

# **CRISS® AS THE "BACKBONE" OF EVALUATION**

by Carol Santa

Think about using CRISS strategies as a "backbone" for evaluation. It has become our backbone at the elementary level (School District 5, Kalispell, MT). We have organized our K-6 curriculum around broad themes of study which include literature, science, and social studies topics. We call it our post-hole curriculum. We have dug deep post-holes into our curriculum for deep study. For each theme or post-hole, we have purchased one or more class sets of books. Our teachers have written teaching guides for each thematic unit which incorporate CRISS strategies.

## **CRISS IN OUR SCOPE AND SEQUENCE**

Our district scope and sequence integrates the CRISS program into our curriculum. We call it our list of "non-negotiables." Regardless of what students read and study in our classrooms, we make sure to teach the non-negotiables. These non-negotiables also provide teachers and students with assessment guidelines.

The scope and sequence is organized around five targets:

1. Extended reading and writing
2. Comprehending, studying, and evaluating ideas
3. Reference skills
4. Vocabulary and word recognition
5. Sentence skills

For this discussion, we will focus on only target 2, because of its emphasis on CRISS strategies.

## **A CLOSER LOOK AT TARGET 2**

Target 2 strategies are organized around three overlapping topics: (1) using main ideas, (2) applying study strategies, and (3) recalling, comparing, and analyzing ideas. Main ideas are evaluated through writing and note-taking products students create. For example, beginning in grade two, students have experiences with Concept Maps, Power Notes, and writing paragraphs with clearly-stated main ideas and details. By the time students reach fifth and sixth grade, they are learning how to do Spool Papers. These strategies provide a far richer evaluation of a student's understanding of main ideas than traditional evaluations through worksheets. If students can use their knowledge of main ideas to organize information from their reading and to structure their writing, we know they understand the main idea concept.

A similar progression occurs with other target 2 topics. For example, in "Applying Studying Strategies," we begin introducing two-column Main Idea–Detail Notes in grade two and teach students how to take tests beginning in grade four. By the time students reach sixth grade, they have experienced most of the CRISS strategies. Strategy instruction and use continues throughout middle and high school.

## STUDENT PORTFOLIOS

Defining when strategies are introduced has added cohesiveness to our curriculum and gives direction to our portfolio assessments. For example, sixth grade students keep a checklist of district targets inside their portfolios. So, along with journal entries, art pieces, science experiments, and math explanations, our sixth graders include their best examples of Concept Maps, Two-Column Notes, and Spool Papers.

In addition, for each thematic unit, students keep a folder of their work. At the conclusion of the unit, they choose samples from their folders to include in their portfolio. We ask students to give reasons for their choices. They write their reflective comments on note cards and staple them to their work.

Also included in their portfolios are records of books read at home and during reading workshop, as well as their written responses to these books. Sometimes these might be Dialogue Journal or Free-Response Entries. We encourage students to personalize their portfolios. They often decorate the cover, include a table of contents, and add autobiographical pages. Teacher-student conferences and peer conferences occur throughout this process.

## EXTENSIONS AT THE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

CRISS strategies are also included within our middle and high school level curriculum sequences. Many examples of strategies are found in the upper grade student portfolios. For example, Sue Dailey, a seventh grade social studies teacher, has her students divide their portfolios into five sections: (1) *personal reading* (fiction or non-fiction books and magazines relating to social studies), (2) *writing in process*, (3) *finished writing*, (4) *study skills*, and (5) *discussion skills*. Students earn a certain number of points for each section. In the study skills section, her students keep examples of strategies: Concept Maps, self-testing strategies (Two-Column Notes), and metacognitive journal entries.

## STRATEGIES QUESTIONNAIRE

An evaluation tool which many teachers find useful is a strategies questionnaire:

1. What strategies do you use to help you get ready for a reading assignment?
2. What do you do to remember information from your reading? A video? A lecture?
3. Why is it important to organize information from your reading or before you begin to write?
4. How do you organize information?
5. How do you learn course information?

Some middle school and secondary teachers ask students to complete the questionnaire at the beginning of the year as a way to collect information about individual strategy use. At the end of the year, students respond again and compare their growth in strategy use from the beginning to the end of the year.

What assessment strategies are you using in your classroom? We would love to hear from you.

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