

FRANCOPHONE CONSORTIUM OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING (CFAC)

A part of the education and training continuum in Canada

*An initiative of the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences
(RESDAC)*

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1.0 Issue

The international literacy surveys show that francophone minority communities (FMCs) are dealing with low literacy rates. The latest survey, the 2012 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), indicates that 52% of francophones living in minority situations fall below level 3 on the literacy scale.¹ This threshold is considered the minimum level required to function in a knowledge-based society. This unenviable score varies by nine points from the score for anglophones outside Quebec (43%).

Despite these alarming results, in the past ten years or so, support programs for the development of literacy and skills (DAC) have been delegated to the provinces and territories. We have noticed that federal public policies are no longer committing to literacy. As a result, the organizations that serve this purpose have declined across the country. In 2015, RESDAC filed a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL) regarding the situation. It is still waiting for the OCOL's final report.

Many official languages studies show that the *Official Languages Act* (OLA) clauses are implemented on an irregular basis across the provinces and territories. Therefore, the FMCs do not receive equal support across the provinces or territories. Although progress has been made, the fact remains that the DAC programs in French in certain provinces and territories are under-funded or even unfunded. In addition, the contribution previously provided by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) for research, resource development and cooperation in francophone minority contexts has decreased and is practically non-existent today. These two situations mean that the development of tools and resources and the availability of literacy and skills development services remain unequal across the provinces and territories.

Although there are still a number of policies, provincial and territorial programs and activities run by institutions and community organizations, the service offering for francophones remains inadequate. Moreover, the offering is increasingly focused on employability, at the expense of other forms of literacy. The recent language data released from the 2016 Census of Population shows the impact of this shortcoming. This situation is putting pressure on the vitality of FMCs. For the individuals concerned, a low level of literacy can increase linguistic insecurity and complicate the transmission of language and culture in the family environment. It limits the parents' ability to help their school-age children learn. It affects the social and economic integration of adults with low literacy levels, and deprives them of certain ways to fully assume their role as citizens in their community and society.

Beyond the national statistics, the needs are above all the singular needs of individuals, in their own contexts and regions. The solutions must meet these diverse and variable needs. We are now thinking in terms of the literacy needed for individuals. For example:

¹ In this survey, literacy is defined as follows: "... their ability to engage with written texts (print-based and digital) and thereby participate in society, achieve goals, and develop their knowledge and potential." (Statistics Canada. (2013). [*Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\)*](#), p. 8.

- Some young people who leave school have not yet acquired basic literacy skills and must use academic recovery services for adults.
- Some parents need to acquire skills to support the formal learning of their school-age children.
- Some adults, including immigrants, need to develop their skills in order to find or keep a job and become part of the middle class.
- Some seniors need to develop new digital literacy skills to use the new technologies.
- Many adults need to develop their skills to navigate through the health or justice systems.

The current offering has resulted in difficulties reaching the potential learners. The reason is that these people are often stigmatized. They are afraid to be exposed in training structures or to reveal their needs. Some current DAC approaches do not always meet needs. The offering often does not take into account the appropriate adult education principles or the specific situations of learners (such as the emotional trauma of refugees, learning disorders or low self-esteem).

It is also difficult to promote unilingual French training. In FMCs, sometimes French skills are needed (to deal with a French language school or share French culture), and sometimes English skills are required (to deal with a bank or an employer in English). As a result, the offering must take into account a bilingual option. In addition, some rural or more remote francophone communities have few DAC services.

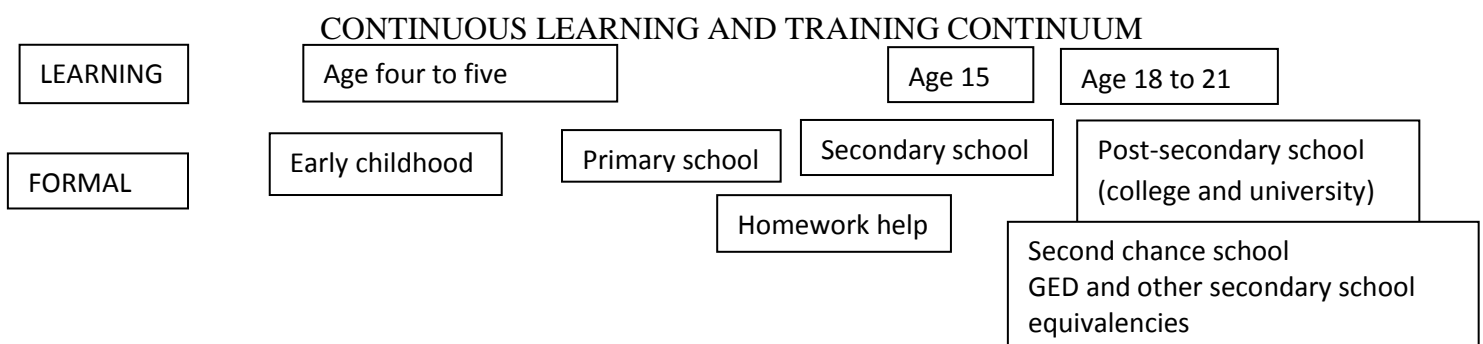
In short,

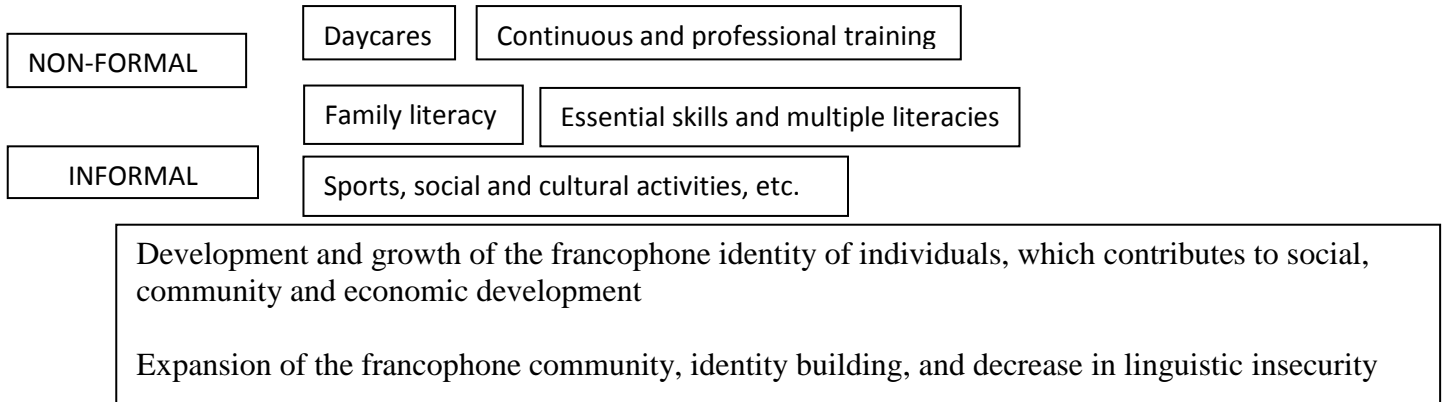
The focus of DAC is to give the less literate adults in FMCs formal and informal ways to develop personally, pass on the French language to their children and help their children with their school work, join the job market, and contribute as citizens to the vitality of their community.

2.0 The learning continuum: a comprehensive vision of DAC

Continuous learning fosters community, social and economic development for FMCs. The tool helps expand the francophone community and decrease linguistic insecurity. It plays a key role in the development of each individual's francophone identity. Therefore, all the stakeholders must receive funding, including those that provide non-formal and informal training.

Non-formal and **informal** learning is being increasingly recognized as a way to curtail assimilation, help drop-outs return to school and facilitate the integration of newcomers. The following chart shows the learning continuum in a francophone minority context. The main goal is the development of individuals, who see themselves as participants and contributors when it comes to the growth of the francophone community at the local, national and international level.





3.0 RESDAC

RESDAC has 11 francophone members (colleges, associations and community organizations) from FMCs that specialize in the DAC field. It has explored a number of ways to deal with the above changes. A recent collective impact project involves stakeholders from the francophonie that work with either adult clients served by RESDAC or in education. The project seeks to develop a cross-Canada strategy that would enable us to improve our results among francophone adults while optimizing our resources. The ongoing work has led us to reconsider the best ways to operationalize the strategy and achieve RESDAC's goals. RESDAC indicated these goals in the brief submitted during the cross-Canada official languages consultations. A solution is to establish a consortium of service providers.

4.0 The francophone consortium of continuous learning (CFAC)

The consortium is an operational response to the above issue. It is a group of service providers, which are DAC experts, and their partners from various sectors. Together, they will be able to expand the DAC service offering and access to training for francophone adults in Canada, specifically for those with low literacy levels. The consortium will serve as a platform to support collaborative projects. The provinces and territories will establish the goals of these projects based on the needs of francophone adults and their communities. It will implement the projects and ensure that the projects have a pivotal and lasting impact. The consortium's members and partners will identify and develop the projects. They will then deliver the projects directly to the learners, who benefit from DAC training and activities. The consortium will also serve as a platform to exchange best practices. It will hold an annual symposium and provide the opportunity to share the tools and approaches developed in the consortium. Together, the members will strengthen their ability to provide quality training and activities, which are competitive with those on the market, to francophone adults across Canada.

Over the next five years, RESDAC will focus its efforts and activities on the consortium, in order to improve the internal processes. We think this new initiative will set RESDAC on a path to progressive transformation. RESDAC will be better able to achieve its goals.

The consortium will reflect the concept of "by and for" and the concept of intersectionality. In other words, the consortium of service providers associated with all organizations from the

education or other sectors will work together to respond in a way that better meets the multiple and sometimes complex needs of francophone adults in their province or territory.

Three areas of development and three priority areas for action

Learning is a lifelong process for everyone in all aspects of life. Community development involves full public participation in the economic, social and cultural spheres. To that end, three areas of development and three priority areas for action have been identified:

Three areas of development

- Employment
- Family
- Community/Citizenship

Three priority areas for action

- Diversity
- Digital
- Immigration

Results expected by the consortium

- Increase access to DAC training and activities for francophone adults by developing local and national partnerships.
- Increase the DAC service offering in French in each province and territory.
- Increase the number of institutions that comply with the best practices in DAC by holding an annual symposium to share the best practices.

Desired impact

- Increase the percentage of adults in FMCs at level 3 by supporting local projects.
- Increase the percentage of adults in FMCs moving from level 1 to 2 by supporting local projects.

5.0 Funding of the consortium

The consortium would run using funding allocated on a multi-year and renewable basis. The funding would help achieve the results expected by the consortium. The table below sets out the funding requested for the consortium.

Allocation of requested funding

	Annually	Over five years
Advisory committee	\$50,000	\$250,000
National coordination	\$120,000	\$600,000
Collaboration fund	\$740,000	\$3,700,000
Sharing of best practices (annual symposium)	\$40,000	\$200,000
Total	\$950,000	\$4,750,000

6.0 Conclusion

Organizations and institutions that work in the DAC field clearly hold a unique and pivotal place in FMCs. In FMCs, 52% of adults fall below level 3 on the literacy scale. Initiatives such as the consortium are carried out by and for francophone service providers, which are long-standing DAC experts. The initiatives are related to the multiple needs and realities in each province and territory. Therefore, the funding of this type of initiative plays a key role in the growth of FMCs in Canada.

In addition to the recommendations made in its recent brief for Canadian Heritage, RESDAC recommends the following:

- That the federal government acknowledge the urgent need to increase the available funding as part of the renewal of the official languages action plan.
- That, in all negotiations of federal-provincial or federal-territorial agreements on DAC, a clause be included that clearly indicates the responsibility to fund organizations and institutions that provide services in French in each province and territory.
- That the training of adults in a non-formal context be included in the bilateral agreements on education, and that they be made accessible to the institutions and organizations that currently provide the non-formal training.
- That the **francophone consortium of continuous learning (CFAC)** receive funding to create and provide literacy and skills development services.