A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO WRITING IN A PRIMARY FRENCH IMMERSION CLASSROOM

by

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A GRADUATING PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

In

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Language and Literacy Education

We accept this major paper as conforming

to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2010

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a fundamental aspect throughout one’s life. This paper explores the use of Culham’s (2003) 6 + 1 Writing Traits in a Grade 2 and 3 French Immersion classroom and investigates its effects on the teacher’s creative writing program. The focus of the unit is the chapter on «les idées» from Ma trousse d’écriture (Spandel, 2007), the French version of the 6+1 Writing Traits. Background information about the context is provided and the teacher’s previous experience in the classroom is discussed, including strategies used and difficulties that arose when teaching emergent writers. A review of the research literature highlights the importance of explicitly teaching writing to emergent writers and the benefits of using a writing program, such as the 6+1 Writing Traits. It further examines how to motivate emergent writers, the positive aspects of self-evaluation and the application of different writing strategies. Following a brief description of the classroom environment and an explanation about the process of the writing unit, the evaluation method is outlined as well as a breakdown of the four concepts taught from «les idées». The discussion section presents some reflections regarding the successes and plans for each concept taught as well as the overall outcomes of the unit and considerations for the future.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii  
Table of contents .................................................................................................................. iii  
Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. iv 

## INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1  
  Description of context ........................................................................................................ 1  
  Definition of problem ......................................................................................................... 3  
  Formulating the objective .................................................................................................. 5  
  Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 5 

## LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................................. 6  
  Emergent writing ............................................................................................................... 6  
  6 + 1 Traits of Writing ....................................................................................................... 8  
  Motivation and self-assessment ....................................................................................... 9  
  Writing Strategies ............................................................................................................ 11  
  Summary .......................................................................................................................... 11 

## LINKS TO PRACTICE ................................................................................................ 12  
  Context of the project: The learning environment ......................................................... 12  
  Preparation ....................................................................................................................... 13  
  Procedure ........................................................................................................................ 13  
  The four concepts: Modification of lessons .................................................................. 15 

## CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................. 24
REFERENCES ..................................................................................................... 26

APPENDICES .........................................................................................................28

Appendix A: Student worksheets ........................................................................28
Appendix B: Pre- and post-evaluation worksheet .................................................38
Appendix C: Performance standards ....................................................................40
Appendix D: Class chart on board .......................................................................42
Appendix E: Les mots de transitions ...................................................................43
Appendix F: Pre- and Post-story self-evaluation worksheets .................................44
Appendix G: The four concepts: Self-evaluation worksheet .................................45
Acknowledgements

First, I would not have made it this far without the support from the two original members of the posse, Karalyn and Alex. We made it through the teaching program together and we embarked on this adventure to complete our Master’s degrees only two years after becoming teachers. I would not have been able to complete this challenge in my life without their support and encouragement over these past couple of years.

I also would like to thank my family for their ever ongoing support, love and encouragement throughout my life and my studies.

Thank you to my girlfriends who listened, supported and encouraged me to take time to enjoy life but to also see the accomplishments I have made. This helped me find the motivation to complete this degree to the best of my abilities.

I also have to thank the teachers with whom I have worked and studied with over the past few years. I have learned so much from your own experiences and from your bank of knowledge. This cohort has been a group of amazing teachers and a huge source of knowledge and support. It is an ongoing journey of learning, and I look forward to the many years of collaboration to come.

Special thanks go to my students: to those who have and who will continue to make being a teacher the best job in the world.
INTRODUCTION

Context

I have taught in the French immersion program in the Coquitlam school district in British Columbia since 2006. I was also a student in this program from Kindergarten through to Grade 12. I continued to study French at Simon Fraser University where I graduated with a French Major and completed the Professional Development Program in French in 2005. The French language has been an important part of my personal and educational life. I am passionate about teaching young children and I enjoy sharing my personal experiences and encouraging them to continue learning an additional language.

French immersion is a program where the students begin their acquisition of a second language in Kindergarten, entering the program with very little or no knowledge of French. In most cases, the majority of the families do not speak French and the classroom is the only environment where the students have the opportunity to learn and use French. All students in French immersion in British Columbia follow the same curriculum.

Throughout the last three years I have taught at the Grade 1 level in the French immersion program. Given that 100 percent of the curriculum is taught in French, I quickly learned that it was necessary to focus on oral language using a variety of visual aids to teach the language and to communicate the curriculum content to five- and six-year olds. Near the beginning of the year, some English is necessary as a medium of communication and instruction to clarify directions and objectives. As the students become accustomed to the directions and routines of the day, English is slowly phased out. By January the students have typically learned how to communicate, read and write using only French without the help of any English.
Although oral language is my big focus during the beginning of the year, and students’ writing output is minimal, I surround the students with print and provide them with opportunities to practise their writing during a variety of activities. My main objective in any writing activity is to develop students as confident writers, who write with ease and who are able to convey a message. From January to March, the students continue building their writing abilities, become much more at ease writing in their personal journals, and their writing output begins to increase significantly. After the March break the students generally have acquired enough vocabulary and their writing has improved to such a degree so as to be able to begin writing creative stories. With these stories, my goal is to have the students transfer their skills in writing from personal experience and apply them to the different elements that make up a creative story.

This school year I began a new chapter in my career as it was my first time teaching a combined-grade class. I taught Grade 2 and 3 in the French immersion program at a new school in the same district. The class was made up of 22 very well-behaved students who, like any class, had demonstrated a range of abilities. There were 14 Grade 2s, three of whom who were approaching provincial learning expectations in writing, nine who were meeting expectations and two who were exceeding expectations in writing. Of the eight Grade 3s, there were four who were approaching expectations and four who were meeting expectations in writing. Based on my experience at the Grade one level, I initially felt it was best to wait until the last three months of school before beginning the creative writing unit in order to allow the students time to build their vocabulary and be exposed to more stories and story language. However, with this group of older students who were eager to write, I began my research project in the second term, allowing the students time to get accustomed to my teaching style and I, time to get to know their individual
learning needs. It also allowed my students a full term to refresh their basic writing skills and begin applying their skills consistently.

**Definition of the problem**

Writing creative stories is a part of British Columbia’s writing curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1995). After teaching creative writing to Grade one students in the past, I always felt their stories demonstrated a limited range of ideas, needed more vocabulary and lacked cohesion. Knowing I was going to be teaching students at a higher grade level—students with more writing experience and a larger French vocabulary—I knew I was going to have to modify my creative writing program and I did not want to end the unit with the same feelings of disappointment in my students' creative writing.

I taught many writing activities to develop the students’ writing abilities and prepare them for the creative writing unit. Throughout the year, the students would practise their writing in their personal journals. The students required the ability to formulate a complete sentence, to develop an idea and to understand how to add information to complete their thoughts. The students would quickly become comfortable and confident writing in their daily journals by using simple sentence structures that were modelled on the board in our daily class journals. I would also work towards building their knowledge of story writing by reading many stories and using story language during any reading activity. I would have them work on story sequencing (beginning, middle and end) as well as story components (who, where, when, problem and solution). Once the students had a good understanding of the different types of characters, settings, simple problems and solutions, as well as the ability to communicate these ideas orally with me and their classmates, they would begin working towards writing their own individual stories.
We would start as a class by brainstorming different characters, settings and times (seasons, time of day, years), as well as possible problems and solutions and then use these ideas to write stories together. However, when the time would come for the students to write individual stories they would have a lot of difficulty. I found the use of drawings and group work were excellent pre-writing activities that helped the students concentrate on developing their ideas. Once their stories were drawn, the students would share these orally, using different paired activities with various classmates, allowing them an opportunity to practise the vocabulary and concentrate on the message they were telling.

Despite the improvement in students’ abilities to write a story after the pre-writing activities, there were many students who had difficulty writing a good age- or level-appropriate story. Although they had a good story in mind, the actual writing did not reflect the ideas the student wanted to send to the reader. Their ideas were not developed and the message was unclear. This led me to ask myself the following questions: Did I give the students too many possibilities? Should I concentrate on only one theme at the beginning of the writing unit? Was the low student performance due to a lack of story or language vocabulary? Should I be explicitly teaching more transition words prior to the writing unit? Is my program missing steps to develop successful story writers?

Prior to beginning my creative writing unit at the Grade 2/3 level, I anticipated encountering the same problems. Given that French is my second language and creative writing has always been a struggle of my own, I am able to understand the students’ frustration. The deficits in my writing program then became my challenge as well, and I wanted to find teaching methods and strategies that could facilitate the students’ learning and the instruction of my creative writing unit.
Formulating the objective

I would like to improve my creative writing program with the use of *Ma trousse d'écriture* (Spandel, 2007) by systematically teaching the strategies related to the writing trait, «les idées», in order to have students produce more detailed, coherent texts and communicate a clear message in their writing. The following terms and definitions relate to this objective:

- **improve my creative writing program**: a reformulation of my writing activities which make up my creative writing unit by creating a fixed schedule and following a systematic plan suggested in *Ma trousse d'écriture*.

- **produce more detailed texts**: texts that include interesting details using a variety of adjectives and creates a clear and colourful mental image for the reader.

- **produce coherent texts**: texts that use transition words and complete sentences enabling one idea to flow to the next and facilitating the comprehension of the text for the reader.

- **produce texts that clearly communicate their message**: texts that keep to the main topic and which transmit a clear message for the reader.

- **systematic instruction of the strategies**: pre-planned and well thought-out lessons taught in a specific order to teach the writing trait to students.

- **writing trait, «les idées»**: one of the six writing traits that examines the effectiveness of the information in the writer’s message. This trait develops the writer’s abilities to write texts that are more detailed, coherent and communicate a clear message.
Research questions

Primary Question

1. How will the implementation of a systematic approach to writing suggested in the
   *Trousses d’écriture* and following the procedures and strategies of the writing trait,
   «les idées», affect the quality and quantity of students’ creative writing?

Secondary Questions

2. How will the development of students’ ideas facilitate their creative writing?

3. How will a systematic and procedural approach affect students’ ability to evaluate
   their own writing? Will it, for example, improve their ability to write more detailed,
   coherent stories that convey a clear message?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emergent Writing

Writing is everywhere and, as a teacher, it is an integral part of my day. I am constantly
using print in various forms to model writing, to demonstrate to the students that writing is a
form of communication and to teach the students the many aspects and components of writing.
Saada and Fortin (2010) support this idea: “L’élève doit être régulièrement exposé à l’écriture
pour acquérir de l’expérience” (p. x) Writing is a difficult task for many students as there are so
many different components that make up a text. Cavanagh (2007) notes:

[p]our écrire un récit (ou n’importe quel autre type de texte) l’élève doit posséder un
ensemble de connaissances dites de « bas niveau » portant sur la grammaire de la phrase
(orthographe d’usage, orthographe grammaticale, syntaxe, etc.) et des connaissances dites
From my experience in the classroom, writing is not a difficult task for every student; however it is a skill that students need to acquire to succeed in their assignments and in their future scholarly lives. Cavanagh maintains that, “[l]e travail d’écriture fait parti intégrant du travail scolaire” (p. xi). Writing, along with reading, surrounds almost all of the academic lessons and is a fundamental part of their daily lives. “Reading and writing work in tandem … .When students read back their writing as they go and read aloud their stories to the teacher and friends each day, they build reading and writing skills simultaneously” (Reid, Schultze, & Petersen, 2005, p. 9). As second language teachers, we are continuously searching for ways to provide the students with opportunities to practise their oral language, build their vocabulary, build their linguistic and cognitive abilities as well as become strong readers and writers. Saada and Fortin (2010) note:

...tout ce que nous faisons en classe contribue à développer la capacité des élèves à écrire. Les tâches orales, écrites et de lecture ainsi que toutes les expériences au quotidien, telles les interactions informelles entre les élèves, permettent d’explorer la langue, d’exploiter le vocabulaire, d’accumuler les idées, de structurer la pensée, de développer l’esprit critique, et bien plus encore. (p. ix)

Nevertheless, developing strong writers requires explicit instruction, and many researchers conclude “that process writing programs facilitate writing and result in meaningful, positive experiences for writers” (Robertson, 2000, p. 12). It is with this information that I began my research to further investigate the systematic writing program called 6+1 Writing Traits (Culham, 2003) in order to motivate young writers and learn how the use of drawing and peer collaboration could benefit the second language learner.
Culham (2003) created the 6 +1 Traits of Writing as an analytic tool to assess writing skills. The 6 +1 Traits of Writing are: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation. Culham describes three advantages to using the trait-based writing approach: it “(1) captures the qualities of what good writing looks like, (2) provides a common vocabulary for talking about writing, and (3) allows students to become self-evaluators” (p.13). These advantages allow teachers and students to follow a program that will not vary from year to year as well as to build on their learning, continually becoming better writers together.

Although each trait has its own chapter and the traits are set in a suggested teaching order, they are interchangeable. It is possible to introduce all of the traits and create a common vocabulary and then return to each trait to teach it in depth. The program can be used as the teacher sees fit. As Culham (2003) advises, “the traits are flexible and should be a cornerstone of your writing program, but they alone aren’t the whole package. They were never intended to be the writing curriculum” (p. 19), making the process approach much less intimidating.

In early primary classrooms, where students are just beginning to write and learn the basics of writing, it is easy to become overly concerned with the conventions of writing. They are still learning what a sentence is, where to put capital letters and how to connect one idea to the next. It is often a struggle for teachers to decide how much time and emphasis to place on grammar, conventions and ideas. Using a program such as the 6 +1 Traits of Writing allows the teacher to stay focused on the objective of the chapter and to apply other strategies as they see fit. Sadaa and Fortin (2010), Culham (2003), Troia and Graham (2003), and Calkins (1986) suggest that, when students can predict when they are going to write, what process they are going to follow and what the expectations are, they will be much more successful in their writing.
For some students, writing comes naturally and for others it is a battle. Saada and Fortin (2010) note, “le syndrome de la page blanche est très répandu chez nos élèves” (p. 1). It is the responsibility of the teacher to create lessons to help students become confident and capable authors. Using the 6 + 1 Traits of Writing, the teacher and the students are guided, and the teacher is able to implement other strategies to motivate the students.

**Motivation and Self-Assessment**

According to Gardner (1985), motivation refers to “the combination of efforts plus desire to achieve the goal of learning” (cited in Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999, p. 23). The students need to see the importance of the writing task and, more importantly, they need to also feel a sense of competence. Cavanagh (2007) suggests using a publication project as a means of motivation because students, who understand that their writing will be read by others, will be more motivated to write. Calkins (1986) suggests that “[a]uthentic writing activities help students appreciate the power and influence of writing and foster a positive motivational regard for writing” (as cited in Troia & Graham, 2003, p. 80). Calkins also points out that writing is a means of communication, and it is essential to teach the students why we write and to create an environment in which students are willing to take risks in order to become better writers and for them to see themselves as authors.

Creating an environment in which students are willing to share their writing will encourage students to see themselves as authors because “[w]hen we acknowledge children publicly, we affirm their belief in themselves as writers” (Reid et al., 2005, p. 11). The authors also posit that, by acknowledging what each student has done correctly, we are revisiting aspects of good writing while encouraging the other students to apply the strategies to their writing. Furthermore, celebrating the students’ success can have a positive effect on their self
competency which, according to Saada and Fortin (2010), is one of the main factors in their motivation to write. Dörnyei (2001) notes that a student’s self-competency can be encouraged and increased by presenting the learner with ongoing opportunities to feel successful and focusing on what the learner is doing correctly (as cited in Klein, 2007). Noels, Clément and Pelletier (1999) suggest that, when students feel personally responsible for their work and have ownership of their learning, they are more likely to enjoy the learning process and be more inclined to put forth their best efforts.

Self-assessment is an excellent strategy to allow students to gain ownership of their learning and encourages them try their best. Brown (2005) defines self-assessment as a measurement tool where students rate their own understanding, their own abilities or their own performance. de Saint Léger (2009) also notes that it is a “tool well-suited to helping learners to develop appropriate goals and self-regulate or monitor their efforts accordingly” (p. 160). Self-assessment can be a useful tool for both the students and the teacher. It provides an opportunity for the teacher to see how the students view their own work and progress (Brown, 2005). Self-assessment should be a continuous process, throughout a lesson, a unit, over a term, etc. which will put more responsibility on the student’s own learning. Self-assessment is “...an ongoing, dynamic tool for reflecting concurrently on past and possible future performance learning behavior” (de Saint Léger, 2009, p. 160). It is important to teach students that writing is an ongoing process and, after assessing their work, it is important to return to their writing and make corrections. Zamel (1982) recommends that students must be taught that revisiting and reworking their own work is an important part of the writing process. Bachman and Palmer (1996) propose that self-assessment allows a student to discover and understand the reasons for their difficulties. Self-assessment is one strategy that can help students understand their areas of
strength and areas that need improvement, which are both important factors in becoming a good writer.

Writing Strategies

There are many different ways to teach writing. Peer work is an excellent instrument to help students prepare and formulate their ideas prior to writing: “[O]ral rehearsal can be a great tool for rehearsing [their] writing” (Reid et. al., 2005). Saada and Fortin (2010) recommend that, for students to become better writers, it is important that students read and share their work, discuss their ideas and complete various types of writing activities. Reid et al. (2005) also propose using drawings as a pre-writing strategy because “as they draw and include details in their pictures, children think about what they will write about their pictures” (p. 15). Bingham, Holbrook and Meyers (2010) also suggest using webs, maps and outlines to help organize their ideas and help become good judges of information to include in their writing. Saada and Fortin (2010) further state that books are an excellent tool to explicitly demonstrate and model the different aspects of writing. Teachers need to consider the many needs and learning styles of their students so that, by incorporating these strategies into a writing program, students will have the opportunity to feel and be successful.

Summary

Writing can be a challenging aspect of the curriculum to teach and to learn. It is through the use of a writing program, such as the 6 + 1 Traits of Writing, and finding the means to motivate students that both the teacher and the students will feel successful. By incorporating teaching strategies such as self-assessment, picture books to demonstrate good writing, peer work and use of student illustrations into a writing program, the writing program will be richer, providing the students with many opportunities to feel like successful and competent authors. It
is important to create a safe environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and subsequently to find ways to celebrate the students' success. Guiding the students through the process of writing will be much easier when there is a structured program to follow. The 6 + 1 Traits of Writing allows teachers to digress from the program and return to it as he or she sees fit, allowing the writing process to progress according to the individual needs of the students.

**LINKS TO PRACTICE**

**Context of the project: The learning environment**

I began my action research the second week of January. I used the first part of the year to put my writing expectations in place and build a safe learning environment; thus fostering the students' readiness to share their work and willingness to take risks. I used the first term to develop and review their basic writing skills such as writing in complete sentences, applying punctuation and using phonetics to spell new words. I used journal writing lessons several times a week to accomplish these objectives. The lessons consisted of pre-journal writing activities, 30 minutes of writing time and post-writing activities. The pre-journal writing activities consisted of journal modeling on the board and allowed me to focus on a writing skill each lesson. The post writing activities offered the students time to share their work. These journal writing lessons provided an opportunity for the students to understand my expectations, become accustomed to pre-writing lessons and allocated an occasion to review and explicitly teach some writing skills.

The students were also taught to revisit their writing during our weekly dictation activities which is an integral aspect of writing (Zamel, 1982). By the end of the first term the students enjoyed journal writing, showed improvement in their writing skills and in their abilities to re-read, locate, and correct their errors. They also became progressively more willing to share their
journal entries with the class. Overall the writing environment in the class was very positive and the students were ready to begin the creative writing unit after the winter break.

**Preparation**

As a teacher in the French immersion program I used *Ma trousse d'écriture*, the French version of the *6+1 Traits of Writing*. Given that my class composition was made up of mostly Grade 2 students, with four of the eight Grade 3 students approaching expectations, I chose to use the Grade 2 kit. The kit consists of a teacher guide, a student workbook, evaluation rubrics and writing samples (one weak and one strong). I found the student workbook had too much reading and not enough space for the students to write and, therefore, I decided to make my own worksheets for each writing lesson. Bingham, Holbrook and Meyers (2010) and Reid et al. (2005) suggest using drawings and graphic organizers to help students develop their ideas, so creating my own worksheets allowed me to include a drawing space for each concept. I was also able to include more writing space and modify the suggested writing topics, making them more relevant to the students and encouraging a higher quantity of writing. I made the worksheets based on the suggestions provided in the teacher guide and the activities in the workbook. I followed the same lesson sequence and used the same vocabulary suggested by the chapter «les idées» in *Ma trousse d'écriture*.

**Procedure**

As part of the systematic approach to writing and as suggested by Sadaa and Fortin (2010), Culham (2003), Trioa and Graham (2003), and Calkins (1986), I used a set schedule allowing the students to predict and mentally prepare for the writing lessons. The chapter «les idées» is divided into four concepts: 1) *Quelle équipe*, 2) *J'ai un message*, 3) *Des détails, des détails, encore plus de détails*, and 4) *Concentre-toi sur ton sujet*. I divided each concept into
two one-hour lessons taught every Monday and Wednesday for four weeks. Monday's lesson was an introduction to the concept. I followed the format and implemented the suggestions provided in the teacher's guide. I created my own worksheets using the key vocabulary words from the student workbook (Appendix A). Wednesday's lesson would consist of a review of the concept, individual writing time and group sharing time. After each lesson, at the end of the day, I took the time to record any modifications I made and why in a personal journal. I also recorded my reflections on each lesson in the same journal. I found this personal journal to be a very valuable evaluation tool, allowing me to note what worked and what did not, what I enjoyed and what the students enjoyed. I often also wrote down things I wanted to be sure to include in the following lesson. This personal reflections journal is something that could be valuable after any lesson and is a great way to improve my teaching.

As a means of evaluation of the implementation of the program on the students' creative writing, I had the students write a pre- and post-story. As writing prompt I used two large posters (Lévesque & Proulx, 2008), one before the writing unit and one after. Each coloured poster has 6 sequential images. I provided the students with a worksheet which consisted of 4 directions (Appendix B). The students had two and a half lessons to complete each of the stories using the same guidelines, however based on different posters. I used British Columbia's Ministry of Education (2002) performance standards, based on the aspect of meaning, to evaluate their work (Appendix C).

We began the first lesson of the unit with a class discussion. I asked the students: "Quelles sont les différences entre l'écriture créative et l'écriture personnelle?" The students helped me fill in the chart on the board (Appendix D). We then came up with a list of words, "les mots de transitions" that are frequently used in writing to transition from one idea to another.
(Appendix E). With the remainder of the lesson, I introduced the poster and the writing activity. As a class, we labelled the poster with the essential vocabulary in each image, while also drawing their attention to smaller details. All of the students’ writing worksheets were kept in a writing duo-tang. The next two full lessons were spent working on their stories. Once the class was done, I had the students complete a self-evaluation worksheet, reinforcing the importance of rereading, revisiting and self-evaluating their writing. The following week, once students had completed their stories and self-evaluations, I began to teach the four concepts of «les idées» (explained below). After the writing unit of «les idées», I used the exact same evaluation procedure. I reviewed the expectations, went over the transition words, labelled the poster with the help of the students and gave them the same amount of writing time. We also completed a writing evaluation with the same self-evaluation sheet (Appendix F).

**Self-evaluations**

Throughout the unit I had the students use a self-evaluation sheet that I had adapted from the pre- and post-story self-evaluations and modified slightly to be relevant to each lesson (Appendix G). The purpose was to review the main concept and to reinforce the importance of revisiting and rereading one’s writing to ensure proper punctuation, complete sentences and adding capital letters where applied appropriately. Although this was something I did continue throughout the unit and the students became accustomed to looking over their work and going back to change and re-work their writing, I did not place a huge emphasis on this in each lesson.

**The Four Concepts: Modification of lessons**

*Quelle équipe!*

The goal of the first concept was to teach the students how images and words work together, encouraging them to create mental images while reading a text and drawing their
mental images before beginning to write. Throughout the two lessons the students were given time to complete the worksheet Quelle équipe! To introduce this lesson, I used a colourful picture book about an elephant at the circus called Amédée (Krings, 1990). The illustrations in the book were very animated, with vivid colours. The characters were also very expressive. Prior to reading each page, I asked the students to identify the words that could describe what they saw. Throughout the lesson we discussed how the images included the key words and illustrated emotions. The students were then given time to decide on an animal doing an action, such as doing a sport, dancing, running, eating, and so on. They then had to choose three key words to describe their topic. To conclude the lesson, the students were given time to begin drawing and labelling their picture.

The following lesson was a continuation of the same concept. As a class, we reviewed our previous lesson followed by an example on the overhead. I drew a picture and had the students help me label the appropriate key words. We used these key words to generate three sentences. Throughout this example, we revisited the importance of adding detail to the picture and making sure all of the important parts of the picture were labelled. Afterwards, the students had to orally explain their picture to three partners. Following the peer sharing activity, the students were given more time to include additional details or key words to their pictures. They were given 10 minutes to write about their pictures. To conclude the lesson, we gathered as a class and a few students shared their writing while hiding their picture from the rest of the class. The rest of the class were given the task of listening and visualizing what the drawing could look like. They were then asked to offer what key words the presenter had included in his or her picture.
Reflections on Quelle équipe!

Overall the two lessons on this concept were very successful. All of the students were able to write at least 3 sentences about their subject. They were all able to generate three key words to help focus their attention so that they could produce a writing sample. The incorporation of drawings, labels and peer sharing time was very successful. I had fewer students searching for French vocabulary and I did not encounter the issue of having a student with nothing to write.

While I experienced some success with this lesson, after some reflection there is one aspect that I believe could be improved. I could have spent more time introducing the term “key words” before reading the picture book. Although the students understood what “key words” meant by the end of the story, the activity with the picture book could have been much richer if they had been previously exposed to the term. It would have allowed the students to begin looking at the pictures and finding the “key words” right away, as opposed to using the first few pages of the book to explain the new term. Next time, I would begin with a short example on the board, similar to the one I used to begin the second lesson, to introduce the new vocabulary.

J'ai un message : Quelle est ton idée?

This was an excellent lesson. The students learned how to write a text with a clear message. The goal of the worksheet was to teach the students the importance of a main idea and how to write focusing on the main idea. The student workbook suggested using the metaphor of a burrito; the ingredients that filled the burrito represented the details, which were all wrapped up by the shell, the main idea. To introduce the lesson, I told the students we were going to make a burrito. I had my shell drawn on the board and they were to offer suggestions as to what I should include in my burrito: “MiAm, miam, les burritos!” This was an excellent opening exercise and
once I had my burrito on the board we labelled the shell “idée principale” and discussed how the ingredients where the words and sentences that explain and add detail to the main idea. It was a perfect segue into our next activity. I chose to read a short excerpt from the student workbook “Frisson l’écureuil”, as opposed to including the words on the worksheet. I did this to help keep the worksheet simple and less overwhelming. The students were to listen and then choose what they thought was the main idea of “Frisson l’écureuil” by placing an “X” beside one of the four options. All of the students were successful in choosing the main idea. It was then time for the students to get to work. They were to choose one of the three main ideas provided on the worksheet or create one of their own. I modified the choices from those provided in the workbook to provide options that appealed to more students in my class. I changed “swimming” to “a sport”, I kept the option of “an activity” as there are many who enjoy other group activities or individual activities other than sports, and then I changed “spiders” to “a subject at school” because I felt that the class did not have a large enough vocabulary to write about spiders. I also kept the option of allowing them to choose their own idea, because as Calking (1986) noted, authentic writing tasks help students see the importance of the writing activity and allows them to chose an idea that is pertinent to them, will help motivate them to write. I also continued to include a pre-drawing activity. The students were very enthusiastic about drawing their main idea and begin labelling the important elements of their drawing.

The second lesson began with a review of the main objective of “Miam, miam les burritos.” They were all able to tell me what they had learnt during the previous class. I then used the overhead projector to draw a picture of myself doing highland dancing, an activity that I used to do. I modeled my thought processes, while adding the details and key words. I was also focusing on the some of the creative writing aspects of who, what, where, when and how. The
students were then given more time to add to their drawings and then 15 minutes to write about their main idea. We used the last few minutes of the class to pair up and share the work with another student.

*Reflections on J'ai un message : Quelle est ton idée?*

These two lessons were excellent. The students were very engaged and loved the concept of the burrito. By the end of the second lesson, all of the students had a writing sample they were very proud of. Some had filled in all of the lines provided. I could see how excited and proud they were of their work and wished I had more time to allow them to share with their friends. For this reason, I used the first 15 minutes of the following lesson to do an inner and outer circle where the students had the opportunity to share with three friends. I then asked for a few volunteers to share with the class, they all wanted to share, even my weaker students. It was great to see their enthusiasm. I was only able to have four students share with the class and then gave the rest of the class the task of listening for the main idea. This all went very well, however, I wish I still had had more time to share.

After reflecting upon my second lesson of this concept, I felt I should have tried to incorporate more of the creative writing portion of my research. Rather than doing an example of something that was personal to me, I could have modeled something that was more creative such as using the elephant from *Amédée*, the story we read the previous week. I would have also had the students create and dictate some of the sentences to me, rather than write the sentences myself. It came down to the amount of time I had, and I felt as though providing the students with enough time for them to write about their picture was more important. This reflection, however, is something I am going to take into consideration next time I incorporate this concept into my creative writing unit.
The objective of the next two lessons was to teach the students how to add detail to their writing, making their writing more interesting and colourful. The first lesson began with a review of the previous two concepts: how mental images and drawings are an excellent way to brainstorm ideas and how to relate and focus those ideas to one main idea. To introduce the concept of adding more details, the teacher’s guide suggested having the students read three excerpts from the student workbook and chose the one with the most detail. I found this to be too easy, seeing as they varied in length and it was fairly obvious which one had more detail. I chose to copy the long excerpt, the one with the most detail, onto the worksheet. The students were encouraged to create a mental image in their head as I read the excerpt aloud. Next, I worked with the students to underline and find the colourful words that added detail. We then continued to work through the worksheet. I asked three students to read the three sentences about a tree aloud. Following this, they were instructed to draw a picture to represent the tree. We re-read the sentences together, and then the students were asked to add colour and detail to their tree. Once the details had been added, they were then asked to choose one of the three sentences and add more detail to that sentence. As a class, we regrouped and re-wrote the three sentences on the overhead. I asked three students who had chosen to re-write the first sentence aloud, then three students who had chosen to re-write the second sentence and then three more who had chosen the last sentence. After hearing the different details added, as a class, we wrote three new modified sentences about the tree. I then read the first version and compared it to the new version. It was an excellent way to model how to create a more vivid, clear mental image by adding detail to their writing.
We began the second lesson with another review. I chose to do an example on the overhead. I drew a boring square house and had written a few sentences about my house, which included very vague details; such as “Here is my house. It has windows and a door. It also has a path and a balcony”. The students then offered suggestions of details that should be added to the house according to the few sentences I had written. They suggested obvious things such as: adding a walkway, windows, a balcony and less obvious things: grass, flowers and a chimney. Following the students suggestions, as a class, we labelled the house, ensuring to add specific details to the labels; such as two square windows, a walkway made out of rocks, a blue balcony, short green grass etc. We then added these details to the few sentences I had previously written. The students really understood the concept of “Les détails, les détails, encore plus de détails.”

The students were then given another worksheet as an extension to this concept. To engage their imaginations and incorporate more creative writing, I chose to have them make a poster about a lost object. It could be an imaginary or real object that was very special to them. They were instructed to draw the object with a lot of detail and write a detailed description to ensure others would be able to have a clear mental image of their lost possession, to ensure the public could help find it. They bought into the task and were very eager to get started. The students were able to use most of the lesson time to complete their poster, add colour, add labels and write several detailed sentences about their object. However, we only had time for a couple of students to share their posters.

Reflections on Les détails! Les détails! Encore plus de détails!

I was very pleased with the outcomes of the students’ writing and I could see a big improvement in their ability to write about a main idea, and add detail to their writing. All of the
students continued to be engaged in the writing lessons and I very rarely had to encourage or help students to write more or come up with an idea. Again, time was a factor in how many students had the chance to share their work. I chose to take some time from our morning routine the following day to allow more students to share their posters. I could see how important it was to the students and how big of an impact it played on their writing self-competency. They were so proud of their work and were much more motivated to produce a higher quantity and quality of writing when they knew they were going to be sharing with their peers and getting positive reinforcement from their classmates and myself. One last reflection on the lost object poster activity would be to clarify what kinds of detail I was looking for. If the student chose to create a toy animal or fictive person, I had several students write about things their object liked and less about what the object looked like. The details should have been more about the appearance of the object and less about the feelings about their object. Nevertheless, the students were using their imaginations.

Concentre-toi sur ton sujet!

The fourth concept was very similar to the second concept and its objective was to concentrate on the main idea and keep the ideas focused to the main message. It was an excellent opportunity to review the last three concepts. With the use of the catchy titles, the students had no problem remembering the goals of each lesson. To introduce the goal of concentrating on the main idea, I read my own example of a story that did not make sense. The students were then asked why the story did not make sense, and they were able to tell me it was because there were too many ideas “all mixed up together.” I then used a few examples from the student workbook. These examples were short paragraphs that contained one sentence that did not make sense. I chose to read these aloud and have the students work in pairs to discuss which sentences did not
fit with the other sentences. This was a very good introduction and provided good examples of what happens when a writer does not concentrate on the main idea. I then introduced the writing activity by bringing out a few small stuffed Olympic mascots, asking the students to tell me about each one. Right away I had their attention. I chose four creative writing topics (different from the workbook), two were about the 2010 Winter Olympic mascots, one was about a princess, and the fourth one was about their favourite animal’s vacation. The students had 20 minutes to chose a topic, draw a picture and begin labelling the picture. To end this lesson I had them do a peer sharing activity to tell their story to two different students.

The following lesson began with another sharing activity to refresh their memories and allow them some time to add more detail to their drawings and organize their thoughts. The rest of the lesson was spent writing. The students who finished before the lesson ended had time to start a title page.

*Reflections on Concentre-toi sur ton sujet!*

The last writing activity was the most successful. Every student was really engaged in the creative writing story. I was very happy I had chosen creative writing topics that the students were enthusiastic about. Again, time was an issue. The title page became an extra project in the class. I had to prolong my writing unit because every student in the class was eager to share their story and title page. I then decided to make a class book with their creative writing stories. It quickly became a popular choice during silent reading. As Cavanagh (2007) suggested, publication projects are a great way to motivate students and next time I would allow for more time to evaluate and correct their writing and create an official publication project as opposed to putting them together in a duo-tang. Although it would take more time, having the students type
up their work and make a book by including images associated with their writing would be an excellent way to conclude the unit and review all of the concepts learned.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I found that using a systematic approach to writing, with the implementation of *Ma trousse d'écriture*, was an excellent way to motivate students to write detailed, coherent texts and encourage them to communicate a clear message. The students responded positively to the catchy titles and common vocabulary provided by the writing kit. The student workbook offered several short and concise examples, allowing me to choose the examples that were relevant to my students. The introductory activities suggested by the writing kit were very effective, being short and quickly engaging the students. I always had numerous students wanting to volunteer their thoughts and ideas. I found the use of graphic organizers, which provided drawing space for every activity, took more time than suggested by *Ma trousse d'écriture*, however they were very effective as a pre-writing activity. The students’ writing was much less interrupted and of a higher quantity and quality due to the fact they had most of the vocabulary necessary prior to writing. By allowing time for peer sharing activities was also a huge success in the classroom. Those who were timid at the beginning of the unit became much more comfortable sharing their work and became much more motivated to produce a better quality of work. Using themes, such as the Olympics and other choices that were current and interesting for the students, also played an important role in the students’ motivation to write. I found keeping the number of subject choices to three and offering one open ended subject, allowed for much less confusion for the students and less difficulty choosing what to write about. The students were all very pleased with their writing progress and proud of their
accomplishments. I will definitely continue to incorporate *Ma trousse d'écriture* in my classroom practices.

In the future I would make small changes to the lessons taught during this unit. One major change I would make would be to try and spend more time on the self-assessment aspect. I believe the students will be more intrinsically motivated and increasingly proud of their accomplishments if the time is spent celebrating their success from beginning to end. The process of self-assessment takes time as it needs to be taught explicitly. It is something I will make an effort to begin earlier on in the year, making it more automatic during our creative writing unit. As mentioned earlier, the use of a final publication project will also be something I will consider when completing my creative writing unit. Using the process of self-assessment and combining it with the end goal of a "published" class book, will motivate and reinforce the importance of revisiting and reworking a piece of writing, and allow the students to take ownership of their work.

In the upcoming school year, I would like to introduce the concepts of «*les idées*» earlier on in the year. As the titles were memorable, I could use this unit as a reference during our creative writing unit. Using a writing program based on the writing traits allows certain aspects to be taught as individual lessons and when appropriate in the teacher's program. Although I found the systematic approach to writing using the writing kit to be beneficial to my creative writing program, *Ma trousse d'écriture* is an excellent tool for any writing unit. I look forward to incorporating more of the writing traits into my all of my writing units, improving all types of writing.
REFERENCES


Culham, R. (2003). 6+1 Traits of Writing: The complete guide, Grades 3 and up. NEED TO FIND THE ACTUAL PUBLISHING INFORMATION.


Quelle équipe!

Les images et les mots forment une très belle équipe.

1. Imagine un animal qui est en train de faire une action particulière.
2. Dessine ce que tu vois dans ta tête dans la boîte ci-dessous.
3. Ajoute des étiquettes à ton dessin.

Examine ton dessin.

- Que vois-tu?
- Quels mots te viennent en tête?
Écris trois mots qui décrivent ton dessin.

1. ___________________________________

2. ___________________________________

3. ___________________________________

Rédige. Écris des phrases à propos de ton animal.

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Quelle est ton idée?

Miam, Miam! Les burritos!

La tortilla = l'idée principale

Les ingrédients = Les mots et les phrases qui expliquent et qui ajoutent des détails à l'idée principale.

Écoute l'histoire de Frisson l'écureuil.

Réfléchis. Quelle est l'idée principale? Mets un <X> à côté de l'idée principale de l'auteur.

_____ Les extraterrestres _____ Les arbres

_____ Les écureuils _____ Les peu d'un écureuil

À ton tour. Choisis une idée principale ou invente une.

Un sport = ____________________________

Une activité = __________________________

Un sujet à l'école = ______________________

Invente une = __________________________
Dessine et ajoute les mots clés.

Rédige. Écris au moins quatre phrases à propos de ton idée principale.
**Les détails! Les détails!**

**Encore plus de détails!**

*Souline* les mots qui ajoutent de l’information intéressante et qui nous aident à créer une image mentale claire.

Chez tante Mimi, il y a des papillons sur les pots de confiture, des coccinelles dans le coin des murs, des chatons dans les tiroirs, des poissons rouges dans une vieille baignoire et un cochon dans le salon! Mimi adore Loulou, son mignon cochon.

Lis :

L’arbre dans lequel j’aime le plus grimper est gros. Son écorce est dure. Mon arbre a des branches.

Imagine l’arbre dans ta tête. Dessine-le :

Maintenant ajoute des détails et des couleurs à ton arbre.
Choisis une des phrases. Ajoute des détails.
Tu as perdu ton objet préféré! Tu as besoin de faire une affiche pour vous aider à retrouver ton objet.

- Dessine ton objet avec des détails.
- Ajoute des étiquettes et de la couleur.
- Écris un texte détaillé.

J'espère que ça va t'aider à retrouver ton objet préféré!
Concentre-toi sur ton sujet!

Choisis un sujet. Utilise l'organisateur graphique pour écrire tes idées

- La fin de semaine de Muk-Muk
- La journée de Quatchi à Vancouver
- Les vacances d'une princesse
- Le voyage de ton animal préféré

Mon dessin

de mon sujet principal
Rédige au moins 5 phrases. Écris quelque chose d'intéressante ou d'important à propos de ton sujet.

N'oublie pas : d'introduire ton sujet
de rester sur ton sujet
des phrases complètes
des majuscules et les points
d'ajouter des détails

Titre :
Écris une histoire en utilisant les images.

1. Il faut inclure un début, un milieu et une fin.
2. Écris au moins deux phrases pour décrire et expliquer ce qui arrive dans chaque image.
3. Donne des noms aux personnages et ajoute des détails pour rendre l'histoire intéressante.
4. Écris avec les phrases complètes. N'oublie pas les lettres majuscules et les signes de ponctuation (points, points d'exclamation, points d'interrogation et virgules).

Titre : ____________________________
Appendix C: Performance Standards

La grille de 2ème année

Meaning

Not Yet Within Expectations
• consists of ideas or events that are not logically connected into a story
• little logical detail or description
• may not have a story problem
• often very short

Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)
• may be a simple retelling of a story the student has read, heard, or viewed
• includes some details; these are often irrelevant or repetitious (and confusing)
• story usually includes a simple concrete problem that is often not resolved
• details about characters and background information recently learned may take over, so that the initially storyline is lost

Fully Meets Expectations
• often modelled on stories read, heard, or viewed (may combine elements of two or more stories)
• includes many details; these are often loosely related to the central story problem (unsorted detail)
• story usually includes a problem, but the writer may have difficulty with a solution and end abruptly
• often includes characters (real or imagined) and background information recently learned about; connection to the storyline is sometimes weak

Exceeds Expectations
• some sense of individuality; often incorporates elements of stories they have heard, read, or viewed with their own ideas
• includes supporting details; some of these may district from development of the main storyline
• story problems are usually concrete and developed through action-oriented events; the solution is less developed (may end abruptly)
• storyline often incorporates relevant characters ad background information recently learned about
La grille pour 3ième année

Meaning

Not Yet Within Expectations
• purpose or "story problems" may be unclear
• few details; these may be irrelevant
• appears unaware of audience

Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)
• tends to use ideas that have been discussed in class or presented in another story, poem, or television show
• makes some attempts to add interest through detail
• may show some awareness of audience

Fully Meets Expectations
• some sense of individuality, although the work may be modelled on another selection
• includes some supporting details that add "colour"
• appears to consider the audience or reader’s reaction

Exceeds Expectations
• some originality and creative development
• includes supporting details that add "colour"
• shows a sense of audience – tries to make an impact
La différence entre l’écriture créative et l’écriture personnelle

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# Les mots de transitions

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</table>
Evaluation personnelle de mon écriture

Histoire Créative (# 1 et # 2)

Relis ton histoire et corrigé ton écriture

A faire :

- Souligne les noms des personnages en ROUGE.
- Souligne les mots de transitions en BLEU.

Répond aux questions suivantes. Encercle Oui ou Non.

1. J'ai utilisé des phrases complètes.
   Oui  Non

2. J'ai écris au moins deux phrases pour chaque image.
   Oui  Non

3. J'ai utilisé les lettres majuscules et les signes de ponctuation (les points).
   Oui  Non

   Oui  Non

5. J'ai ajouté des détails à mon histoire.
   Oui  Non
Evaluation personnelle de mon écriture

Quelle équipe

Relis ton histoire et corrigé ton écriture

A faire :

- Souligne les mots clés en ROUGE.

Répond aux questions suivantes. Encercle Oui ou Non.

1. J'ai utilisé des phrases complètes.
   Oui   Non

2. J'ai écrit au moins 3 phrases qui sont reliées à mon image.
   Oui   Non

3. J'ai utilisé les lettres majuscules et les signes de ponctuation (les points).
   Oui   Non

4. J'ai donné un nom à mon animal.
   Oui   Non

5. J'ai utilisé mes mots clés.
   Oui   Non
Evaluation personnelle de mon écriture

Quelle est ton idée

Relis ton histoire et corriges ton écriture

A faire :

• Souligne les mots clés en ROUGE.

Répond aux questions suivantes. Encercle Oui ou Non.

1. J'ai utilisé des phrases complètes.
   
   Oui  Non

2. J'ai écrit au moins quatre phrases.
   
   Oui  Non

3. J'ai utilisé les lettres majuscules et les signes de ponctuation (les points).
   
   Oui  Non

   
   Oui  Non

5. Toutes mes phrases sont reliées à mon idée principale
   
   Oui  Non
Evaluation personnelle de mon écriture

Les détails, les détails, encore plus de détails!

Relis ton histoire et corrige ton écriture

A faire:

• Souligne les détails en ROUGE.

Répond aux questions suivantes. Encercle Oui ou Non.

1. J'ai utilisé des phrases complètes.
   Oui       Non

2. J'ai écris au moins quatre phrases.
   Oui       Non

3. J'ai utilisé les lettres majuscules et les signes de ponctuation (les points).
   Oui       Non

   Oui       Non

5. Toutes mes phrases sont reliées à mon idée principale
   Oui       Non
Evaluation personnelle de mon écriture

Concentre-toi sur ton sujet!

Relis ton histoire et corrige ton écriture

A faire :

• Souligne les mots clés en ROUGE.

Répond aux questions suivantes. Encercle Oui ou Non.

   Oui                       Non

2. J’ai écris au moins cinq phrases.
   Oui                       Non

3. J’ai utilisé les lettres majuscules et les signes de ponctuation (les points).
   Oui                       Non

4. J’ai ajouté des détails à mon histoire.
   Oui                       Non

5. Toutes mes phrases sont reliées à mon idée principale.
   Oui                       Non