

POWERFUL ASSESSMENTS WITH CRISS

By Jim Devine

As a CRISS trainer and teacher, I frequently touted the use of Project CRISS strategies as assessment tools for the classroom teacher. In my trainings, I introduce RAFT using the science example on pages 187-188 in the Project CRISS training manual, in which the student author uses a travelogue to describe the role of red blood cells. After reading this selection, I frequently ask the CRISS workshop participants, “Now, tell me. Do you think this paper demonstrates the student’s understanding of the role of red blood cells?” And, as a follow-up question, “Do you think it would be necessary to devise a multiple-choice test on the role of these cells to evaluate this student’s knowledge?” These questions help participants realize the power of this strategy, not just for teaching and learning, but also for assessment.

I knew, with certainty, CRISS strategies could be used effectively as assessment tools and professed this belief on multiple occasions. However, not until I recently received a set of papers from my college students was this belief confirmed beyond my expectations.

THE ASSESSMENT

As an adjunct instructor for Elementary Math Methods at the University of Central Florida, my course evaluation includes two formative assessments and a final exam. The purpose of assessment in this class is to determine that students understand and have processed the information presented, to get students to review the course materials, and to help them reflect on what they have learned.

The first assessment was a traditional in-class essay. For the second assessment, I devised the following RAFT assignment:

Role: Student who has taken the class MAE 4326

Audience: Future students who will take the class MAE 4326

Format: Letter

Topic: Convince future students the worth of the class

To assure my students understood my expectations, I included an assessment rubric along with the description of their RAFT assignment.

MODEL AND DISCUSS

Prior to my students working on the assignment, I modeled by creating my own RAFT paper. I allocated some class time for them to read my example and review the RAFT strategy in small groups.

A STUDENT SAMPLE

As I mentioned, the quality of these RAFT papers exceeded my expectations. Using creativity and voice, these students proved to me they understood the core content of this elementary math methods class. They provided multiple examples that consistently demonstrated they had effectively processed my curriculum.

The adjacent RAFT paper excerpt is from Jennifer Evans, a junior at the University of Central Florida.

REFLECTION

In reviewing these papers, my own metacognitive process kicked in. I realized almost everything I had shared with these pre-service teachers had been given to me by someone I valued—a mentor, a staff development trainer, or a professional colleague. Through my students' RAFT papers, I heard the voices of these people again. It is through professional mentors that we become highly effective teachers. The cycle of teaching, learning, and assessing is, in its very essence, a human endeavor. This reflection affirmed my belief in staff development.

This one strategy, RAFT, provided me with a way to assess my students' knowledge and to motivate them to review and discuss the curriculum of my class. In addition, it led to a highly engaging reflection for me as a learner and affirmed the power of Project CRISS. CRISS has changed my life. I am thankful this change is a lifelong process. If you have not used RAFT recently with your students, I highly recommend you revisit this powerful tool for student assessment.

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DECREE FROM THE QUEEN IVANNA DEWY DECIMAL

To the wonderful citizens of Digitopolis:

It is decreed by the Queen that every person over the age of sixteen must complete a workshop entitled *How Children Learn Math* or *MAE 4326*.

The purpose of this workshop is to prepare and teach mathematics lessons which provide for students' input and which actively involve students' critical thinking, while focusing on teaching kindergarten through sixth grade. This workshop is an excellent overview of what it takes to communicate math effectively and the Queen would like all her citizens to develop this knowledge.

The workshop allows for hands-on experiences with manipulatives. These are perfect to teach abstract concepts in a concrete way. One example of this is the multiplication table activity. It starts with rainbow cubes and moves to cutting shapes from grid paper. These cutouts represent rectangles and, by placing them on a grid, a pattern can be observed. The pattern moves the activity from the concrete to the abstract, and eventually the pattern becomes the multiplication tables! . . .

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The most interesting and fun part of the workshop is the wonderful brainteaser at the start of each meeting. Each one is unique and challenging. It helps to get the brain functioning in a mathematical way. . . .

This workshop provides an opportunity Her Majesty believes is beneficial for all her loyal subjects. This is not the black plague, people, so for the love of your "head" sign up for *MAE 4326*!

*Her Majesty the Queen of Digitopolis,
Ivanna Dewy Decimal*

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