

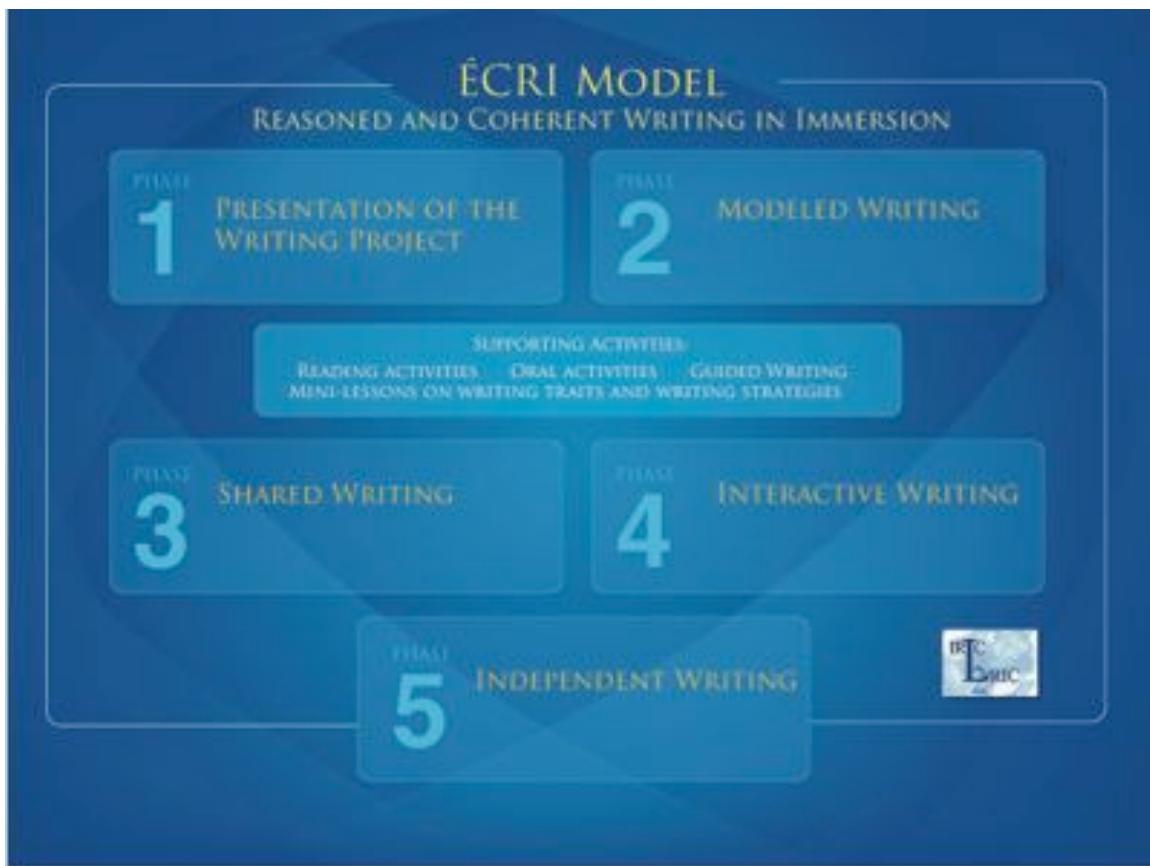
Theoretical Foundations

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A. The *ÉCRI*¹ Model

The coherent and reasoned writing in immersion (ÉCRI) model is an organizational model for writing instruction that brings together and organizes exemplary writing instruction practices into a consistent unit.

The ÉCRI model consists of five writing instruction phases along with supporting activities.



Phase 1: Presentation of the Writing Project

During phase 1 of the ÉCRI model, the teacher presents the writing project to students. This final project has a written, a visual and an oral component.

¹ **ÉCRI** (Écriture cohérente et raisonnée en immersion- reasoned and coherent writing in immersion) was originally created with and for French Immersion Teachers at the elementary level. Since that time, teachers in French and English language arts classes at the middle school level have contributed to and experimented with the model, but we retain the original ÉCRI acronym to show its origins.

Examples of final projects



The written component follows a specific genre and type of text, thereby providing students with a writing purpose and format. Smith (1998) explains that a genre is a “family” of texts with common characteristics. To take the comparison further, all text types are members of the specific “family” (genre). While possessing common characteristics with other types of texts of the same genre, each type of text possesses its own characteristics. Here is a description of the genres frequently studied in schools along with a list of some types of texts belonging to those genres.

1. Narrative: usually told in chronological order

Types of texts: short stories, stories, legends and novels

2. Persuasive: seeks to convince/persuade

Types of texts: editorials, advertisements, and opinion letters

3. Informative or explanatory: seeks to inform/explain

Types of texts: procedures, descriptions, research and articles

4. Poetic or expressive: expresses emotions and plays with language

Types of texts: poetry, songs and diaries

Furthermore, during phase 1 of the ÉCRI model, students see and sometimes listen to an example of the final project they must carry out. Teachers specify their expectations and explain project requirements as well as the steps to successful project completion.

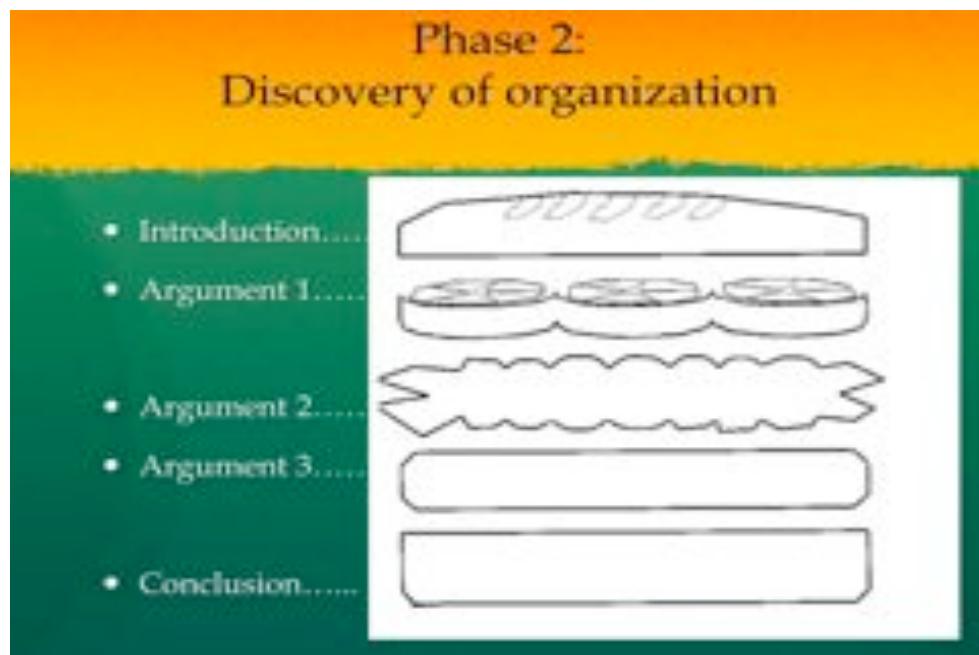
Phase 1 has several elements that support the learning process:

1. **Personalization:** during this phase, the teacher personalizes the final project by making connections between the final project and each student's experience. Furthermore, the choice of writing topics plays a role in personalization: for example, Grade 8 students may choose to produce an advertisement on a product, service or invention.
2. **Activation of previous knowledge:** during this phase, students have the chance to share and validate what they already know about the choice of proposed topics and the genre being studied.
3. **Anticipation:** the teacher specifies the tasks to be performed and presents intended learning outcomes and the steps to follow to carry out the various components of the final project. Based on examples, students can identify what they think they will do in response to the teaching unit.

Phase 2: Modeled Writing

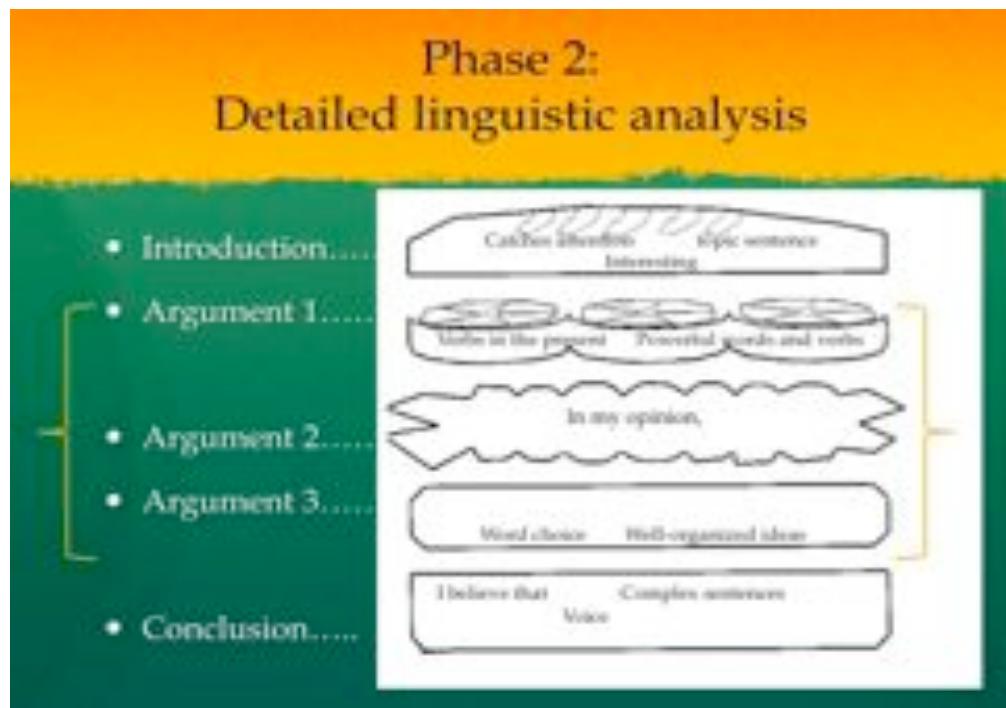
Modelled writing, the second phase of the ÉCRI model, includes three sections:

1. First, the teacher presents one or more models of the genre being studied for the students to read. In groups, students analyze and/or compare texts to understand their structure/organization. Once identified, the structure/organization of the text is transcribed onto a graphic organizer.



Example: Opinion Text Structure

2. Once the structure/organization is identified, students carry out the second part of phase 2. They re-examine the model(s) the teacher provides by comparing them to identify the language elements these texts have in common: verb tenses and modes, grammatical structures, vocabulary and the traits of the genre being studied. These language elements are added to the graphic organizer.



3. Based on the language elements identified during text comparison, the teacher and students together create a rubric for the final project's written component.

**Phase 2:
Rubric creation**

Traits	Strong text (with students)	Average text	Weak text
Content	Main idea clearly explained and supported by details and examples		
Organization	Smooth transitions		
Voice/style	Dynamic text		
Word choice	Exact and nuanced words		
Sentence fluency	Variety of simple and complex sentences		
Conventions	Correct grammar		

Therefore, modeled writing is used to structure student writing by providing them with the framework for the type of text being studied, the linguistic elements required for producing that type of text, additional examples of that type of text and specifics about expected performance criteria.

Phase 3: Shared Writing

Phase 3 of the ÉCRI model gives students the opportunity to see and understand what the teacher does during the act of writing. During this phase, the teacher, with pen in hand, writes a text in front of the students while explaining his or her reasoning to them with regard to that text. While referring to the graphic organizer and the rubric, the teacher explains aloud why he or she has chosen certain ideas and/or conventions.



Teachers describe aloud their word choice, sentence structure and other aspects of the text. The reasoning behind the writing is presented very clearly to the students. Furthermore, in addition to the graphic organizer and the rubric, the teacher models the use of different writing tools, such as the dictionary, the thesaurus, and other references. Students are encouraged to participate actively by offering suggestions to improve the teacher's written text. The teacher then discusses these suggestions and decides whether or not to incorporate them into the text. Some teachers have preferred to adapt shared writing. Instead of writing in front of students, they have presented them with a previously prepared draft and explained the reasoning behind their writing choices.



During this phase, it is impossible to share everything. At the start of the year, when the students are not necessarily familiar with all the characteristics of a good text (ideas, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency and conventions), it is good for teachers to concentrate on one characteristic in particular. Due to the length of middle-school level texts, teachers often identify certain problematic paragraphs for students, such as the introduction and conclusion in opinion pieces, and they focus on those paragraphs. For example, for an opinion piece, two teachers have modeled the introduction and the first development paragraph in which the first argument is presented. Other teachers have distributed the sharing of certain textual elements over several days, thereby sharing a larger part of the text in question. Some teachers have preferred to do both shared and interactive writing within one piece of writing. They have done this by firstly, sharing their thought process as to how to write the first few paragraphs (shared writing). Secondly, they have asked students to finish the last few paragraphs collaboratively through interactive writing.

Furthermore, teachers address socio-affective factors during this phase by talking about the successes and challenges they have had when writing and the strategies they use to overcome obstacles. They put themselves in the shoes of student-writers. Last, students evaluate the quality of the teacher's text according to the rubric created during phase 2 and offer suggestions to improve that text.

Phase 4: Interactive Writing

After the modeled and shared phases in which the teacher is more directly involved, in phase 4 we see the emergence of more independence from students in the writing process. During **interactive writing (phase 4)**, students have the chance to write cooperatively and are asked to write a new text or continue the one started by the teacher in phase 3. In this way, they receive support from each other as peers during writing and

play co-writing and co-editing roles. During phase 4, students are responsible for content, textual structure, planning for writing, revision and corrections, and they work out those textual elements among themselves.



They also make sure to use the tools at their disposal, such as the graphic organizer and the rubric. It is important that the teacher model these collaborative processes and negotiation behaviours so that students can put it into practice. Students help each other throughout this phase while the teacher adopts the role of facilitator.

Depending on the teacher's preferences, this phase may be conducted in several ways. The students as a whole class can prepare a text collaboratively, or they can work in pairs or small groups. Some teachers have adopted a combination of these two options (whole class and smaller groups). One Grade 8 immersion teacher asked students to write some paragraphs of the text as one large group and other paragraphs in their smaller groups. Other teachers asked students to collaboratively complete the text the teacher shared during phase 3 (shared writing).

Phase 5: Independent Writing

In the fifth and final phase of the ÉCRI model, students are now ready to prepare the written part of their final projects. They follow the various steps of the writing process in this diagram:



Step 1: Planning

First, students plan their writing. In order to generate ideas in this step of the writing process, students brainstorm individually and in groups and have discussions in “idea conferences” with a classmate and /or with the teacher. They continue to plan their written texts using the graphic organizer to develop a writing plan.



Step 2: Drafting

During the second step of the writing process, students produce their first drafts by concentrating on ideas. They use the performance criteria rubric for help.

Step 3: Revision and Correction

Third, in the revision and correction step, students revise their texts by correcting them. First, they revise their ideas individually, and then they have peer conferences that focus on ideas, clarity, and organization. An individual conference with the teacher is also appropriate at this stage.

After revising their ideas and discussing them with their peers and the teacher, students make individual linguistic revisions. Once again, the rubric is very useful as a guide for students who also use numerous linguistic tools at their disposal, such as the graphic organizer, thematic vocabulary lists, and various dictionaries in order to strengthen their piece of writing.

Step 4: Publication and Presentation

During this last step of the writing process, students publish their writing projects. Lastly, students present their final written projects interactively by incorporating oral, visual, technological, artistic and/or dramatic components. Time also need to be given throughout the process to complete this complementary component of the project.

Supporting Activities

Throughout the five phases of the ÉCRI model, depending on student needs, the teacher presents a series of supporting activities to help students carry out the writing portion of their final projects. These supporting activities incorporate the principles of balanced literacy described later in the document. They connect all concepts and intended learning goals for the genre and type of text being studied.

These mini-lessons can target oral, reading or writing outcomes. These lessons can also focus on the traits of writing and writing strategies or activities related to the use of self-correction and other reference tools.

i. Oral Activities

Oral development is the foundation of reading and writing development. While oral development certainly contributes to writing development, writing may also be used to support the oral dimension. According to Harley (1994), using writing to support the oral aspect could contribute to the development of a certain linguistic precision among second-language learners.

By encouraging oral development, oral supporting activities not only include opportunities to discuss orally written texts but also to implement and consolidate, in an authentic context, certain speech acts, vocabulary, structures and grammatical points specific to the writing theme.



For oral communication, we can distinguish two main categories: 1. planned and 2. unplanned. Of course, there are different degrees of planning, and it is important to expose students to various oral communication situations: those that require no preparation and others that require varying degrees of it. Oral interaction with peers is at the end of the unplanned oral communication continuum, while a formal oral presentation to a large group is at the end of the planned oral communication continuum. The ÉCRI model allows both types of oral communication to be incorporated.

ii. Reading Activities

As is the case with oral development, reading and writing also reinforce one another, and making connections between them is crucial for literacy development. When students read, they learn how to write better by discovering suitable literary processes and exploring the richness of written language. Furthermore, by writing, students learn how to read better by discovering, for example, how ideas are organized in texts. These supporting activities include reading aloud, shared and independent reading.



1. Reading Aloud

When reading aloud, the teacher models how expert readers read, usually based on an example from a book. The teacher often reads texts that slightly exceed students' independent reading level. The goal of reading aloud is to expose students to a variety of genres and types of texts and help them discover the pleasure of reading. Also, by reading aloud, the teacher can illustrate certain literary processes and characteristics of a good text used by professional writers.

2. Shared Reading

For shared reading, teachers select texts based on student needs and determine a specific learning goal for the lesson. For example, they could teach and model the prediction strategy. Students, usually seated in a circle around a large book or magnified text projected on a screen, follow with their eyes while the teacher reads and thinks aloud. Teachers then invite students to read and reflect on their reading comprehension strategy with a peer. Then students have the opportunity to re-read the text individually and react to it.

3. Independent Reading

During a supporting activity, students may be given the chance to read a relevant text independently.

iii. Writing Activities

1. Guided Writing

Teachers determine a specific goal for the guided writing session in which a group of students with the same needs participate. Teachers teach or, more often, re-teach a specific aspect of writing: a particular trait, writing strategy or organization.

iv. Language Activities

Finally, still in accordance with the principles of the balanced literacy approach, supporting activities incorporate various language activities, such as vocabulary development, activities related to the six traits of writing and activities related to the teaching of writing strategies.

1. Vocabulary Development Activities

Here are some vocabulary development strategies used by teachers at the elementary level which have been adapted for use at the middle level.

- a. Theme wall:** a place to organize words related to a theme. Just like the word wall used in elementary schools, vocabulary can be taken from texts read or written in class and from discussions.

- b. Recycled words:** the teacher, using a poster depicting several recycling bins, asks students to find synonyms for a word that is used frequently or overused. Above the recycling bins, the teacher writes the frequently used or overused word and asks the students to find synonyms, which the teacher notes in one of the recycling bins. Therefore, by using a recycling bin, the teacher communicates the message that the word to be recycled is a good word but that students can enrich their texts by using a diverse vocabulary. The teacher can use this poster several times during the study of a genre/type of text because it has several recycling bins.

2. ‘Six Trait of Writing’ Activities

‘Six trait of writing’ activities (Spandel and Hicks, 2005) focus on the teaching and learning of the characteristics of good texts. Promotion of the six traits of writing is part of the ÉCRI model itself, but teachers must also cover the traits during supporting activities for reinforcement. The six traits are:

- a. Ideas:** for effective written expression, it is important to present ideas clearly by incorporating a message and interesting details that capture the reader’s interest. Readers must be able to understand both the purpose and message of the text.

“*Words aren’t cheap!*” is an example of a teaching technique used by the Park Elementary School teachers. During this support activity, the teacher explains to the students that their texts will be published in a (fictitious) Francophone newspaper. To be published in this paper, they have to pay a lot of money for each word they write. The teacher then asks the students to select the ideas that are crucial to understanding the text and to express themselves as exactly and concisely as possible.

- b. Organization:** to communicate a message effectively, it is important to select the genre and type of text that fit with the writing purpose. The ideas within a text must be organized logically, and the text should include an introduction (setting the story) and a conclusion.

To work with this writing trait during a supporting activity, teachers may give students a scrambled text to put in order.

- c. Voice:** to interest readers, writers must have their own styles that reveal their personalities.

To explore this trait during a supporting activity, teachers give students a short text and ask them to rewrite it from a different point of view than the one presented (e.g., from the point of view of a student instead of a teacher; from the point of view of the pet instead of the pet owner)

- d. **Word choice:** to affect readers and communicate their messages effectively, writers must use accurate, precise and evocative vocabulary.

During a supporting activity, teachers may give students a text with blanks and ask them to select the best words for the context. Students may use reference books such as a thesaurus for help and are then encouraged to share their words and discuss them.

- e. **Sentence fluency:** to ensure smooth textual rhythm and flow, it is important to vary sentence length and structure.

To work on sentence fluency during a supporting activity, teachers may hand out sentences to groups. Using a long sentence, the teacher asks students to form two sentences or, using two simple sentences, asks them to form one complex sentence.

- f. **Conventions:** to communicate their messages effectively, writers must master the mechanics of the language to some degree and have the ability to be accurate. Conventions include spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

An example of a possible supporting activity on conventions is the error hunt. Teachers give students a text containing common errors and ask students to attempt to identify and correct as many as possible.

v. Writing Strategy Activities

Writing strategy activities may be divided into three categories:

- a. **Cognitive** strategies provide students with the intellectual tools to accomplish the writing task. During these supporting activities, teachers may model note-taking or how to group ideas.



- b.** **Metacognitive** strategies allow students to plan, manage and monitor the writing task. During this type of supporting activity, teachers may model how to establish a work plan that takes into account the writing task, allotted time, available resources and imposed constraints. They may also invite students to reflect on the strategies they have learned based on the model itself, such as the importance of planning and usefulness of the graphic organizer.
- c.** **Socio-affective** strategies are related to student attitudes and behaviour. During these supporting activities, teachers may teach students ways to manage writer's block, such as brainstorming on interests or circulating to see what topics classmates have chosen. In order to reduce anxiety, teachers may teach how to use a storyboard to develop and clarify ideas before putting them on paper.

B. Exemplary Practices

According to Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (2005, p. vi), the term “best practice” stems from the fields of medicine, law and architecture, in which it is used to describe solid, reputable and current work. In the educational field, the goal of research on best writing practices is to identify the strategies and techniques that will produce the best results for teaching and learning writing. The ÉCRI model has been developed to integrate exemplary writing, literacy and general teaching practices into reasoned and coherent instruction.

First Language (L1) and Second Language (L2) Writing

Writing is a complex activity that requires the writer to call upon numerous processes at the same time. First of all, there are the writing processes themselves, such as planning, drafting, revision, correction, spelling, phonological awareness and grapho-phonemic correspondence. In addition to these writing processes, there are also learning processes: for example, activation of prior knowledge, knowledge transfer and use of short and long-term memory. Besides these two categories of processes, socio-affective factors, such as motivation and confidence in one’s writing abilities, also influence writing.

According to researchers, processes are similar in both L1 and L2, and best L1 practices may be used in teaching the second language by modifying them so that they address these learners’ specific needs.

Writing Characteristics of Second Language Learners

Differences between first language learners and second language learners with regard to writing fall into two categories:

Differences in L2-student-produced texts:

1. Shorter texts are produced.
2. More limited vocabulary is used.
3. Sentence structures are simpler.
4. L2 students make more errors.

Differences in the writing process for L2 students:

1. Planning takes L2 students three times longer than L1 students.
2. L2 students need more composition time.
3. L2 students have access to limited strategies and linguistic skills.

Exemplary Practices in Writing Instruction (ÉCRI Model)

In the first stages leading up to the creation of the ÉCRI model, the University of New Brunswick's (UNB) Second Language Research Institute of Canada (L2RIC) researchers worked in collaboration with elementary school teachers to explore the best practices used by professional learning community (PLC) members and the best practices presented in current research literature. During the creating and refining of the ÉCRI model, teachers and researchers included best practices. In a second research project on best practices, researchers worked in collaboration with PLC members at the middle school level to study the possibility of adapting the writing instruction model created at the elementary level so that it reflected middle school needs as well as best practices among teachers and in the research literature. The following points describe the best writing practices integrated into the model:

- 1. It is important that a school and its staff share a common vision on writing. Furthermore, in each teacher's classroom, writing instruction must be predictable, uniform and consistent.***

Writing itself is a complex activity that holds several surprises. Because it is unpredictable, students must be provided with a routine learning environment in which they feel comfortable about taking writing risks. This familiar context must remain constant throughout the school year and from year to year. There must be a routine with clear procedures and expectations. Organization of the physical environment must encourage easy access to the required writing materials and tools and facilitate student movement among various work structures: large groups, small groups, pairs and individuals.

The ÉCRI model organizes the teaching of writing by integrating effective teaching strategies such as modeled, shared, interactive and independent writing. Therefore, it provides a context for the teaching and learning of writing without being a prescriptive writing program, thereby facilitating its adoption by all teaching staff.

- 2. The process approach is the most effective for the development of writing, and it is crucial that teachers have extensive knowledge of that approach.***

Because the process approach (including writing processes themselves, learning processes and socio-affective factors) is included with the ÉCRI model, teachers develop and extend their knowledge of that approach by using the model.



Phase 5 of the ÉCRI model (**independent writing**) contains the various steps of the writing process: planning, drafting, revision, correction and presentation. Also, throughout the model, students have the chance to learn to produce texts that possess the characteristics of effective texts and to develop the required knowledge for doing so.

With regard to learning processes, one of the important elements of phase 1 (**writing project presentation**) is the activation of prior knowledge. Students also have the chance to transfer all learning done during phases 1 to 3 to authentic and contextualized writing situations, first in collaboration during phase 4 (**interactive writing**) and then independently during phase 5 (**independent writing**). Supporting activities also allow students to reinvest their new knowledge in different contexts.

Also, the ÉCRI model focuses on providing students with the support necessary to prevent writing anxiety and ensure their success. During shared writing, teachers share their own writing process and address socio-affective factors by modeling the strategies they use to manage their own writing attitudes and behaviours.

Numerous factors influence student motivation and positive attitudes about writing, and the professional community at George Street Middle School and their UNB partners took these into account when they developed the ÉCRI model:

- a. *The writing task must be contextualized and authentic.* The ÉCRI model adopts the project-based approach, which allows the writing tasks to be put in context. Selection of a final writing project is very important in order for it to be authentic. The teachers at George Street Middle School reflected on and discussed at length their choice of final writing projects in order to meet the authenticity criteria.
- b. *The writing must have a clear purpose and an audience.* By being based on a genre and a specific type of text, the ÉCRI model ensures that the writing project has an obvious purpose. Because teachers carefully select final project subjects in

order to fit student ages, needs and interests, student peers are a natural and interested audience. Students want to hear the ideas and opinions of their classmates.

- c. *Collaboration among peers is a crucial element in all steps of the writing process, especially revision.* The ÉCRI model provides students with many opportunities for peer collaboration.



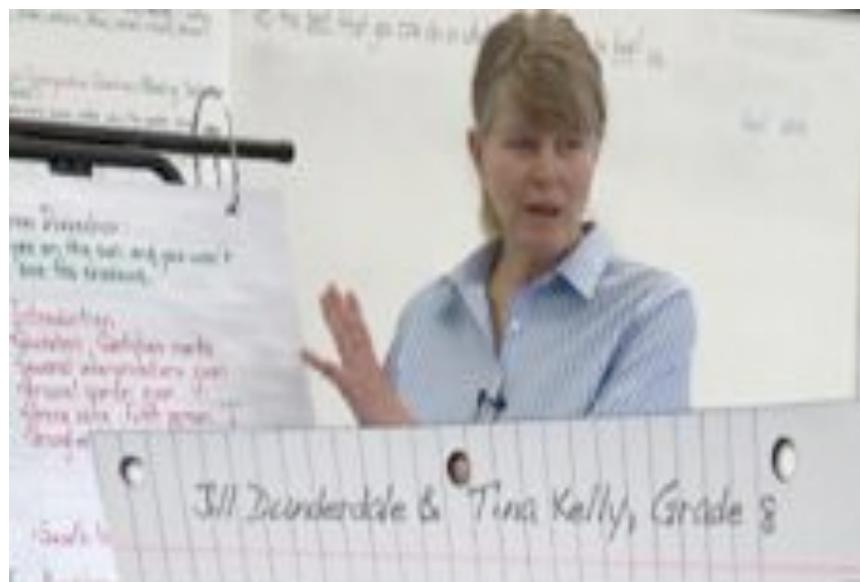
For example, phase 4 (**interactive writing**) emphasizes the importance of collaboration in writing. Students work with partners during phase 2 (**modeled writing**) to compare and identify textual structure and linguistic elements.

In phase 5 (**independent writing**), great importance is attached to conferences, including those between peers.

- d. *Students must have the opportunity to choose writing subjects.*
While considering the limitations imposed by the genre and type of text being studied, teachers also have to provide a choice of topics for the writing task. For the parody-type narrative text in Grade 7, students had the opportunity to parody the fairy tale of their choice. In Grade 8, for the advertising-type informative text, students “sold” a product, service or something they invented.
- e. *Teachers must support the development of student writing by providing them with literary scaffolding, i.e., temporary structures that underpin writing.*

Teachers must deliver straightforward teaching to students based on their needs and must cover all components of the writing process. Students need to know what and how to write and why they are writing. Teacher modeling and sharing of thought processes are crucial elements of literary scaffolding; however, that support is only temporary, and teachers must gradually transfer writing responsibility to students.

The ÉCRI model addresses multiple writing support structures and organizes them in order to gradually allow students greater independence. First, during phase 1 (**writing project presentation**), teachers provide students with final project examples so that students can see and hear what the final product should look like. During phase 2 (**modeled writing**), students have the chance to see sample texts and deconstruct them in order to identify textual structure. Also at that time, students identify the vocabulary, expressions and linguistic structures unique to the genre and type of text being studied. Because two characteristics observed in second language students are limited vocabulary and simplified sentence structure, it is especially important to provide them with support in that regard so that they can develop their vocabulary and the sentence structures required for drafting texts. Furthermore, phase 2 focuses on equipping students with strategies by demonstrating how to use a graphic organizer for their writing.



In phase 3 (**shared writing**), teachers model using the graphic organizer as a tool for organizing writing ideas and the linguistic resources required for revising and correcting written texts. They also demonstrate how to write a text by considering ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, voice and conventions. Phase 3 allows teachers to challenge the writing misconceptions usually held by students. Most believe that good writers write perfect texts the first time. In shared writing, teachers encourage students to reconsider their misconceptions about writing by demonstrating that the best writers are those who do the most planning and refining by writing several drafts. Teachers share their own experiences, challenges, successes and strategies for overcoming the various writing obstacles.

Students then have the chance to see a series of strategies in action: self-correction, for example, which they can then practise themselves, first with the support of their peers during phase 4 (**interactive writing**) and then individually during phase 5 (**independent writing**). Therefore, students acquire greater independence during phases 4 and 5 while having the required knowledge, strategies and confidence to produce a text alone. Teachers choose supporting activities based on student needs, and those activities help

students by allowing them to practise and reinforce certain elements with which they are experiencing difficulty.

- 3. Responsibility for writing must be the students' and the students' alone. They must be able to find their own solutions to their writing problems. The teacher's role is to provide students with tools, knowledge and strategies to resolve their own problems.**

The first four phases of the ÉCRI model focus on providing students with key tools, knowledge and strategies so that they can find their own solutions to their writing problems during independent writing. Also, during phase 5, student-teacher conferences are intended to meet specific needs by providing students with individual tools, knowledge and strategies.



During these conferences, students have the opportunity to articulate their thoughts about writing and to seek solutions with the teacher's help. By asking questions in reaction to student ideas, teachers can then further student reflection. Peer conferences lead students toward the same goals. By discussing their ideas, obstacles and successes as well as the strategies used, students extend their knowledge and reflection about their writing.

- 4. Two-thirds of composition time must be dedicated to planning, and second language students require three times as much planning time as first language students. Researchers assert that the planning step is the most important for producing a quality written product. They also emphasize the importance of dedicating a significant amount of time during planning to vocabulary and to the language elements that are crucial to completing the writing task.**

The first four phases of the ÉCRI model provide students with the required preparation for carrying out the writing task properly. Those phases are intended to equip students at

the levels of vocabulary, language elements, robust textual characteristics and cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. Through exposure to numerous examples of the genre and type of text being studied, students develop a clear idea of the work to be completed, and they can begin to generate writing ideas. The visual component is also intended to stimulate student creativity and help them prepare themselves for writing. Writing teachers at George Street Middle School ask their students to start reflecting and working on their visual component in phase 1. By reflecting and working on the visual component, students are also reflecting on their written component. The visual aspect of the project is used to support the written one.

In phase 5 (**independent writing**), the first step of the writing process is designated for planning. In general, students brainstorm in a large group to generate ideas about the writing task. Then they brainstorm individually, using the graphic organizer to organize their ideas. Also, they have the chance to discuss their ideas with their peers and the teacher and to clarify them in order to put them on paper.

5. *Effective teachers make connections between reading and writing and use model texts to illustrate different genres/types of texts and the language and literary processes that professional writers use.*

During phase 2 (**modeled writing**), students have the chance to read one or more models illustrating the structure, language and literary processes used by professional writers in the genre and type of text being studied. Additional models are provided during phase 3 (**shared writing**) and phase 4 (**interactive writing**), including one written by the teacher and another written in collaboration with students. Teachers use supporting activities to further integrate reading into the writing instruction.

These readings are intended to demonstrate the characteristics of a good text as well as various literary devices. Teachers use student texts for the same purpose.

6. *Students must learn the different literary devices, conventions and writing strategies in context.*

By organizing teaching around a writing project, the ÉCRI model provides the learners with a context. During **modeled** and **shared writing**, students become aware of the relevance of the concepts taught because they realize that they will need them to produce their own texts during **independent writing**. Furthermore, concepts are taught through texts in which students can see the interaction among the different discursive, linguistic and sociolinguistic elements required for the production of written texts. During **interactive writing**, students have the opportunity to put the concepts studied during the previous phases into practice in the context of a text they create themselves. Conferences during **independent writing** allow teachers to individualize their teaching by explaining the concepts a particular student should apply directly in his or her text. Furthermore, during supporting activities, teachers use samples taken from student texts to illustrate certain concepts. For example, the teacher may use a student text with multiple voices to illustrate that writing trait.

7. *Students must write at least three hours a week, and teachers must provide regular and frequent space for this activity.*

By contextualizing and organizing writing instruction, the ÉCRI model facilitates the regular and frequent incorporation of writing into literacy blocks. The model requires that students dedicate quality time to the study of a specific genre and type of text and to the preparation of written texts.

8. *Students need comments on their writing throughout all steps of the writing process. This feedback should come from both the teacher and peers. It is important for the teacher to provide feedback during the composition process rather than at the end after the text is published.*

Quality feedback has the following characteristics:

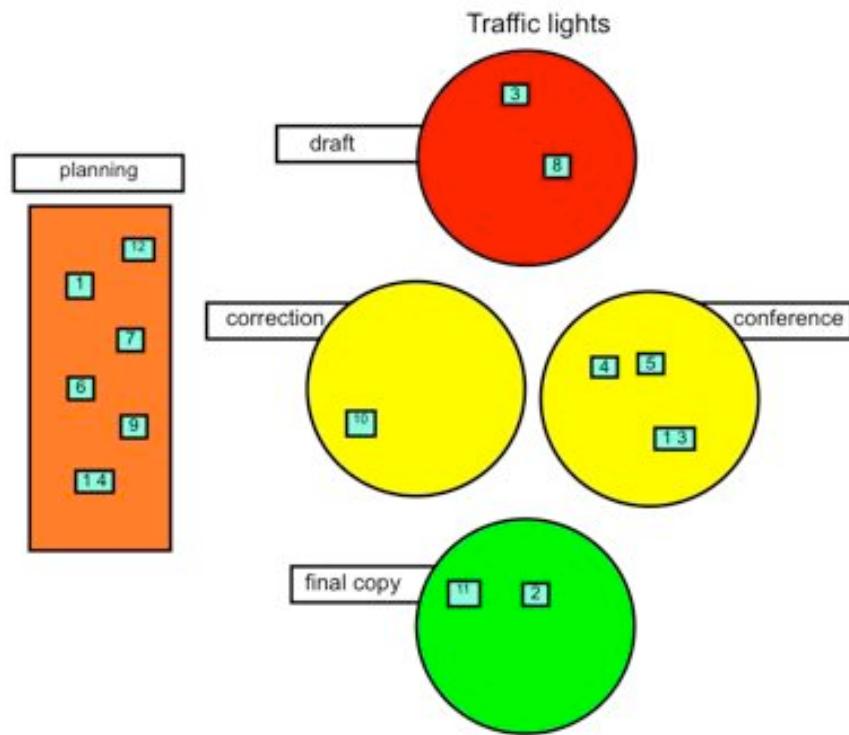
- a. *It is understandable*: students can make sense of the feedback.
- b. *It is useful*: students can use the feedback to advance their learning and improve their performance.
- c. *It is precise*: the feedback provides a clear and complete description of performance. It does not attempt to compliment or blame.
- d. *It is continuous*: the feedback is provided on a regular basis.

During phase 3 (**shared writing**), students evaluate their teacher's text based on the rubric they created together in class, thus providing their teacher with feedback. Also, during phase 4 (**interactive writing**), feedback is given on the collaborative drafting of a text in which the students negotiate the text by offering suggestions and corrections interactively. During phase 5, peer and student-teacher conferences play a very important role, allowing students to receive quality feedback from their peers and the teacher. It is very important that the teacher model how to hold peer conferences so that students have an exact idea of the type of feedback to provide to their peers. The contribution of peers in the development of writing tools, knowledge and strategies should not be underestimated, but teachers must first teach students how to provide that feedback.



Conferences facilitate the personalization of teaching. During conferences, students share their needs, challenges and successes, and their peers or the teacher react to them. The feedback obtained is therefore very useful and accurate because it meets the current needs expressed by the students. It is also understandable, because whether a pair is made up of two peers or the student and teacher, both partners have the chance to work out the direction to take by asking clarification questions and paraphrasing.

To assist students and to help them help themselves in managing phase 5, teachers at both the elementary and middle level used a traffic light or similar system that includes four categories. On the left side is a long rectangle titled “planning.” On the right side is a traffic light. The red light represents drafts; two yellow lights side-by-side represent revision and correction, and conferences respectively; and the green light represents the final copy ready for publication.



Students all receive magnetized numbers allowing them to manage their progress through the different steps of the process by placing their magnets in the traffic light corresponding to the step on which they are at the moment. By placing their magnet in the yellow conference traffic light, students indicate when they need a conference and thereby indicating a need for feedback. With the help of the traffic lights, students also become aware that the writing process is not linear: it is possible that, after having met with a peer or the teacher, a student may decide to return to the planning step.

- 9. Teachers must promote writing by publishing student texts, inviting students to share them, posting them on classroom or school building walls and celebrating student successes.**

By incorporating visual and oral components into the writing project, the ÉCRI model is intended to stimulate student creativity and make the final project presentation interesting and interactive.



Furthermore, providing the required literacy support throughout the model's phases ensures that students develop confidence in their writing abilities and that they feel proud about sharing their final projects with their peers. Publication and presentation of final projects are part of the ÉCRI model's phase 5 (**independent writing**). It is the fourth and last step of the writing process.

10. Teachers must create a literary community and an environment in which students feel safe and willing to take risks.



By incorporating best writing practices that address all aspects of the writing process (that is, the writing processes themselves, learning processes and socio-affective factors) and by providing students with literary support structures and allowing them to interact in

numerous work structures (large groups, small groups and pairs), the ÉCRI model allows students to develop the required writing confidence and ensures that they are willing to take risks.

They develop the tools, knowledge and strategies that are important within a writing community. During the **shared writing** phase, teachers communicate the message to students that they are part of this community by demonstrating that teachers face the same challenges as the students do. Furthermore, they demonstrate that the teachers have confidence in the students and their abilities by asking them to evaluate the teachers' texts using the rubric created in class during phase 2. Students are invited to actively share their learning and adopt a critical perspective toward written texts. Above all, teachers focus on creating a climate of trust in the classroom so that students share their ideas and comments in the spirit of collaboration and support.

Exemplary Literacy Approaches

i. Balanced Literacy

On the professional development site for teachers, eWorkshop, the Ontario Ministry of Education defines literacy as

the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent and think critically about ideas. It enables us to share information, to interact with others and to make meaning. Literacy is a complex process that involves building on prior knowledge, culture and experiences in order to develop new knowledge and deeper understanding. It connects individuals and communities and is an essential tool for personal growth and active participation in a democratic society
(<http://www.eworkshop.on.ca/edu/core.cfm?p=literacyAbout&navID=literacyAbout>).

Although the name of the ÉCRI model seems to imply a primary focus on writing, in fact, it relies on the principles of balanced literacy and also includes reading, oral and other language activities.

The teaching of balanced literacy integrates oral communication, reading, and writing to bring those language skills together. In a balanced literacy approach, language activities such as word study, vocabulary development and enrichment, studying the characteristics of a good text (six traits of writing), teaching of writing strategies and phonological and grapho-phonetic awareness are combined within oral, writing and reading activities.



Reading, oral and language activities are included in the model itself. For example, during modeled writing, students read texts in order to identify the structure, thereby discovering the connections that exist between reading and writing. Still in this phase, students interact to identify textual structure and language elements, enriching their vocabulary, language structures and knowledge of the characteristics of a good text of the type and genre in question. Students then have the chance to discuss the reading and the characteristics of a good text.

These characteristics, based on the six traits of writing, include ideas, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency and conventions. During phase 3, teachers model how to write a good text following the six traits of writing and how to use certain strategies such as a graphic organizer, a rubric and other writing tools. Students also have the opportunity to provide oral suggestions during this phase. In phase 4, students engage in oral interaction related to the writing of a collaborative text containing characteristics of a good text. Furthermore, during phase 5, students have the chance to read some of their classmates' texts and comment on them. Students interact orally with peers in peer conferences and with the teacher during individual conferences. In this phase, the teaching of the traits is based on students' individual needs, according to which teacher and student discuss ideas, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency and/or conventions. At the very end of phase 5, learners present an oral component connected to their writing project.

Besides the oral, reading and language activities included in the different ÉCRI model phases, another way in which balanced literacy is integrated is through the supporting activities described in a previous section.

Exemplary Teaching Approaches (ÉCRI Model)

The ÉCRI model draws on project-based pedagogical principles and facilitates differentiation.

i. Project-Based Pedagogy

Project-based pedagogy organizes teaching around the accomplishment of a final project and has the following characteristics:

- a. ***It encourages interaction among cognitive, affective and social domains:*** project-based pedagogy allows students to be actively involved in the task. As they carry out the project, students become aware of their writing strengths and weaknesses. They learn to use their strengths to overcome writing obstacles and thereby develop strategies allowing them to become more independent, take risks, increase self-confidence and be more motivated. Project-based pedagogy encourages oral interaction between teacher and students and also among students. The student-student discussions in which students take the primary role and teachers adopt the role of facilitator in the background are especially obvious during phase 4 (**interactive writing**).



- b. ***It gives teaching and learning a direction and a goal:*** project-based pedagogy provides teaching and learning with a direction and a goal by giving them a context for use. Providing students with a relevant genre/type of text and choice of writing topics helps them to be interested in and motivated to carry out the final project.

- c. ***It is based on students' prior knowledge:*** the project-based approach makes it possible to connect the project with the student's life experience and to construct knowledge based on previously taught lessons.
- d. ***It encourages integration of the balanced literacy approach:*** by providing a context for language use, project-based learning makes it possible to integrate speaking, listening, reading and writing activities and make connections among them.
- e. ***It encourages scaffolding:*** to properly carry out the final project, the task must be divided into several steps or sub-tasks. These sub-tasks lead students toward the mastery of certain concepts before going on to the next step. Therefore, teachers provide students with support and enable their success.



- f. ***It allows collaboration:*** the ÉCRI model includes various collaborative structures: large groups, small groups, pairs and individuals. Students have many opportunities to discuss and interact.
- g. ***It adds variety to teaching and learning:*** the ÉCRI model incorporates various teaching strategies such as modeled, shared, interactive and independent writing. During supporting activities, teachers adopt a diversity of exemplary teaching strategies such as guided writing, reading aloud, shared reading, and vocabulary development. Students have the opportunity to write, read, and talk about specific genres and types of text by working with them. Teachers choose final projects based on student needs, aptitudes and interests in order to encourage them to actively participate in the learning process and provide them with variety.

The project is usually conducted in three major steps:

1. ***Preparation:*** this step is in phase 1 of the ÉCRI model: **final project presentation.** The teacher presents the genre and type of text to be studied, the procedure to be followed and the learning goals.

2. ***Carrying out the project:*** from phase 2 to phase 5, students explore the genre and type of text being studied and acquire the tools, knowledge and strategies required for carrying out the written component of their final projects. This preparation will allow them to produce their written drafts independently in phase 5. Students work on the final project's visual and oral components throughout the phases after the teacher has presented the final project to them.
3. ***Project presentation:*** In phase 5, this step corresponds to the last step of the writing process. Students present their pieces of writing to their peers by incorporating an oral and a visual component.

ii. Differentiation

Carol Ann Tomlinson (cited in Caron 2003, p. 79) defines differentiation as an “organized yet flexible way of proactively adjusting teaching and learning to meet kids where they are and help them to achieve maximum growth as learners.”

Instructors differentiate their teaching in order to:

1. make learning accessible to students.
2. motivate students and develop their desire to learn.
3. reach students through their ways of learning.
4. base teaching on students' acquired knowledge, experiences and interests.

Differentiation may be conducted on several levels:

1. ***Content differentiation:*** to differentiate content, teachers must identify, based on the program of study of the subject in question, the essential content that all students will have to learn and master, the content that most students will learn and master and the content that only some students will learn and master. In class, students sometimes work on different content simultaneously.

This content differentiation is included in the ÉCRI model in the choice of writing topics offered to students and during student-teacher conferences or peer conferences. In those conferences, teaching is personalized because it stems from individual student needs. Also, during a guided writing support activity, teachers may assemble a small group of students who share the same needs.

Furthermore, the ÉCRI model, by integrating the project-based approach, facilitates content differentiation because teachers can make writing tasks either simple or complex. For example, in the Grade 7 class, most of the students create a parody of a fairy tale while another group of students who want more of a challenge ask to include several fairy tales in their parody.

2. ***Process differentiation:*** with process differentiation, teachers propose that students learn in accordance with various learning styles.

This process differentiation is most often incorporated into visual supports such as the graphic organizer, the thematic wall and numerous examples that are part of the ÉCRI model phases and supporting activities. In other words, the ÉCRI model is intended to present knowledge multimodally to tap into as many student learning styles as possible. Also, the final project has a written, a visual and an oral component for communicating the desired message.

Furthermore, supporting activities, teachers incorporate mini-lessons based on student needs. At this point, to reach all students, teachers may present various ways of arriving at the same goal. For example, in phase 5, if students are experiencing writer's block, teachers may give several examples of strategies for overcoming that obstacle, such as brainstorming, discussion with a partner, circulating in class to find out classmates' ideas and diagramming the main events from their text before drafting.

3. ***Production differentiation:*** with production differentiation, teachers provide students with a choice of suitable communication methods for demonstrating what they have learned.

The ÉCRI model facilitates production differentiation without directly including it as part of the model, however. At the time the DVD was shot, the same final projects were proposed to all students, but several times during the year students had the chance to choose their communication method. For example, in Grade 7 immersion, during a research project-type informative text unit, students could present their research results in the form of a speech or a PowerPoint presentation.

4. ***Structure differentiation:*** to differentiate structures, teachers provide several work structures: large groups, small groups, pairs and individuals. Work structures are chosen based on student needs, interests or level.

This structure differentiation is also part of the ÉCRI model in which students have the opportunity to work in different work structures in order to encourage oral interaction. For example, during phase 2, students work in pairs or small groups to compare texts. Also, students have the chance to work with a partner during peer conferences. During the interactive writing phase, students work in small groups to produce a written text collaboratively. During phase 5, students have several opportunities to work individually.

C. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

This DVD and its workshop document are the products of more than a year of collaboration among early French immersion program teachers at George Street Middle School and the L₂RIC research team. The ÉCRI model was developed and refined during a research project on best practices for teaching writing during which teachers and researchers participated in a professional learning community (PLC).

PLCs have the following characteristics:

1. *The focus is on learning.*

The PLC role is to ensure that each student learns in an optimal way. A group of teachers is formed to examine learning and teaching processes in depth in order to improve professional practices and maximize the learning of each student. Therefore, the PLC provides a paradigm shift. It is no longer about merely teaching, but is about ensuring that every student learns.

2. *There are high academic expectations of students.*

All PLC members share a fundamental belief that all students without exception can learn at a high and appropriate academic level. Student success is no longer the individual responsibility of one teacher alone. All teachers, as a group, are responsible for the success of each student in the school. To ensure that success, according to DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2006: 91), PLC members should examine the following questions:

- a. What do we want our students to learn?
- b. How will we know if they have learned it?
- c. How will we intervene if our students don't learn it?
- d. How can we extend and enrich the learning of students who have demonstrated their ability?

3. *PLC members share a clear common vision and specific goals.*

To optimize each student's learning, PLC members analyze the differences between performance standards for student learning and actual student performance. Based on students' most pressing needs, the PLC sets a goal and makes a plan to improve student performance.

4. *The PLC is focused on problem-solving.*

The PLC is specific to the context in which it arises, so its members have excellent knowledge not only of the issues their school faces but also of the resources and tools at their disposal to resolve those problems. Therefore, they are more able to find solutions to their school's challenges than are workers from outside the organization. Together, PLC members work to increase their knowledge and professionalism in order to effectively meet their students' needs and overcome the obstacles to their learning. According to Fullan (2005, p. 211), this increased knowledge is developed during the interaction of three collective phenomena: 1. New skills and mindsets; 2. Resources are improved and

better focused on needs; 3. The teaching staff's shared commitment is reinforced and they are more cohesive and motivated.

Increased professionalism is founded on action. Teachers' professional development is based on the problems identified in the school and in the teachers' classes. Together, teachers find solutions to those problems and put solutions to the test concretely in their school and classrooms. Discussions centred on problem-solving and discussions following intervention and the analysis of the effectiveness of that intervention contribute to the teachers' professional development. This type of professional development is very useful because it meets teachers' needs.

5. *The PLC is focused on results.*

To take progress into account, PLC members establish parameters along the way to the goal. PLC teacher members continually evaluate the effects of their lessons and practices on student performance and compare them to established parameters. They use data obtained during evaluations for analysis. The obtained results indicate if they are on the right track and progressing in accordance with the established parameters or if they must make some adjustments. PLC members rely on current research and theories to support their practice and decisions and to analyze their results.

6. *The PLC means teachers' continual, structured collaboration.*

All fundamental PLC characteristics depend on teacher collaboration. Teachers meet regularly to share, improve and evaluate their practices, strategies and lessons to optimize student learning. That collaboration requires a lot of work and dedication from teachers. It is worth noting that collaboration is not synonymous with collegiality. In the PLC, there is no focus on understanding and friendship among colleagues. The PLC's goal is to organize and support school teaching staff's collective work efforts to improve student performance. Discussions focus on students and their success in school.

Durrant and Holden (2006) assert that partnerships with other stakeholders, such as other schools, parents and universities, can increase PLC effectiveness, a fact which has led Park Street Elementary School PLC members to approach 2LRIC researchers at UNB Fredericton to establish a partnership. Together, teachers and researchers have identified best practices for the teaching of writing used by PLC members in their classrooms and best practices in current research. Based on students' and teachers' needs, Park Street Elementary School teachers and UNB researchers have developed and improved the ÉCRI model for the teaching of writing.

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