

Learning from the CRISS Teacher Survey

By Deb Franciosi

This Fall, over 3,000 CRISS-trained teachers and trainers from 41 U.S. states, 3 American Protectorates, 9 Canadian provinces, and Norway responded to surveys about how CRISS is being implemented in schools, perceived needs, and current trends in education. While a survey can tell only part of the picture, those who responded were very candid in what is and is not happening with CRISS. English/Language Arts/Reading (ELAR) teachers were in the majority (39%), and followed by Special Education (15%), Mathematics (14%), Science (13%), and Social Studies (13%). All other subjects were represented to varying degrees, making up 18% of respondents, and specialists and administrators made up a further 11%. Given the variation in school size and student population needs, it's not surprising that many of our CRISS educators have several roles in their schools. Levels also had significant overlap, with 44% working at the high school level, 36% in middle schools, and 38% in elementary. The fact that the highest percentage of teachers responding teach ELAR demonstrates the continued need to communicate the importance of thinking skills and strategies to teachers in other curriculum areas. The best practices embedded in Project CRISS apply across the boundaries of school subject areas.

When asked about Level I training, the majority of teachers (62%) were trained by certified CRISS District Trainers, and almost half work in schools where the majority of teachers are trained. Surprisingly, a full 65% indicated they never participated in *any* CRISS Level I follow-up activities. Given what we know about effective professional development needing to be embedded and consistent, the fact that teachers go through a two- to three-day training and then are left to themselves is unfortunate. Certainly, the cost of subbing teachers out is prohibitive in an economic climate that has not been kind to public education, but there are a variety of ways trainers can provide support. And if trainers are not available, then you as teachers can find support in your colleagues and put pressure on administrators to create structures to support collaboration. How can you accomplish this? It depends on the school/district in which you work, but consider some of these options:

- Allot one prep period or morning a week/month to meet with other CRISS-trained teachers in your building to share CRISS Strategic Learning Plans (CSLP) and/or student work, or troubleshoot implementation issues and share successes. If your school implements Professional Learning Teams (Critical Friends, etc.), CRISS can provide the common language and instructional strategies and goals (student self-direction).
- Meet regularly with subject-alike teachers to create CSLPs, share student work, etc. For schools developing Common Assessments (Reeves), common CSLPs can achieve the same thing. Teachers with different strengths can learn a tremendous amount from each other by using a common CSLP, then comparing student work and performance and discussing what worked and what didn't.
- Visit each other's classrooms during your preps to observe CRISS implementation, or guest-teach for each other, introducing students to a new strategy.
- Seek administrative support for a day or an afternoon (or compensation for after-hours work) for a team of interested CRISS-trained teachers to meet and plan. While subbing out 30 teachers at a time may break the bank, sometimes funds can be found when 3-5 energized teachers want to collaborate to improve instruction. 😊
- Take turns facilitating e-mail chats on CRISS topics. The facilitator picks the CRISS Principle, strategy, or possibly a CSLP and a prompt to generate some thoughtful e-discussion.
- Take turns hosting CRISS Brown Bag lunches, where participants take turns sharing how they are implementing CRISS.
- Take turns hosting CRISS Teas for Teachers—afternoon socials focused on effectively implementing CRISS, complete with tea and treats!
- Consider using the *CRISS Cornerstones* video CD and workbook to guide your implementation. It can act as a handy refresher if it's been a while since your Level I training. It's inexpensive (\$35), and can be a useful tool in your school's professional library.

When it comes to implementing CRISS in the classroom, 91% of teachers are actively using CRISS. Most focus on the strategies for student learning (84%), and over half are teaching students how to learn and be metacognitive, the key to student self-direction. Continued focus on how the CRISS Frameworks for Learning and Teaching support deeper student learning, reflection, and critical thinking beyond the Level I is key to moving your instructional practice to mastery and students to lifelong achievement.

Additional resources:

Professional Learning Teams info: <http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues61.html>

Critical Friends Groups info: <http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu/11-01/cfg/>

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