The focus of Project CRISS has always been rooted in developing self-directed, lifelong learners through student-centered learning experiences; current pedagogical shifts acknowledge how important this is.

Empowering lifelong learning, the end-goal of Project CRISS, requires a high level of professionalism and reflection on one’s own practice. Early developers of the project sought to make sense of research in education and cognitive psychology and pull findings together to facilitate practical, effective classroom instruction. From this early work and the subsequent decades of action research, validation, dovetailing research in neurobiology, and praxis, arose the current CRISS Frameworks for Teaching and Learning. The focus of Project CRISS has always been rooted in developing self-directed, lifelong learners through student-centered learning experiences; current pedagogical shifts acknowledge how important this is.

To achieve the high levels of learning and engagement required by the Danielson Framework, teachers must ensure students understand their role in the learning process. The CRISS Framework for Learning, the cornerstone of CRISS implementation, explicitly demonstrates how students take personal responsibility for themselves as learners. The CRSS Framework has three key components: PREPARE, ENGAGE & TRANSFORM, and REFLECT. Each component has core elements to which the learner must attend in order to deeply understand content and develop the metacognitive awareness and executive functions which drive empowered, lifelong learning. The teacher as facilitator clearly explains, models, and guides practice in a gradual release of responsibility model such that the students understand the learning processes and strategies to access content understanding. While the strategies and activities vary by classroom, content, and learner needs, this Framework for Learning holds true across content disciplines and grade levels.

The CRISS Framework for Teaching encompasses the Framework for Learning with the addition of a PLAN component: the responsibility of the teacher. With PLAN comes goal setting, curriculum design and decision-making.
making. Each of the components of the Framework for Learning as addressed through the lens of the teacher, who must consider the pedagogical dimensions of each underlying element (e.g., what prompts or cues do students need to connect their background knowledge to this new content?).

By using Danielson’s four domains to structure the comparison, this crosswalk between Project CRISS and the Danielson Framework for Teaching demonstrates how these two initiatives are complementary and overlapping. It shows that when done well, Project CRISs provides an instructional framework or “the how” to achieve high levels of teaching and learning teachers, coaches, and administrators are searching for. As is often the case when connecting two independently-developed systems, some elements are more explicit in their connections and lend themselves to more elaboration. This crosswalk is basic, rather than exhaustive; as frameworks, both systems leave room for teachers as professionals to make further connections.

For more information about the Danielson Framework for Teaching: http://danielsongroup.org/framework/

For more information about Project CRISS: http://www.projectcriss.com

Danielson Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

The Project CRISS Frameworks for Teaching and Learning incorporate the elements of high level instructional planning which lead to high levels of learning. CRISS uses a backward design model wherein the teacher designs lessons by starting with the end goals and standards, identifying an effective assessment program with formative assessment activities and an appropriate summative demonstration of understanding, identifying needs of the learners, and choosing content and engagement activities that scaffold student learning toward the end goal(s). CRISS incorporates learning process goals — metacognitive and executive function goals — in addition to specific content and standards goals. Reflection on learning is embedded in the process at the activity level often formative as assessments, as well as at the summative level.

The Introduction to Project CRISS workshop provides an overview of the core components of the CRISS Frameworks for Teaching and Learning and the facilitator models what these look like in lessons. Teachers participate as students in lessons, do some lesson deconstruction, examine how the lessons addresses college and career readiness standards, and reflect upon how they can implement the framework components in their classrooms. Sustained implementation at the local level lends itself to lesson study and professional learning community or independent exploration of planning and preparation at deeper levels.

1a: Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy

Teachers’ understanding of their content discipline and its commonly used structures and tools goes hand in hand with pedagogical knowledge required to assess student preparedness and determine the developmentally appropriate learning activities and content materials. An effective educator designs lessons which allow students to access content and engage with it for deep understanding. Lessons include opportunities to practice learning processes and strategies with low-risk/familiar content. They also layer activities and content to scaffold student experiences for success with increasing levels of rigor.

The teacher sets enduring understandings for process and content which guide the thinking and planning processes for instruction.
1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students
The Framework for Learning provides simple guidelines for understanding how the brain works in learning new content. CRISS acknowledges what is developmentally appropriate for learners in terms of preparing to learn, engaging with content through writing, discussion, organizing, drawing visual representations, etc. The teacher uses learning strategies to structure student experience with content in a meaningful way. Students are taught to reflect upon themselves as learners and their content mastery in demonstrable ways which inform next steps in instruction. Student gaps in knowledge and misconceptions are surfaced so the teacher can address them. The teacher knows each student through various forms of engaging and reflection activities thoughtfully designed as formative assessments; the teacher facilitates student progress toward desired learning outcomes. The Introduction to CRISS workshop demonstrates many different techniques for reflection which inform teacher understanding of student interests, learning preferences, and gaps in students’ awareness of themselves as learners.

1c: Setting Instructional Outcomes
The CRISS Framework for Teaching incorporates specific enduring understandings in content and process, including content and college and career readiness standards. The learning goals are put into student-friendly language and students are informed of the learning goals at the onset of instructional units and lessons such that they know the learning targets and why learning tasks are structured the way they are. Teachers proactively answer the question, “Why are we doing this?” as a part of daily instruction. Activities are layered and scaffolded to build student understanding. Most learning strategies allow for embedded differentiation to meet students where they are and move them toward the learning goals. In the CRISS intro workshop, participants use learning logs and reflections directly tied to the purposes for learning in the lessons as well as the workshop overall.

1d: Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources
The CRISS Framework for Teaching expects teachers identify the content enduring understandings, map learning activities, evaluate student needs, and then match content materials to best assist students to reach those understandings. The workshop uses a variety of content materials across genres to meet learning goals.

1e: Designing Coherent Instruction
By starting with the enduring understandings and standards, teachers move towards thoughtful instructional design. Activities become formative assessments which inform the teacher and scaffold subsequent activities progressing toward student demonstrations of understanding. The emphasis is NOT on the activities and strategies as ends unto themselves – the strategies are tools in the students’ toolboxes for current and future learning – the goal is for students to become self-directed learners with deep understanding of core content.

The Intro to CRISS workshop models coherent instruction through its structure with repeated reference to objectives and reflection on the learning processes. The Project CRISS: Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies, 4e (2012) training manual includes simple guide questions for teacher reference as they design lessons that follow the CRISS Framework for Teaching. As teachers work through these questions in chapter 1, they can access the various strategies in chapters 2-9 of the manual (and beyond!) to design lessons and units of study.

1f: Designing Student Assessments
The majority of CRISS strategies, when carefully implemented within the scope of a lesson or unit of study, function as formative assessments. Students complete activities using strategies to prepare, engage and transform, or reflect upon content and learning processes. As they work through these activities, students
surface their understanding – or lack thereof – and the teacher adjusts instruction or reteaches to fill gaps and correct misconceptions.

Several of the CRISS strategies can function as summative assessments wherein students use the strategy to demonstrate understanding of content (e.g., RAFT and Spool Paper). The Project CRISS training manual includes simple guide questions regarding assessment to assist teachers as they design lessons.

**Danielson Domain 2: The Classroom Environment**

Project CRISS implementation incorporates the affective and physical elements of a healthy, student-centered classroom that is flexible and responsive to student needs. When embedded effectively, these elements cannot be separated into isolated domains; teachers plan for the environment as an integral part of teaching for student success.

**2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport**

Project CRISS implementation supports a student-centered, collaborative culture through respectful interaction that honors student development, ability, and experience. The teacher develops relationships with students by explicitly modeling and teaching students how their brains function and the ways in which they can take control of their own learning. Teachers respect students enough to recognize the students’ capacity for self-direction, and apply the patience, modeling, and guidance required to move students forward. Frequent, structured opportunities are provided for students to develop relationships with peers, including paired and larger groupings, interactive writing and visualization, and academic discussion. Reflective practice provides insight into the students, and as they get to know themselves as learners, they build empathy towards others with different learning styles, preferences, and needs.

**2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning**

The CRISS Framework for Learning provides the foundation from which students build their learning stance; they come to understand what it means to be metacognitive, confident, and self-directed. Students learn how to incorporate the critical components of the learning process: preparing for learning, engaging and transforming with content, and reflecting on the process. Students explore what it means to be a learner independently, in pairs, in small groups, and as part of a collaborative learning community that values the challenges of learning.

Lessons and units of instruction have specific goals and intentions that are explained to students; learning goals are framed as enduring understandings which address the content and its relevance. Teachers practice a gradual release of responsibility and students understand they have opportunities to practice, ask questions, and take risks as learners prior to summative assessments. Strategy training and guided practice give students the tools with which to build understanding of content as well as learning processes. Learning activities are differentiated and support student learning. These elements are all modeled in the Intro to CRISS workshop.

**2c: Managing Classroom Procedures**

The focus of CRISS is learning PROCESS. When introducing something new, teachers guide students by explaining, modeling, and then giving students safe opportunities to practice, followed by time to reflect on the content and the learning processes used. This sequence applies to classroom routines as well as learning strategies. Details on learning procedures are modeled in *Introduction to CRISS* workshops and embedded in the 4e manual. Effective teachers apply these to their content discipline and classroom management. When planning for instruction using the Framework for Teaching, the teacher identifies transitions and plans for smooth movement between each.
2d: Managing Student Behavior
Teachers who establish clear routines and processes in a safe environment see a reduction in traditional classroom management issues. Students who take ownership of the learning process monitor their peers and themselves as members of the classroom community. Through effective planning, teachers determine where students may struggle and assist students through the challenges.

Project CRISS also provides tools that councilors, disciplinarians, and teachers can use to help students assess behavioral issues and manage their executive function. Learning strategies and tools, such as Problem-Solution Notes, can be adapted to help students describe and evaluate actions, context, and possible solutions to problems with peers and adults.

2e: Organizing Physical Space
In a CRISS classroom, the type of instruction dictates the organization of classroom space. Ideally, classroom furniture and supplies can be arranged in a variety of ways to encourage discussion and collaboration, independent practice, etc. The Introduction to Project CRISS workshop uses discussion and collaborative groups, pairs, individual work, and movement around the learning space.

Danielson Domain 3: Instruction
Both Project CRISS and Danielson’s Framework recognize that classroom instruction is at the core of student achievement. The teacher plans, creates an environment conducive to learning, and provides thoughtful instruction (and, reflects, of course, but that’s Domain 4). In Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching (2007), Charlotte Danielson says, “. . . the heart of Domain 3 is engaging students in learning; all the other aspects of the framework serve the purpose of engagement, because it is engagement that ensures learning.” CRISS builds engagement into each aspect of the Frameworks for Teaching and Learning, and further names Engage as a core component.

3a: Communicating with Students
Effective instruction requires clear communication and precise vocabulary. A CRISS teacher initiates new learning by establishing learning goals and purposes; assisting students with activating background knowledge through oral, written, or visual prompts or baseline activities; and pre-teaching content structures which otherwise may obstruct student understanding. The teacher uses techniques to surface misconceptions and misunderstandings so those may be addressed in learning activities. The teacher clearly explains and models the learning strategies appropriate for making meaning, providing opportunities to learn and practice unfamiliar processes prior to delving into new content. The teacher models these processes through think-alouds and demonstrations. Interaction between teachers and students uses formal structures for oral and written language, as well as informal structures of communication. Students are comfortable asking clarifying questions and communicating with the teacher and their peers and understand the importance of developing their academic vocabulary.

3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques
Through an active learning format, teachers and students value discussion and questioning as vehicles to create meaning and facilitate comprehension. Project CRISS takes a constructivist approach to discussion and learning. While the teacher must explain and model structures, processes, and expectations, the goal is to develop independent learners. It may be necessary for teachers to check understanding with basic questions – and in these, CRISS advocates a mandated response wherein all students are given time to think and respond
These adult learners are engaged in discussion; the content is relevant and they understand the process!

-- but the focus of teacher energy is on teaching students to drive discussions and questioning themselves. The teacher facilitates discussion and inquiry with open-ended questions, rephrasing of questions, progressive questions to facilitate deeper understanding, and respectful redirection when students get off-topic (for example, the teacher may use a Parking Lot technique to acknowledge a tangential question and save it for a more appropriate time).

The teacher provides basic structures and models the thinking and processes for high-level discussion and questioning using learning strategies such as Question-Answer Relationships, Question the Author/Talk to the Author, simple discussion stems, questioning heuristics, and discussion group roles. As students progress through lessons, the teacher uses these various questioning strategies and prompts to engage all students. Students learn effective questioning and communication strategies to approach the teacher, their peers, authors, the community, and the content itself. They learn to respectfully explore others’ ideas.

Chapter 4 of the 4e CRISS manual is entirely dedicated to discussion and questioning. In the Introduction to CRISS workshop, various techniques are discussed, modeled, and practiced.

3c: Engaging Students in Learning

Engaging students in meaningful learning is hit-or-miss unless teachers are intentional in their instructional design; effective teachers use techniques that empower students as learners. The foundation of CRISS is student empowerment, which comes from confidence, curiosity, and passion. Teachers build student confidence by helping them understand how the brain learns, developing a toolbox of strategies to build deep comprehension of new information, modeling inquiry and providing opportunities for practice, and allowing students the freedom to make choices and take risks as learners.

Instructional design of the CRISS Framework for Teaching follows an active learning format that flexes with the content and needs of the students. The CRISS Framework for Learning establishes that the student’s responsibility is to “be involved and actively persistent” through writing, discussing, visualizing, and organizing content. The key elements of the CRISS Framework for Learning apply across all content areas and grade levels and are not text-dependent. They provide underlying structures, but don’t need to be formulaic and restrictive. Teacher direction is often in mini-lessons or short snippets of explanation and modeling; students are given ample opportunity to engage with content and practice learning processes. The modeling sets a high standard for deep thinking, demonstrates persistence in the face of obstacles, problem solving, questioning, etc. Progressive activities scaffold students, layering depth of content and rigor toward student mastery. Student grouping is flexible and dependent upon the learning activities, content, and students’ capacity for independence. Thoughtfully designed lessons incorporate research-based strategies which lend themselves to formative assessment that informs next steps in the progression. Materials used acknowledge diversity of learner needs and move students toward deeper comprehension of content; textbooks do not drive learning and the goal is never to “cover” content. If the content is important enough to teach, then it’s worth taking the time to train students how to learn it.

Through different learning strategies, students engage with a variety of content materials in different genres, formats, and media to synthesize information and transform it in ways that support deep learning. Strategies
are applied consciously to facilitate high level thinking. The CRISS Framework for Learning captures this at its
core with Engage & Transform. During the workshop, participants use learning strategies matched to the
content and learning goals to experience the “flow” of engagement that happens with careful instructional
design.

3d: Using Assessment in Instruction
CRISS teaches students to listen to their metacognitive inner voice to self-monitor their engagement in
learning processes and understanding of content. When students recognize they don’t get it, they have the
resources and strategies to create and implement a plan to fill the gaps. Teachers explain and model this
process in different contexts, formats, and levels of rigor, and students reflect on their experiences.

Teachers are intentional in their choice of learning activities and modes of assessment. Most CRISS strategies
function as formative assessments provided the teacher identifies key assessment criteria, monitors and
measures student progress, and uses that data to adjust instruction. Multiple measures and modalities are
used. Data collection can be formal (e.g., quiz) or informal (i.e., observations, quick-writes, sketches).
Feedback to students can be on-the-fly verbal prompts as students move through activities, written
communication (responses to journal entries and such), formal classroom conferences, simple rubrics,
progress grades, or peer feedback using any of the modes a teacher uses. Teachers train students in the use of
rubrics and guidelines to ensure student awareness of learning goals and performance expectations. Students
learn through safe, low-stakes practice to value and incorporate (where appropriate) feedback from all
sources, including their own self-assessments. Learning becomes visible to the teacher and students.

CRISS strategies such as RAFT and Spool Papers, lend themselves to summative assessments and
demonstrations of learning.

Through the use of the CRISS Framework for Learning, the students reflect on themselves as learners and their
understanding of the core content or learning goals both after the individual lesson segments, possibly after
specific learning strategies in formative reflections, and at the completion of units of study in summative
reflections.

3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness
Teachers and students are continually monitoring and self-assessing progress towards learning goals through
reflection, formative assessments, and feedback. CRISS implementation promotes a balance of chunking
instruction and engagement; this allows teachers and students ample opportunities throughout the learning
process to stop and check comprehension and adjust teaching and learning accordingly. Teachers use
sequenced strategies to scaffold student persistence and perseverance in the face of obstacles. The learning
strategies and processes lend themselves to differentiation based on student capabilities and familiarity with
content; pace can also be adjusted to accommodate student needs. Once teachers provide students with a
toolbox of strategies and an understanding of their applicability, the student is empowered to choose which
learning strategy will work best to ensure understanding of content. An example of this is a summative
assessment wherein students demonstrate understanding through a process that allows them to each choose
the strategy or strategies to best organize and communicate information.

Danielson Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities
Exemplary (“distinguished”) teaching requires professional awareness and responsibility. Danielson’s Domain
1 enumerates duties specific to planning and preparation of content and pedagogy. Domain 2 covers the work
necessary for establishing an environment conducive to learning. Domain 3 is all about what happens during
instructional learning time. Domain 4 is a catch-all for everything else on the teacher’s plate. While the focus is
(as it should be!) on student learning, the professional context has a significant impact on that focus. Project CRISS supports the teacher as a professional – there are no scripts and no specific demands beyond accounting for the elements of the Frameworks.

4a: Reflecting on Teaching
At the core of CRISS is the need for reflection. We train students to be metacognitive about their learning processes and to be aware of their progress toward mastery of content goals. The CRISS Framework for Teaching asks teachers to reflect on student learning (both process and content) and instruction. What worked? What didn’t? Did students meet the learning goals? How were they metacognitive? What should I (the teacher) do differently next time? How do I help students progress as we move forward? What changes do I need to make for these particular students – in the environment, explanations, modeling, prompts, support, grouping, etc.?

In Chapter 1 of the CRISS 4e manual, there are guiding questions for use when analyzing the lesson from the teacher perspective and from the students’ perspectives. There are reflection questions specific to each strategy throughout the manual.

4b: Maintaining Accurate Records
The gradual release of responsibility model embedded in Project CRISS supports a reasonable requirement for record keeping in terms of student performance on formative assessments. These assessments inform teacher decision-making, but do not require extensive grading. Creating a safe environment for students to take safe risks means they are not going to be penalized for mistakes as they explore content and process. Gradual release implies less teacher grading and more teacher questioning, observing, and facilitating learning experiences; generating plans and prompts are a normal part of this. Teachers and students create rubrics or scoring criteria, and students are more successful on summative assessments.

4c: Communicating with Families
CRISS provides a CRISS for Parents Workshop to support parent outreach. The workshop includes the practical application of the CRISS Framework for Learning and a reference guide on how parents can support learning at home with their students by using common language and processes.

4d: Participating in a Professional Community
Chapter 10 of the CRISS 4e manual outlines the features of a Five-Star School. The rubric guides educators to full implementation of CRISS. Chapter 11 describes actual teacher-student action research projects teachers can use as models to replicate/adapt for in their own classrooms or school. Project CRISS offers follow-up workshops, a study guide, and webinars that support a culture of continued improvement for staff (appropriate for individuals, PLC teams, course- or grade-alike teams, or whole staff).

Schools/districts are encouraged to cultivate a cadre of district trainers that can provide the on-site professional development necessary for sustainability of the initiative. CRISS-trained teachers have valuable insight into what best-practice looks like in the classroom, so are excellent resources for staff demonstrations and modeling.

4e: Growing and Developing Professionally
Project CRISS implementation provides frameworks focused on student learning which can guide collegial, professional discussions on teaching practice. The Introduction to CRISS workshop establishes a common understanding and language for discourse across grade levels and content areas. Subsequent implementation can flex to existing school structures for delving deeply into effective praxis.
CRISS has multiple opportunities for staff to remain current through on-line webinars, on-site follow-up workshops facilitated by a District or National Trainer, and the Comments from CRISS newsletter. A staff member can extend their learning of CRISS and become a District Trainer, which enhances their own professional practice as well as providing tools to support colleagues. CRISS-trained educators are encouraged to conduct action research, submit lesson plans and student work samples for sharing with other teachers through the CRISS website, and/or write articles for the CRISS national newsletter, all of which support personal and professional growth.

4f: Showing Professionalism
The CRISS student-centered philosophy naturally builds a culture of collaboration and respect within the classroom, school, and district. Planning that begins with clear outcomes for the students, instruction centered around student achievement and ownership of learning, and respect for the importance of reflection on one’s thinking and learning all contribute to an environment where decisions are made with the learner’s best interest in mind. A professional educator is a lifelong learner.

A copy of this document is available online under the Publications and Research tab, Other Initiatives.

CRISS HITS THE ROAD

International Reading Association Annual Conference in Boston, Massachusetts, July 9-11, 2016
Thoughtful Digital Literacy for Powerful 21st Century Education, presented by Dr. Debra Franciosi.

Pre-Conference Institute on Friday, July 8, 2016: Supporting Adolescents to Meet the Literacy Challenges of the 21st Century, presented by Julie Meltzer, Carol Jago, Doug Buehl, Vicki Jacobs, Kathleen Hinchman, Lori DiGisi, Stephanie Romano, Doug Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Deb Franciosi.

Secondary Reading Interest Group, with presentations by Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey.

Northwest Montana Reading Council Back to School Conference, August 17, 2016
Reflecting on Practice, Process, and Content, presented by Dr. Debra Franciosi

Illinois Reading Council Annual Conference in Peoria, Illinois, October 2016
Deb Franciosi is a Featured Guest Speaker, presenting three sessions: Creating a Community of Readers; Reflecting on Practice, Process, and Content; and Asking Good Questions. Check in with her and get some great ideas for your professional practice. Visit the CRISS exhibit booth #309 while you’re there!

Links from this issue of CRISS Crafter

Trader Resources “how-to” http://www.projectcriss.com/files/misc/Event_Instructed_FAQs.pdf
Danielson Framework for Teaching: http://danielsongroup.org/framework/

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