheet and the focus is on positive feedback.” An example of the form Jeannie used is at the end of this article.

CRISS in Action

As we started the observations, we were unaware there would be so many benefits over and above embedding our CRISS knowledge into our daily teaching. Comments from teachers as they began the process of observations were shared with a sense of relief. “It opened the door to conversations about engaging students using different strategies.” Another said, “What a relief to see that others were struggling with the same concerns I had.” “It was a great chance to see how other teachers worked with their classes.” We had 100% participation in our school plan and sixty-six teachers chose to team up and complete the required cycle of observations.

One Strategy, Many Uses

One pair of seventh grade math teachers collaborated prior to observing each other. Both decided to teach Pattern Puzzles. They chose to focus on different concepts: one taught integers and one had a lesson on fractions. Using this approach, they were able to observe different ways to explore background knowledge, active involvement, and organization, while focusing on the same strategy. They were able to take what they had seen, provide specific feedback on that lesson, and expand their own repertoire of teaching strategies.

Our Findings

We found that our 301 plan increased awareness and integration of active student engagement. Our teachers started using their lunch hours to discuss what they had observed. They were asking questions of their peers that led to additional discussion and further observations. “How did you get the students to respond in such depth?” “I want to see you teach the lesson on dialogue journals.”

The conversations will continue, since we recently received a consensus from our faculty to pursue our 301 plan again this year. As we move into year two of focusing on the CRISS P & P, we are anxious to continue our learning curve. One comment from a student was enlightening, “Could you make sure all the teachers get trained in how to use CRISS?”

About the Author-Jeannie Wager is an instructional coach in Amphitheater School District in Tucson, Arizona. She has worked in Amphi as a classroom teacher, reading facilitator, and technology coach before moving to her current position. One of her primary roles is to build capacity in schools by creating systems that encourage teachers to meet diverse needs by using data to drive instruction.

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Example only!

Focus on Student Learning

Date: 10/1/06 Site: AMS Student(s): Focused on John, Lydia, Tim per teacher request
 Content Area: General Math Time: 9:00-9:20am Peer Observer: Jeannie Wager

TIME	DESCRIBE BEHAVIORS AT REGULAR INTERVALS
9:00	Students started bellwork independently – Tim needed assistance
9:05	Think-pair-share on yesterday’s lesson on vocabulary – Lydia had several ideas to share
9:10	Note taking used for lecture segment and one-sentence summary was evaluative
POSSIBLE STUDENT BEHAVIORS DURING INSTRUCTION Active student learning: constructing his/her own meaning with independent learning strategies Student engaged in whole class instructional conversation Student engaged in lecture, demonstrations, or discussion in conjunction with instruction Student engaged in seatwork, working cooperatively or individually with assistance Student engaged in seatwork with no assistance (not requiring assistance)	

LEVELS OF STUDENT THINKING	
KNOWLEDGE/COMPREHENSION: RECITATION, ✓ PARAPHRASING, ✓ SUMMARIZING, ✓ EXPLANATION, APPLICATION:	HIGHER-LEVEL THINKING: QUESTIONING, ✓ SYNTHESIS, PRODUCT, PERFORMANCE, ANALYSIS, ✓ EVALUATION:

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING: Record 1 mark for each observed		
FORMAL ASSESSMENT	✓ INFORMAL	MONITORING & ADJUSTING INDIVIDUALLY

STUDENT USE of ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES			
✓	1. STUDENT KNOWLEDGE OF CURRENT STANDARDS	✓	8. STUDENT DISCUSSION
	2. ABLE TO COMMUNICATE LEARNING GOALS		9. STUDENT READING
	3. COMMUNICATE RELEVANCE OF LESSON		10. STUDENT WRITING
✓	4. USE OF BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE, ANTICIPATION GUIDE		11. GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS: K-W-L, Venn diagram
	5. METACOGNITION: Think alouds, reflection journals, etc.	✓	12. CORNELL NOTE TAKING
✓	6. KEY VOCABULARY UTILIZED		13. CHORAL READ/RECITE
	7. TECHNOLOGY USED by STUDENT(S)		14. OTHER:

STUDENT ENVIRONMENT: Record 1 mark for each observed			
✓	STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY TO PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	✓	STUDENT MAINTAINS STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR
✓	LITERACY RICH ENVIRONMENT: LEVEL OF READING MATERIAL-SCAFFOLDING, LIBRARY, LEARNING POSTERS, CURRENT STUDENT WORK, ETC.	✓	EVIDENCE OF PROCEDURES, ROUTINES THAT SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING (EX. NOTE-TAKING, PACING; WARM UP AS LEAD IN TO LESSON, ROUTINES)

Notes on what went well during the observation:

Folders were easily available for bell work and students knew procedures.
 Modeling the think-pair-share first with one student led to immediate involvement when the whole class participated.
 Students were familiar with note-taking and all students were engaged. Color-coding notes helped students organize the processes. John had partially filled in form to scaffold lecture.
 The students had to synthesize information in order to complete their summary sentences.