



CPS in the Classroom: Blumberg Center Brings Program to Students

By Bill Littlejohn and Nancy Mayfield

In her first year, Kimberly Trate had only heard about Creative Problem Solving. The Indiana State University graduate student in school psychology got to see it in practice after she enrolled in a summer school class specially developed to present CPSB's Igniting Creative Potential program in a five-week format. Kimberly, who expects to graduate in May 2005, was impressed with the experience.

"The versatility of CPS makes it an extremely beneficial tool. You can conduct a day-long CPS session with a room filled with people to work through a problem from beginning to end, or you can sit down by yourself and use one of the tools to help devise a solution or plan of action for yourself," Kimberly said.

Kimberly and others in her graduate-level class of future school psychologists and educators were the first group at ISU to take CPS training in a classroom setting. The first class was offered during Summer 2002. Taught by Bill Littlejohn, director of the ISU-based Blumberg Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Special Education, the class is an example of the Center's efforts to expand its outreach to bring CPS to Indiana educators and social service agency representatives.

The Indiana CPS Initiative, which operates under the auspices of the Blumberg Center, has trained nearly 800 special and general education administrators, teachers, university/college faculty, social service agency personnel, local Step Ahead and First Steps coordinators, and other not-for-profit and government agency personnel.

Traci Goddard, a school psychology major who graduated in May 2003, said she planned on using the skills she learned in the class to help educators solve problems in a creative, direct way. "CPS is direct and gets the job done without wasting time. It is also a simple, straight-forward process that gets an end result," Traci said.

Our Blumberg Center training team usually presents the program in a five-day format that is broken down into separate two-day and three-day sessions. We wanted to find a way in which we could offer this unique training to ISU students who are pursuing careers that will put them in contact with children and families. Thus, the 3-credit hour, summer school offering was developed. The

course was also offered at ISU again in July 2003, and is to be offered for Summer 2004 and annually thereafter.

Scott Isaksen and Brian Dorval from The Creative Problem Solving Group, Inc., were instrumental in assisting Bill Littlejohn, Blumberg Center Director and Indiana Creative Problem Solving Initiative Program Director, in developing the ISU class. In addition to advising him, they shared a syllabus and materials from a similar course they had taught at Buffalo State College. These items helped Littlejohn lay the groundwork for the ISU course, which was offered to graduate students from the Department of Educational and School Psychology in the ISU School of Education. Littlejohn taught a two-week CPS course for the University of Winnipeg during July 2003.

The Indiana CPS Initiative has been funded by annual grants from the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), Division of Exceptional Learners, since 1994. The Center provides training in the latest version of Creative Problem Solving (CPS Version 6.1™) through a licensed arrangement with The Creative Problem Solving Group, Inc. The project includes activities to customize programs and workshops for targeted groups and to help link CPS facilitators with entities interested in facilitation support services.

A CPS Impact Study conducted in 1999-2000 by the Blumberg Center demonstrated that persons the staff had trained in CPS, during the first six years of the project, were able to apply the problem solving methods learned in the CPS training immediately and effectively to a broad range of problems they encounter daily. A report on the details of the impact study was shared in *Communiqué* in its Fall 2001, Volume 10 issue.

We know CPS training is effective and practical, as evidenced by the feedback and examples of application we get from the network of people who have attended our programs. As part of our overall mission to connect ISU students and faculty with the Blumberg Center's work, we thought offering CPS training to Educational and School Psychology (EPSY) graduate students would be a great thing. A core group of "traditional" graduate students attended the course on campus, while several ISU graduate students in other fields who are working professionals (including teachers, an assistant principal, and a college professor) took the course at another site in the traditional 5-full-consecutive-day format.

As the instructor for the CPS class, Littlejohn adapts the material from its traditional format and adds some extras, including guest speakers who use CPS "in the field" in a variety of ways. The speakers bring a breadth and depth of knowledge and first-hand experience in how CPS techniques have been successfully used in the settings the students likely will find themselves in

someday, namely as school psychologists working with teachers, children and their families, and social service providers.

Among the speakers, were staff members and consultants from the Indiana Creative Problem Solving Initiative who use CPS in a variety of education and social service settings, including Facilitated Individualized Education Plans (FIEP), General Education Intervention teams, and social service agency wraparound efforts.

For example, Claire Thorsen, program coordinator for the FIEP program spoke directly to the role of school psychologists and how they can use CPS in an educational setting. With more than 20 years of experience working with special education districts, Claire shared many "hands-on" instances to which the students could relate. "I talked about using the CPS skills and tools to negotiate conferences and meetings and to help teachers provide some problem solving mechanisms," Claire reported.

"These graduate students will someday be in a position where they will need to work and partner with parents and teachers to achieve joint outcomes. They can use CPS in so many ways – to set goals and objectives, to support both parents and schools in having a say in the kinds of training children will receive, and to encourage partnerships in meetings that might be tense," she added.

In addition, several speakers addressed the use of CPS for General Education Intervention (GEI) teams. The Blumberg Center has trained over 150 school GEI teams (over 1,000 educators), across Indiana, in a modified version of CPS to help them address the needs of students facing special challenges in and out of the classroom.

Jennifer Sears, a graduate student in educational and school psychology who took the class, is putting what she learned to use as a facilitator for the CPS Initiative. "CPS offered me a way to conduct meetings and work with other people in a professional manner," she says. "I appreciate that it has many tools, so I can personalize sessions to best meet clients needs." The course presented an excellent opportunity for the students to hear how professionals are incorporating CPS and a number of tools to impact their work.

The Summer 2002 CPS class was taught over a five-week period, with class running from 10 a.m. to 11:50 a.m., five days a week. The text *Creative approaches to problem solving*, (Isaksen, Dorval, & Treffinger, 2000) was used to supplement the CPS training materials (Toolbox for Creative Problem Solving, Basic Tools and Resources. Isaksen, Dorval & Treffinger, 1998). The format was

changed to longer hours to complete the class in three weeks during Summer 2003.

Several differences are of note between our usual two- and three-day workshop format, in which daily sessions run from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the five-week (and three week), summer format, in which sessions ran two-hours per day, five days a week or three hours per day for three weeks. During the summer class:

- Reading assignments, tests, and guest speakers helped to enrich student learning
 - During tool teachback, summer school students taught three tools each instead of the one tool each usually taught in our workshops
 - Tools were introduced in, and students experienced all three stages in the Understanding the Challenge Component (Constructing Opportunities, Exploring Data, Framing Problems)
 - A six to twelve page paper was required by the end of the class
- These elements added to the CPS experience for the students and gave them exposure to many more resource people and materials than they would have had under the usual circumstances. For example, the required paper would be impossible to complete in the two- and three-day traditional format. The assignment gave students a chance to demonstrate a transfer or extension of learning and insights into the CPS process, and its professional and ethical uses.

The paper added to the total experience and yielded some interesting subject matters. Students were asked to either review research in an area pertinent to CPS and focus on specific issues and processes or to discuss the application of a CPS facilitation. The CPS facilitation was discussed by describing a situation leading to the intervention, providing the Task Summary used, the outcome and key learnings for the facilitator, and client and resource group reactions to the intervention.

One student, a teacher who was part of the off-site cohort, wrote about how she used CPS within her middle school community to choose textbooks that would be read to the students as part of a program to reduce bullying. An on-campus student addressed the issue of maintaining a creative spirit in elementary school children and how CPS can provide a framework for developing innovative and useful solutions. Readers can see selected student papers on the Blumberg Center's website at:
<http://www.indstate.edu/soe/blumberg/cpsstudent.html>.

The length of the course also lent itself to the introduction of more CPS resources. In addition to copies of *Communiqué* and newsletters from the Center

for Creative Learning, more than a dozen books related to CPS were introduced. They included such titles as *A Kick in the Seat of the Pants*, by Roger von Oech; *Adaptors and Innovators*, by Michael Kirton; and *Lost Prizes*, by Ken McCluskey, Phillip Baker, Se O'Hagan, and Donald Treffinger.

Another interesting observation from the on-campus summer school class was that practice problems identified by students for use in the class were predominantly of a personal rather than a professional nature. Several focused on financial/budget needs of graduate students. (In our off-site programs, attendees are practicing professionals and their practice problems are predominately related to their work rather than personal matters.)

Our workshops always include activities on the last day to help the participants take their learning forward – to plan the next steps, etc. All of the EPSY graduate students had at least one more year of school and little professional experience. The “taking it forward” activity for them was to develop personal plans and to start drafts of letters of inquiry and/or resumes to call attention to their powerful CPS skills.

We are pleased with the success of the course and look forward to bringing CPS to even more professionals-in-preparation and Indiana educators in the future.

References & Readings

Isaksen, S.G., Dorval, K.B. & Treffinger, D.J. (2000). *Creative Approaches to Problem Solving*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt.

Bill Littlejohn is Director of the Blumberg Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Special Education, Project Director of the Indiana Creative Problem Solving Initiative, and an Associate Professor of Special Education, School of Education, Indiana State University. He is an accredited trainer and facilitator by CPSB and was instrumental in the creation of the Indiana CPS Initiative.

Nancy Pieters Mayfield is a free-lance writer and communications consultant who works for a variety of journalistic interests, including Reuters News Service, and university-affiliated organizations, such as the Blumberg Center. She has attended the two-day CPS training. She also is an Assistant Professor of Journalism at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College.