

Read-and-Say-Something • Vocabulary Mapping • Think-Pair-Share
CRISS and SCHOOL'S CULTURE
ABC Brainstorming • Discussion Web • Sticky-Note Discussions • QARs
Produce an "Accumulating Effect"
K-W-L Plus • Picture Notes • Spool Paper • RAFT • Mind Streaming

By Jeff Means

High Springs Community School, located in rural northwestern Alachua County, Florida, is quite a gem. Over the past five years, the Pre-K to 8th grade school of 950 has evolved from two separate schools into one, to become the district's sixth largest and the only school of this elementary/middle grades configuration. Although challenging, the evolutionary change process is producing awesome results.

As a part of the "re-culturing" process, CRISS plays an important role. CRISS Principles and Philosophy are embedded across the campus, starting at the very earliest grades. Every teacher is offered and encouraged to take part in formal CRISS training, as well as participate in ongoing staff development opportunities, most of which center on student engagement. Routine walk-throughs and weekly lesson plan reviews provide evidence of a CRISS-rich learning environment.

In addition to our own professional efforts, the school partners with the University of Florida's College of Teaching and Learning as a Professional Development Community (PDC) and hosts approximately 20-25 pre-interns and interns each semester. These pre-service teachers bring added enthusiasm and up-to-date expertise in the areas of learner engagement and instructional practice. Ongoing inquiry is also a major part of the PDC partnership.

All of the above-mentioned pieces come together to produce what I've come to call an "accumulating effect." The kindergarten teachers engage their eager learners immediately by using the CRISS language and vocabulary on a daily basis. They constantly think out loud, using the CRISS principles to "set our purpose for learning," and to ask their students how they are going to "activate your brain" with what they know. Even at the kindergarten level, teachers are introducing the QAR concept when teaching with Big Books. Students enter first grade knowing there are "In the Book" and "In My Head" types of questions. By the end of second grade, students are creating their own QAR questions.

Through the intermediate elementary grades, teachers add a variety of strategies to the students' academic arsenal. They also hone in on teaching students to be more aware of their own learning styles and processes. As you can see from the following excerpts from some fifth graders' learning logs, they are very aware of when they are learning and when they are not and are incorporating strategies into their learning, as well.

Brandon—5th Grade

RAFT assignment: Use science vocabulary (highlighted) in a letter to introduce a new student to the class.

Dear Girell,

I want to welcome you to our ecosystem at HSCS. Our classroom population is 22, and we are part of a community consisting of grades PreK-8th grade. Our community population is approximately 1,100. My niche in our ecosystem is to help new organisms find their way around the community. Our habitat is located in the middle school area. We share a building with the 4th grade . . .

Caleb—5th Grade

Learning Log Entry: Relating science vocabulary to school.

The lesson went great. Because I like how you compared the school and the classroom to an ecosystem. Also, I liked how you went through the words slowly and explained it very clearly. Another thing that I like is how you can relate the words to a lot of things. It helps me understand the words more clearly.

Kayla—5th Grade

Learning Log Entry

Math: Review the basics of fractions and decimals when adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing.

The lesson was fine. I understood it, but it went too fast. I can add decimals, but I need help in multiplying them.

With a core set of beliefs, i.e., CRISS Principles and Philosophy, these students are engaging in new structures of learning (strategies), whereby they create new experiences in their own learning process.

By the time students at High Springs Community School reach the middle grades, this metacognitive awareness evolves into some very sophisticated learning. After years of strategic teaching and learning, our eighth grade achievement scores are typically the highest in our district in the areas of reading, writing, science, and math. This “accumulating effect” produces very positive results and has become an integral part of our school’s culture.

About the Author: Jeff Means’ career has revolved around education for 27 years at the elementary, middle, high school, and college levels. He became the principal at High Springs Community School in High Springs, Florida, six years ago. Jeff’s past experience includes assistant principal, behavior resource teacher, reading coach, hospital/homebound teacher, and migrant education teacher. Jeff is a CRISS Master Trainer who has conducted CRISS trainings all across Florida and in six other states. Jeff’s wife, Valerie, is a middle school teacher. They have two sons, ages 20 and 21.



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