



Fifteen years ago, the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF) [Canadian federation for literacy development in French] added its voice to all those that encourage and support the efforts of people who want to learn to read and write and who want to do so in French.

In many ways, the FCAF resembles these people whose mission it is to serve. Every year, thousands of people are driven by a passionate desire to overcome the obstacles that have kept them from living a full life. They decide to learn how to read and write. All who work within the literacy network share this same passionate desire to succeed. It is this passion that distinguishes the Federation: a passion that makes a difference.

Favourable Conditions for Literacy Development

The year 2005 saw several events that attracted more attention to the issue of literacy in Canada.

In February, the federal government tabled a budget in which it committed itself to develop a comprehensive strategy in support of literacy development. The Minister of State for Human Resources Development then consulted literacy organizations and other stakeholders across Canada and encouraged them to submit action plans to her. Working together, these organizations then prepared and submitted to the Minister a set of recommendations for a comprehensive national literacy strategy for the coming 10 years.

In May and November 2005, Statistics Canada published the results of the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (IALLS). This survey showed that the ability of Canadians to understand and use the information that they read had not improved over the preceding 10 years. Two out of every five Canadian adults aged 16 to 65 still do not have the skills needed to meet the demands of a sophisticated economy such as Canada's.

In early November 2005, the former head coach of the Montreal Canadiens, Jacques Demers, publicly acknowledged that he could not read or write. This disclosure put a human face on the data from Statistics Canada. It shocked the public and drew the media's attention to this major issue.

Lastly, in late November of 2005, a federal election was called to elect a new government for Canada on January 23, 2006. The various organizations that work on literacy issues in Canada took advantage of the election campaign to try to obtain commitments on literacy development from each of the political parties.



Mobilizing and Responding Rapidly

One of the most important ways in which the FCAF has matured over the past 15 years is in its ability to respond rapidly to events. Here are some of the ways that it did so over the past two years.

■ Responding to the federal government's Action Plan for Official Languages, the Federation mobilized existing resources in the literacy community to develop the *Réseau d'experts en alphabétisation familiale* [network of family literacy experts], which it officially launched in January 2005.

■ Responding to the invitation from the federal Minister of State for Human Resources Development, the Federation and its members co-ordinated their efforts and submitted a comprehensive Canada-wide plan and provincial and territorial plans for French-language literacy development over the coming 10 years.

■ Responding to the November 2005 federal election call, the FCAF spoke out during the January 2006 election campaign to better position literacy as a social and economic issue in the minds of Canadians.

■ From April 2004 to December 2005, the Federation held forums for over 1 000 communication professionals and managers in the public and private sectors to make them more aware of the need to communicate more clearly with the general public.

Through its rapid response to all these events, the FCAF confirmed its leading role in advocating for and supporting French-language literacy and essential skills training in Canada.

Co-ordination and Public Relations

In addition to mobilizing its members to respond to breaking events, the Federation continued its efforts to promote several causes that it holds dear.

- Together with the *Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes* (ICÉA), the FCAF began preparing for the next International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), to be held in 2009. The FCAF and ICÉA also met several times in 2005 to define some concrete steps that they can take in future to promote the right to adult education.
- The FCAF helped to spread the influence of Canadian Francophone institutions worldwide by participating in the Professional Seminar for Uniterra Partners and the Third International Meeting on the Globalization of Solidarity, both of which were held in Senegal in November 2005. The FCAF followed up on these initiatives in April 2006 by signing a memorandum of understanding under the Uniterra program with the *Centre canadien d'étude et de coopération internationale*. This agreement will encourage exchanges between French-speaking African countries and the members of the FCAF.
- The FCAF participated in a project entitled *Pour une presse écrite plus accessible* [making print journalism more accessible], sponsored by the *Association de la presse francophone* (APF). The purpose of this project was to raise awareness among publishers and editors of French-language newspapers of the need to make their publications more accessible to their readers in Canada's Francophone communities. The FCAF assessed the accessibility of some of the APF's member newspapers and trained 15 editors, journalists, and graphic designers in the principles and best practices of plain language.
- The FCAF also signed a memorandum of understanding with the *Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Canada* (RDÉE) [francophone economic development and employability network of Canada] and the *Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada* (RCCFC). The purpose of this agreement is to develop the essential skills of francophones in Canada.

Network of Family Literacy Experts

The FCAF originally established the *Réseau d'experts en alphabétisation familiale* (REAF) [network of family literacy experts] in 2003-2004 in response to the federal government's Action Plan for Official Languages.

The Federation officially launched the REAF in January 2005 and spent the year 2004-2005 promoting this network and getting its programs up and running. At the same time, the REAF's member organizations expanded their own networks of partners in sectors where they had had little or no presence before, such as universities. As a result of these efforts, federal departments and provincial ministries increasingly came to recognize the importance of family literacy programs.

In 2004-2005, the FCAF and its member organizations signed an agreement with the federal government that made it possible to stabilize their network, to hire more literacy practitioners and to train them so that they would be better equipped to do their jobs. The FCAF's member organizations also increased the number of service points in several provinces and territories and developed new approaches to programming.

In 2005-2006, the FCAF and its member organizations undertook a formative evaluation to determine how effectively the REAF network was being implemented. To help conduct this evaluation, the FCAF retained the services of the *Centre canadien de leadership en évaluation*, a francophone non-profit consulting firm that specializes in this area.

The FCAF's purpose in conducting this evaluation was to determine to what extent the FCAF and the REAF were using the right methods to achieve the targeted outcomes of this initiative. This evaluation also determined how parents who had participated in various models of family literacy programs involving various approaches to family literacy had been affected by these experiences.

Promotion and Communication

Literacy in the headlines

The two things that attracted the most media attention to literacy issues in 2005-2006 were the publication of the results of the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey and the publicity that literacy organizations generated during the federal election campaign.

From the very start of this campaign, the FCAF's members co-ordinated their efforts to raise public awareness of literacy as a policy issue in Canada. We obtained some commitments from a few candidates in several parts of Canada. This initiative's main achievement was to better position the Federation to continue its efforts to raise awareness among all the political parties and in the media after the election campaign was over.

Francophone literacy learners' awards

Every year, some 80 francophone literacy learners show their courage by entering the competition for the prestigious *Prix de la francophonie en alphabétisation* awards, sponsored by the *Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française*. To enter this contest, they must write an essay no more than five pages long describing how they improved their ability to read and write in French and thereby improved their lives. The FCAF promotes this event to people who are currently taking literacy training, and it co-ordinates the selection of the winners, a process in which literacy learners participate.

Publication of letters from francophone literacy learners to the FCAF's spokesman

Every year, the FCAF invites francophone literacy learners throughout Canada to write letters to the FCAF's official spokesman, well known Franco-Manitoban singer/songwriter Daniel Lavoie, to tell him what made learning to read and write in French so important to them. The response to this invitation is always enthusiastic: in 2005-2006, 324 literacy learners wrote to Daniel. All of the letters received each year are compiled into a collection, *Le Printemps des lettres*, which is published in May.

À lire, a French-language magazine on literacy issues

À lire is the only French-language magazine in Canada that is devoted to literacy issues, and its purpose is to raise awareness of these issues among decision-makers and the public. Its press run is 6 000 copies.

The FCAF published two issues of *À lire* in 2004-2005. Issue 11 dealt with the impact of low literacy skills on people's health. Issue 12, published in Spring 2005, dealt with the need to raise the average literacy level to meet the needs of both employees and employers.



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"Towards Clearer Communications" Forums

The FCAF strongly believes that all organizations that deal with the general public must communicate with them clearly in plain language. To promote this idea, from April 2004 to December 2005, the Federation held a series of 11 bilingual forums on clear communication, entitled *Towards Clearer Communications*. These forums were held in every province of Canada and were attended by a total of approximately 1 000 organizational communication professionals and managers.

At these forums, the FCAF:

- raised awareness among participants of the different levels of literacy in Canada;
- familiarized the participants with the literacy organizations operating in each of their provinces (many participants were unaware of their activities);
- more clearly identified the work that the participants must do to ensure that clear communication practices become the norm in their organizations.

Clear-communication services offered by the FCAF

The *Communicateurs efficaces* division of the FCAF offers clear-communication consulting, writing, and training services to public, private, and community-sector organizations that deal directly with the general public. In recent months, *Communicateurs efficaces* has completed major projects for a number of government departments and agencies. For example, in a study conducted for the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada and MasterCard, this division analyzed the accessibility of French-language credit-card application forms and associated documents.

Permanent Network for Literacy Learners

Literacy learners have always played an active role in managing the FCAF. The mandate of the Federation's *Réseau permanent des personnes apprenantes* [permanent network for literacy learners] is to represent their interests.

This network's representatives are the best ambassadors for the cause of French-language literacy in Canada. On many occasions, they have attended public meetings to explain the needs of adult literacy learners clearly, in their own words.

This network's newsletter, *Mosaïque*, keeps francophone literacy learners throughout Canada informed of current events that concern them. Over the past two years, the FCAF has published five issues of *Mosaïque*. The 6 500 copies of each issue are distributed primarily to over 400 literacy centres throughout Canada.

Strengthening Governance

The FCAF Board of Directors has implemented the principles of strategic governance within the organization. Over the past two years, they have successfully completed a whole series of initiatives in this regard. For example:

- At a Special General Meeting held in January 2005, member organizations adopted the revised statutes and by-laws on which the Board had been working since 2004.
- The Board has introduced skills-based management as a central element of human resources management.
- The Board has completed a revision of the administrative policies and procedures manual.

FCAF Allies and Partners

The FCAF can count on many allies and partners to help accomplish its mission. Here are some of the organizations that have worked with us over the past two years:

- Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française
- Association de la presse francophone
- Canadian Commission for UNESCO
- Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities
- Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network
- Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale
- Centre for Family Literacy
- Family Resources Program
- Health Canada Consultative Committee for French-Speaking Minority Communities
- Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes
- Movement for Canadian Literacy
- Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité
- Table nationale en éducation
- Table nationale sur la petite enfance

Over the same two years, the FCAF has received financial assistance from the following organizations:

- National Literacy Secretariat
- Department of Canadian Heritage
- Canada Post
- Social Development Canada
- National Film Board of Canada

FCAF Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français

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Newfoundland and Labrador

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