



Ottawa, May 26, 2014

### **The Skill Development Financing Debate: Off to a Bad Start**

**The current debate over financing for the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences (RESDAC) in Canada is getting out of hand. To claim, as Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) did, that *"for many years federal literacy funding was going to the same organizations to cover the costs of administration and research papers instead of funding projects that result in improving the literacy skills of Canadians"*<sup>1</sup> is false.**

The truth is far more complex. In reality, the federal government does not finance and has never financed this pan-Canadian network of organizations to offer services directly to lower literacy adults. That is not the role of these organizations. To suggest at the present time that this network has failed to deliver results is borderline ironic and, more importantly, does not take into account the Canadian jurisdictions and rules established by the federal government itself in this regard.

On the other hand, over the years, federal financing (through the National Literacy Secretariat, NLS, and the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, OLES) has helped create a unique expertise in Canada in literacy and skill development in the fields of research, innovation, information, and partnership. These advances provided a better understanding of the complex realities of literacy and skill development in countries like Canada, the economic and social issues that they represent and especially the challenges that Canadians face as a society in this regard.

Suggesting now, for reasons that are unclear, that *"Canadian taxpayers will no longer fund administration of organizations but will instead fund useful literacy projects"*<sup>1</sup>, shifts the debate, presents an incomplete view of reality, and misleads citizens.

The reality is far more complex. Canadian adults have multiple and complex needs in terms of education and skills development. We, now, have an up-to-date picture of these numerous challenges (notably thanks to international surveys such as PIAAC-2012). Political, social and economic actors must therefore take action today in order to make this issue a priority across the country. Together, we must build a strategic vision for developing skills for life.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotation of Alexandra Fortier, press secretary for Minister Jason Kenny, taken from the article "Adult literacy programs in trouble, warns advocacy groups" on CBC news site – Calgary, May 16, 2014.

*"Effective skills policies are everybody's business....Designing effective skills policies requires more than co-ordinating different sectors of public administration and aligning different levels of government. A broad range of non-governmental actors, including employers, professional and industry associations and chambers of commerce, trade unions, education and training institutions and, of course, individuals must also be involved."*, affirms the OECD in its report published in the fall of 2013. "Skills for life"?

While reports of recent years and expert opinions agree on the need to implement "policies designed to provide high-quality lifelong opportunities for learning (to help) ensure that the adults of the future maintain their skills", Canada seems to be charting a different course. Which course? Are we on the wrong track? It's hard to know or to understand.

While Canada should be concentrating on assisting communities in reacting to change, in building a culture of learning that champions and supports ongoing innovation...<sup>2</sup>

While the importance of adult training and education is clear in today's new world of change and complexity, adult education has become invisible in Canada. While not so long ago we were one of the world leaders in this field...<sup>3</sup>

While policies and programs should allow Canadian adults to upgrade their basic skills to actively participate in the life and economic development of their community in order to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century society...<sup>4</sup>

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) decided to ignore the expert opinion and skills of a strong network, which is present throughout Canada and which works with provincial and territorial governments, with social and economic actors, with different linguistic and cultural groups and with the most vulnerable communities.

It's a choice. And in our opinion it's the wrong choice for Canada!

Isabelle Salessé

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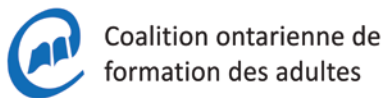
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<sup>2</sup> Taken from "L'apprentissage, une compétence essentielle à la survie au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle", notes from the Lifelong Learning Forum 2010 of the Adult Learning Network of Ottawa, November 7, 2010, Tim Brodhead, President, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

<sup>3</sup> Ditto

<sup>4</sup> Taken from "Un rêve pour l'éducation des adultes au pays : un rêve réalisable" speech by Paul Bélanger, Lifelong Learning Forum 2010 of the Adult Learning Network of Ottawa, November 7, 2010.

RESDAC and its Partners



Ensemble.



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