



## STRUCTURED AND GUIDED PRACTICE WITH CRISS

We recently received some great CRISS applications from Allyson Burnett, Instructional Specialist, and Diane Cournoyer, World Geography Department Chair, at Elsik Ninth Grade Center in Houston, Texas. Elsik is a school that offers students the opportunity to make a guided and gradual transition from middle school to high school in a caring and supportive environment. The school has approximately 1,000 students and 70 teachers.

Elsik has an extremely diverse student population culturally, with students representing over 50 different cultures, and a population that spans the spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds. For the most part, though, the students are economically disadvantaged.

Allyson and Diane worked with their students on the goals of teaching Power Notes and how to use them for organizing information from world geography resources. They started by giving the students a creative and fun introduction—Allyson brought a basket of clean, unfolded clothes into class. As Diane was lecturing, Allyson quietly began to fold clothes. Diane peeked at her periodically until she was so distracted, she had to stop lecturing and rush over to Allyson. She pulled the folded towels, shirts and socks out of the basket, and carefully refolded them “correctly.” The kids, of course, loved this. Diane used this enactment to point out that there is more than one way to organize things—laundry and ideas.

Next, they provided some structured and guided practice with the Power Notes, similar to what you can find in the CRISS

training manual. Once they felt the students were knowledgeable about the Power format, they wanted to give them some independent practice. Allyson and Diane found this following activity to be effective in building background knowledge and to prepare the students for taking notes from their classroom materials.

Allyson and Diane put the students in groups of three or four, then gave each group a set of blank pattern puzzle pieces—laminated 3"x5" index cards in bright neon colors with magnetic strips on the back. They also included a Color Code Power Key, i.e., each color corresponded to a level of the Power Notes, e.g., pink = Power 1 ideas, blue = Power 2 ideas, etc.

Next, Allyson and Diane gave the students world geography categories, like “bodies of water;” items which fit under the categories, like “oceans,” “rivers,” and “bays;” and examples of the items, “Atlantic,” “Rio Grande.” The students

discussed the pieces of information (which the teachers provided to them in a random order) and then wrote

them with a marker on the appropriate index cards to indicate whether they were Power 1, 2, or 3 items. Once a group determined the correct representation, they posted the magnetic cards in order on the board.

When all groups had posted their cards, the students did a “gallery tour” to see if



they agreed or disagreed with the other groups' Power arrangements. If they did not agree, they wrote their concerns on the



white board next to the “mistake.” Once they completed this activity, Allyson and Diane reported the students were ready to read and take Power Notes on related articles

and on the textbook chapters. “It was really BRAIN-friendly!” Allyson told us. And, we are sure the students became more motivated to read and take notes after moving around and discussing the geography ideas with their peers.

I want to share this final comment from Allyson, since I think it shows how her school is focusing on and supporting the key elements of CRISS. “Our principal, Greg Freeman, is a BIG believer in CRISS and the strategies associated with it. In fact, we have worked hard to create a ‘habitat of literacy’ in our school and have really focused on making nearly every in-service about how to help students gain independence through the use of CRISS strategies or CRISS-like strategies.”

We thank Allyson and Diane and the students and staff at Elsie Ninth Grade Center for sharing their Super Strategies with us. If you, too, have used CRISS theory and strategies in a successful way, we hope you will mail or e-mail us your ideas.

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