

Case Studies on Adult Learning

The CDÉACF Alpha Biblio Project

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ADULT LEARNING

Knowledge Centre

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Initiated by the Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (CDÉACF) in cooperation with the Montréal Libraries Network, the goal of the Alpha Biblio project is to boost cooperation between public libraries and Francophone literacy organizations in order to improve reading skills among Quebec's adults. This project very quickly spread to all of Quebec's libraries, even those in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

1- Program description

1-1- Context

A survey conducted among the parties involved revealed more than one reason why bridges were built between the libraries and literacy organizations, including the problem of library accessibility, lack of funds and ignorance of literacy-related challenges and needs. The clear message quickly resulted in the establishment of the Alpha Biblio project.

The CDÉACF then joined forces with other partners, such as the Montréal Libraries Network, Association pour l'avancement des sciences et techniques de la documentation (ASTED), Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ), Commission scolaire René-Lévesque in the Gaspésie and Magdalen Islands region, Literacy Foundation, community literacy organization COMQUAT, Réseau BIBLIO du Québec and Table des responsables de l'éducation des adultes et de la formation professionnelle (TRÉAQFP), in order to make three key decisions:

- Establishment of a project steering committee made up of representatives from all of the corporate partners;
- Active participation of all public libraries in order to facilitate access by literacy group members;
- Development of an initiative that can be recreated outside Quebec in order to extend literacy education opportunities to all Canadians.

1-2- Target population

The Alpha Biblio project is geared toward all community members who want to improve their reading and writing skills for greater well-being and to meet daily needs.

It should be noted that the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) reveals that over 800,000 Quebec residents aged 15 and over do not have the skill level required to function effectively in a knowledge and information-based society like Canada.

1-3- Operation

1-3-1- General organization

The 400 literacy organizations of the institutional and community networks can now count on front-end educational support from libraries. In total, the 797 independent or affiliated public libraries, which offer 1,046 points of service and serve 849 municipalities, are aware of the Alpha Biblio project and its goals, and many want to get involved.

1-3-2- Admission

The project is open to all literacy organizations and libraries. Their past and present cooperation initiatives, undertaken outside of or within the framework of the project, are listed in the database that can be accessed on the website. A guide developed based on those initiatives and showing how a public library and literacy organization can cooperate successfully and effectively is available in the box on the project site.

1-3 -3- Process

The project was first announced in all of the networks of the partners involved, which made it possible to draw up a list of 21 cooperation initiatives between public libraries and literacy organizations that had already been set up across the province.

Once identified, they were used as an initial database in order to subsequently develop new cooperation experiences and potential activities, and made it possible to add 21 new activities to the database. A training guide was then prepared to promote new collaborative approaches between literacy organizations and public libraries.

The second last phase of the project promoted the organization of discussion and training days held jointly by the public libraries and literacy organizations. Finally, a website was set up - alphabiblio.cdeacf.ca - to post both the cooperation activities and the directories of libraries and literacy organizations.

1- 4- Funding

The Alpha Biblio project is being funded mainly by the Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLESP) of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and by the Quebec Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et des Sports (MELS). This funding is both recognition of the merits of this initiative and encouragement to improve the province's literacy rate.

2- Achievements and innovation

2-2- Innovation

The Alpha Biblio project is innovative in that it gives everyone, without exception, access to libraries, the privileged seats of knowledge. The only one of its kind in Canada and elsewhere, this project has managed to unite literacy organizations.

The Alpha Biblio project's website¹ refers to Canadian experiences or those of other countries that have contributed directly or indirectly to its progress. Another advantage of this project is the fact that it uses copyright-free technologies both in its development and in the integration of new functions such as interactive geographic maps, which help to give the organizations the greatest possible access to the information that is relevant to them.

2-3- Achievements

The Alpha Biblio project has the merit of being efficient in terms of the time limits and budgets it is given, despite the size of the provincial oversight committee and the diversity of its members' mandates. In addition to opening up a wide network of involvement, the project is meant to raise awareness of the literacy issue. A 27-page

¹ Online: [http:// alphabiblio.cdeacf.ca](http://alphabiblio.cdeacf.ca)

manuscript titled "Mystère à Parida" has been produced by a group of learners from a school board, and its public launch was supported by the area's city hall.

The Alpha Biblio project offers support to libraries and literacy organizations. Over 250 learners, from 12 of Quebec's 17 regions, have taken part and many have said they want to continue visiting their library. Libraries have noted this growing desire among learners and will fulfill it.

2-3-1- Challenges

In two years, and with a team of only two employees, the Alpha Biblio project has raised awareness of literacy education needs among various bodies, but it must persevere in its efforts to include learner diversity.