

Alternative Certification Program Uses Project CRISS



By Carol Jones

EDUCATOR PREPARATION INSTITUTE

The Educator Preparation Institute (EPI) at Pasco-Hernando Community College in New Port Richey, Florida, provides a competency-based alternative certification program for baccalaureate degree holders. EPI students must demonstrate mastery of the same competencies and pass the same state exams as students in a traditional college of education program—but without the benefit of a full internship. It is our hope that Level I CRISS training for EPI students will increase the number of high-performing teachers in Florida.

LEVEL I CRISS TRAINING FOR THE PRE-SERVICE TEACHER

Rationale: One of the greatest drawbacks to an alternative certification program is the lack of an extended, supervised internship for the teacher candidate. For example, the average EPI student spends less than 30 hours in a classroom environment before completing the program. Another disadvantage to the alternative certification program is that it is designed for all future K-12 teachers, regardless of subject area.

These two disparities between the traditional college of education program and the alternative certification program call for a redesigned and improved teacher-education program. We need to find ways to compensate for the fact that, without an extended internship, our candidates do not have the opportunity to observe accomplished mentors using various instructional strategies nor do they see them modeling classroom activities specific to their subject areas. Whatever we can do in an alternative certification program to offset these shortcomings will benefit our students.

Implementation: In 2007, the EPI program infused Project CRISS training into the teacher training curriculum. Level I CRISS training, which is the same training that many experienced classroom teachers and administrators take as a staff development course, was integrated into the reading and instructional strategies courses in the EPI program of study. This was done in an effort to help our teacher candidates understand scientifically-based reading research (SBRR) and how it translates into instructional processes at all levels and in all content areas.

Through CRISS training, the teacher candidates learn a variety of research-based strategies, and they also learn how to use the strategies in their future classrooms. The strategies instruction follows a step-by-step process. After the class, candidates incorporate what they learned during the training into projects for other courses that are part of the alternate certification program. Candidates also bring the skills they learned in the CRISS training to their mentor's classroom during their 3-day student-teaching experience.



Teacher-Candidates in a CRISS Training

Principles and Philosophy

CRISS training provides teacher-candidates with a variety of strategies using the direct instruction approach: introduction, modeling, guided practice, and independent application.



Active Learning

Throughout the CRISS training, teacher-candidates apply the various learning principles and strategies in pairs and small groups.



Formative Assessment

Teacher-candidates learn how to use formative assessment through teacher observation and feedback, student-led discussions, process conferences, and reflective writing activities.

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Comments from Pre-Service Teachers

“I just want to express how much I appreciate the opportunity to receive training in Level I CRISS material. The importance of student-led strategies cannot be underestimated for the new teacher. A basic understanding of these methods in our lesson plans will greatly enhance our ability to convey ideas and increase participation among the students in our classes. This will not only assist in the cooperation among students, but it will also increase the success we have with our students taking ownership over the knowledge being taught.” –Mike Maio

“One of the things I will remember most about my EPI experience is the CRISS training. I attend [EPI] classes after working a full eight hours, so most nights I just take notes and follow along. During the nights when we had the CRISS training, I found myself energized and excited about learning. Then I thought . . . if these strategies make learning fun for me after eight hours of work, then I can just imagine how they will make learning exciting for my students.” –Pamela Patrick

“It has been a dream of mine for many years to be a teacher, and that dream is about to come true. One of my main concerns was that I had been out of the classroom for twenty years and might not be able to adjust to the students of today. The CRISS training offered through our alternative certification program certainly helped me to get over some of those fears. I feel much better equipped to work with students now that I understand how those students have to make connections in order to learn. I have already used strategies I learned during the CRISS training in my field experience. My lesson began with a K-W-L, we went on to complete Free-Form [Picture] Maps, and the lesson ended with a RAFT. I can now not only ‘Talk the Talk’ but I can ‘Walk the Walk.’ Thanks EPI!” –Douglas Northrup

Comments from School Administrators

“The implementation of CRISS into the Educator Preparation Institute program at PHCC works well with the current curriculum. The training adds additional tools and strategies for the teacher candidates to take with them after leaving the program and making their move into the classroom. CRISS provides a detailed, organized plan for classroom strategies that can be used in all content areas, across all levels.” –Jim Michaels, high school principal

“I think the idea of infusing the CRISS strategies into the EPI program was great. It gives beginning teachers some very powerful strategies to use in the classroom. It also provides them with some research-based teaching techniques to fall back on in a bind. As a college instructor and middle school principal, I can honestly say that CRISS training is a very powerful tool to offer these pre-service teachers.” –Steven VanGorden, middle school principal

“Observing new teachers from some alternative certification programs come into the classroom without any ‘teaching strategies’ is painful. Most of them teach how they were taught 20 or 30 years ago, and we know that times and teaching have changed far too much for a strictly *lecture* manner of teaching. CRISS strategies give the teacher candidates in the EPI program some insight into how the students of today need information presented to them. CRISS strategies provide the candidates with some tools they can use immediately when they walk into a classroom. These (CRISS-trained) teachers will feel confident they are effectively meeting the needs of their students with researched-based practices. Embedding CRISS training into EPI coursework is probably one of the most valuable tools these candidates can have, and they will certainly appreciate having these tools when they enter the classroom for the first time. CRISS training provides the kind of practical, best-practice tools that many teachers either are never exposed to or have to wait years to learn. The EPI students are very fortunate to be able to participate in the CRISS training.” –Kimberly Reddish, elementary school reading specialist

About the Author: Carol Jones, CRISS District Trainer, is the Coordinator of the Educator Preparation Institute at Pasco-Hernando Community College in New Port Richey, Florida. She earned her degree in secondary English education at the University of South Florida and later, her Masters Degree in Adult Education and Distance Learning at the University of Phoenix. She worked for twelve years as a high school English teacher, reading teacher, and Literacy Specialist. Carol also worked for many years as a staff developer for the District School Board of Pasco County in Florida. She is the author of *Beyond the Test: A Study Guide for the Florida Community College Exit Test-Reading*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2009; *The Substitute Teacher’s Reference Manual, Fifth Edition*. Palm Springs, California: ETC Publications, 2007; and a co-author of *The FCAT Connection*. Geneva, Illinois: McDougal Littell, 2000.



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