Change Over Time: The Redevelopment of Intervention préventive en lecture-écriture in Canada

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In her observations and experiences with young children, Marie Clay (2004) tells us that “Before 7 years of age, the child is a language genius who can learn two languages easily, keep them separate, and use different languages in different settings…” (p. 2). This theory/perspective can be explored in Canada where children, regardless of the language spoken at home, have the opportunity of English or French as their language of instruction in school. Aimed at supporting Grade 1 students from English classrooms, the implementation of Reading Recovery® in Canada is well established. Its redevelopment as Intervention préventive en lecture-écriture (IPLÉ) serves as an intervention for French language learners and continues to evolve. As interest and enrollment in French programs continues to expand in Canada (EdCan Network, 2019), Clay’s words regarding learning multiple languages resonate when supporting children being taught in French who are struggling in their literacy development.

Background
Over 50 years ago, the government of Canada adopted the Official Languages Act that recognized English and French as the official languages of the country and ensured the equal status of both. While it does not require that every Canadian speak English and French, it values either language spoken and guarantees that services are available in a person’s language of choice (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2020). Results from the 2016 Canada Census show that 20% of Canadians identify French as the language spoken at home, with the majority based in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, and New Brunswick (Statistics Canada, 2016). In an education context, everyone has the right to be educated in either English or French, and documents must be available in the language of instruction such as communication between home and school as well as professional resources that are provided to teachers.

An important distinction is that there are two possible options that are available to students: French First Language and French Immersion. In a French First Language school, French is the language of instruction for the entire school day and typically, French is the language that is spoken at home. Interventionists and specialist support are provided in French. French Immersion is a program that falls within English programs and is taught as an additional language at the school. Students are “immersed” in the French language for most of the school day, with the percentage of English instruction gradually increased at each grade level. This program is designed for children with little or no previous understanding of French or an expectation that it be spoken at home. Interventionist and specialist supports are provided in French, if available.

Historical Context
Clay believed that the same theoretical model used to create Reading Recovery could be applied to students in another language. She had visited Canada on several occasions and saw the possibilities of offering Reading Recovery in French.

In 1995, Clay began the process of redeveloping Reading Recovery into French with Gisèle Bourque, who...
would later become Canada’s first trainer in IPLÉ. This course of action was not simply a translation of the professional resources and training into French. Rodríguez, et al., (2003) explained the reconstruction in other languages must “…fit the linguistic and cultural context and be sensitive to the literacy developments that children need to master in each language” (p. 38).

Canada and the United States share similar features when considering education governance structures. In Canada, education is distinctly a provincial responsibility. Within each province, geographical boundaries create local structures. These entities have differing names (e.g., school board, region, district) but all have authority as defined in their provincial Education Acts for educational matters that may include implementation of the provincial curriculum, human resources, operations, and facilities management (Hickcox, 2013).

In 2000–2001, a pilot program trained IPLÉ teachers at the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP), Nova Scotia’s French First Language School Board. The following year, the implementation expanded to include all 20 teachers at all CSAP schools across the province and was supported by two teacher leaders (Bourque, 2001).

Since that time, IPLÉ’s implementation in Canada has grown to include students enrolled in French Immersion programs where French is an additional language of instruction. Clay (2015) believed that even if a child speaks a different language from the teacher’s, they have already learned how to learn language.

Today’s Context
Currently, two bilingual trainers collaborate to support the IPLÉ implementation which has expanded across four time zones in Canada — from coast to coast and up to the most northern regions of the country. Six teacher leaders, all with a deep understanding of literacy processing theory in French as a first and/or second language, guide and support 75 teachers in 60 schools (Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery [CIRR], 2019, p. 6).

The provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island support provincial implementations, while IPLÉ’s strong roots are established in multiple school districts located in Vancouver, British Columbia, and the Yukon as well as across the province of Manitoba.

Moving Forward
One of the challenges faced with growing IPLÉ’s implementation to new regions in Canada is the requirement in many French Language school boards for all professional resources to be available in French, the language of instruction. Currently, the only official translation available to IPLÉ teachers and teacher leaders is Le sondage d’observation en lecture-écriture (Clay, 2003). This resource is an adaptation that dates to Clay’s (1993) first edition of An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement. Their English Reading Recovery teacher and teacher leader counterparts, however, are currently using Clay’s 2019 fourth edition of the Observation Survey.

Clay (2014) defined awareness as it relates to literacy as “being able to attend to something, act upon it, or work with it” (p. 38). The same holds true, she added, when thinking about the implementation of IPLÉ. In 2018, the CIRR and its board of directors
initiated an increased awareness on IPLÉ with its plan to train an additional bilingual trainer. Since then, the focus has been to support their IPLÉ teachers and teacher leaders by increasing the availability to French professional resources.

With the support of the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and with permission from New Zealand, the CIRR has completed the official translations for Canadian Guidesheets that are being used in the 2020–2021 school year. In addition, permission has been obtained from New Zealand to translate and adapt their Tutor Information Sheets. Preliminary inquiries have been made by the CIRR and a publishing company regarding adaptations and translations of two of Clay’s works: *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (4th ed., 2019) and *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (2nd ed., 2016), and IPLÉ teacher leaders are reviewing texts to add to the IPLÉ Booklist.

Clay (1990) tells us that “if a culture is clear about its goals for language learning, the problems of teaching children to read ... can be faced” (p. 90) resulting in creating successful readers and writers. Culture and language are interconnected and dependent upon one another. In recognizing French and English as official languages and that both have equal status, the Canadian government has demonstrated its commitment to valuing and promoting bilingualism. Within an educational context, parallels can be drawn between Reading Recovery and its redevelopment as IPLÉ. Both interventions provide children who struggle in their literacy development the opportunity for support in their language of instruction by valuing the child’s language and culture.

**References**


### About the Author

Lisa Harvey is a national IPLÉ trainer supporting the implementation across Canada. She is an experienced educator with over 15 years teaching in Nova Scotia French Immersion classrooms at the early elementary level and in specialist positions including resource and early literacy. Lisa is passionate about French language instruction and student achievement.