

Description of the Quebec Association for Adult Learning 2007 Award received by Peter MacGibbon of the Quebec Learners' Network for the project entitled *Support Network for Teachers and Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities*

SUMMARY:

Over the last four years, Peter MacGibbon of the Quebec Learners' Network (QLN) has designed, facilitated, and led the successful delivery of a non-formal adult learning project entitled *Support Network for Teachers and Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities*. Peter's various roles in the project included responsibilities for community outreach, needs analysis, project conceptualization, partnership development, proposal writing, instructional design, materials editing, project management, team coordination, facilitation of focus groups, research and testing, and publicity. Aside from drawing a contract salary for this work, Peter has contributed approximately 300 unpaid hours to the project with the intention of ensuring its success, and continues to promote its benefits throughout the English-speaking community.

The project itself has been carried out in three phases:

Phase 1 – Outreach and Needs Analysis (2003-04) – was comprised of a series of four workshops featuring family psychologists and other guest experts delivered by tele-conferencing to teachers and parents in remote and rural Quebec communities. This phase allowed the QLN to test various technologies with the target clientele, including video and audio-graphic conferencing and the use of an interactive web portal.

Phase 2 – Content Development (2004-05) - focused on the design and development of three comprehensive online learning modules used for increasing teacher and parent awareness of attention deficit disorder and learning disabilities, and strategies for cooperating with children who have them:

- Module 1 – *An Introduction to Learning Disabilities* – gave an overview of the various learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders, and their related issues;
- Module 2 – *Understanding Learning Disabilities* – explained the specific learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders and the particular needs of those afflicted by them;
- Module 3 – *Supporting Children with Learning Disabilities* – provided strategies for parents and teachers to work cooperatively in addressing the needs of afflicted students.

Phase 3 – Enhancement, Integration, and Delivery (2005-06) - provided the interactive multimedia content for *The Learning Puzzle* (version française, *L'Apprenti-sage*), a website available at www.TheLearningPuzzle.net. *The Learning Puzzle* provides entry-level information, strategies, and support for parents and teachers of children with learning disabilities. This is a highly-accessible reference guide that can also function as a collective focal point for parent-teacher workshops or discussions. The website includes multimedia presentations, video clips, and resource lists that are easy to access online – even for dial-up Internet users.¹ All of the material was developed with the advice of learning disabilities experts and the assistance of the parents, teachers, and learning disabilities practitioners in Montreal, Gatineau, and Ottawa.

¹ An identical set of materials are contained on a CD version available from info@centreforliteracy.qc.ca.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:**The need addressed by the project**

This project grew out of an often-voiced need throughout rural and remote English-speaking communities in Québec for support to parents and teachers in dealing with children's learning disabilities. Learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders are a serious social issue, affecting an estimated 1 in 10 Canadians. A child struggling to deal with a learning disability will also encounter the social stigma attached to it, and may experience bullying and low self-esteem, dropping out of school, or turning to drug use or crime. Parents of children with learning disabilities need essential information, guidance, and resources to help them face this type of challenge. In addition, countless other family members, teachers, health professionals, and community support workers deal with children with learning disabilities in their daily lives. For the past four years, the Quebec Learners' Network (QLN) has been part of our society's response to this challenge.

Innovative / creative practice strategies relevant to adult learners**Phase 1: Community-based videoconferencing and technology testing (2003-04)**

The QLN ran a series of Learning Disabilities videoconference workshops for parents and teachers, reaching communities as distant and dispersed as Noranda, Val d'Or, Temiscaming, Thetford Mines, and Aylmer. These events confirmed the importance of this kind of support to parents and teachers in the English-speaking community, and identified the types of technology that would best serve their various schedules, locations, and learning needs.

Phase 2: Asynchronous online learning (2004-05)

This phase focused on the design and development of three highly-practical learning modules (*An Introduction to Learning Disabilities*, *Understanding Learning Disabilities*, and *Supporting Children with Learning Disabilities*). As "asynchronous" learning tools that allowed for anytime, anyplace learning, the learning modules provided accessible, engaging online resources that could be viewed over the Internet by any parent individually, or incorporated into workshops by teachers and special education advisors with groups.

Our selection of technology respected a variety of target-audience factors. With a largely rural audience in mind, we chose the most effective media-rich format (web-streaming slide shows with audio narration, engaging animation, and user-friendly navigation features) possible for all viewers, even those who might be accessing the modules with a slow-speed Internet connection. Public responses to the learning modules (including feedback from two well-attended focus-group sessions) attested to the effectiveness of this approach, which provide a cost-effective model for creating widely-accessible lifelong learning experiences.

Phase 3 – Digital video content (2005-06)

The QLN then sought to enhance the modules by personalizing them for greater impact. Incorporating digital-video interviews with parents, teachers, and family psychologists brought an additional wealth of human experience for motivating self-directed learners to acquire effective parenting or teaching strategies and interaction behaviours in working with children with learning disabilities.

Project design & development: Objectives, process, techniques, strategies

This project had **three objectives** that addressed important community needs to:

1. *Build the capacity* of parents, teachers, and advocates to respond to the needs of children with learning disabilities.
2. *Raise awareness* in the general population about the issues and difficulties faced by people with learning disabilities and the need to provide them with support.
3. *Support the development of multimedia delivery models* that address lifelong learning needs for the English-speaking population of Quebec.

The **criteria for planning and development** processes included designing the project with consideration for:

Learners' needs – their learning, communications, and technology preferences

Content – the appropriateness and durability of information

Presentation – the length and flexibility of materials for various learning situations

Technical design – the functionality, user-friendliness, accessibility (connection speeds), and navigational features of the online learning tools

Application – the material's overall pedagogical effectiveness

Engagement – the level of sustained interest the material could generate in users

Utility – the usefulness and relevance to learners' needs

(Please see **Appendix Tables 1 and 2** for details on the techniques, strategies, and approaches used in the first two phases of the project.)

Phase 3 –Enhancement, Integration, and Delivery (2005-06)

Enhancement of the existing content included:

- **Video-recording** 24 interviews (English and French) for web delivery via media streaming. The video interviews were drawn from parents, teachers, educational psychologists, and from learning-disabled adults who have learned to cope with their disabilities. They have captured real-world experiences and situations (both positive and negative) that impact people with learning disabilities on a daily basis.

Integration of the materials included:

- **Revising and updating** all of the original learning modules
- **Creating** two new modules on the subjects of *Adaptive Technologies and Learning Disabilities / ADHD in Adults*
- **Pilot-testing** the “Beta” version of the product with a selected focus group of adults with learning disabilities, LD specialists, teachers, and parents of LD children.

The **delivery process** included:

- **Launching** the project publicly at a wide variety of community conferences, meetings, and workshops.
- **Distributing** widespread notice of the product to school boards, health and social service agencies, and community associations.

The Learning Puzzle was formally launched in April 2006 through a targeted communications strategy aimed at winning over “champions” throughout the learning disabilities community. These champions included individual teachers and parents, family psychologists, special education advisors, literacy development practitioners, school principals and administrators, learning disabilities associations, and community development groups. We also expanded the general public’s awareness through bilingual production and by promoting the website to the English-speaking populations of the Outaouais, Greater Montreal, and Maritime Quebec regions.

Results Obtained

Through this project, the QLN has provided parents and teachers working with children with learning disabilities with media-rich resource materials. By working with agencies such as the Centre for Literacy of Quebec and community and regional health and social service associations, the QLN built public awareness of the effectiveness of technology-enabled learning applications among the learning disabilities support community. To date, over 650 individuals in the community, health, social services, and education sectors have received live presentations, demonstrations, and display of the uses of *The Learning Puzzle / L’Apprentissage* at regional consultations, symposiums, association meetings, conferences, and by videoconference presentations (see **Appendix Table 3**). In general, there has been great enthusiasm from project participants, and many statements of intent to share or use the resources.

In addition, approximately 300 complimentary CDs, as well as press releases, colour flyers, and bookmarks printed with the website URL have been distributed to libraries, resource centres, school board offices, and social service clinics.

The Learning Puzzle / L’Apprentissage has so far received over 6,000 “visits” by users (extended sessions on the website), totaling 35,000 “hits” – tangible proof that parents, teachers, and advocates are taking advantage of free and convenient access to resources for understanding and supporting children and students with learning disabilities.

Here is a sampling of participants’ written responses to our work on survey questionnaires:

Very engaging – it left me wanting to know more.

This is a good tool to overcome parental denial.

Any parent (of special needs children or not) would find this useful.

I found the presentations very uplifting!

Relevance to the QAAL Mission and the Québec Government policy

The *Support Network for Teachers and Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities* relates directly to QAAL's mission to raise public awareness on a timely social issue. It provides a practical reference for bringing together concerned adults (whether parents or teachers) and facilitating their own exchange of their knowledge and experiences. Finally, the project provides resources for parents to advocate on behalf of their children, and teachers on behalf of their students. All the elements deemed essential for a successful project are present: supporting adult learners in an innovative way, developing practical and accessible content, networking between organizations and individuals, and partnering in project design, development, and delivery.

The *Support Network* project also makes a strategic contribution to the Québec Ministry of Education, Leisure, and Sport by developing content and practices for orientation and training not currently provided online by the Ministry or its school boards. Using a community-based, client-centred approach for the network demonstrates an ideal model for integrating quality content and best practices – one that could easily be adapted by the new Community Learning Centres for other areas of adult learning activity. The network also contributes to moving Québec further into the realm of distance education and online learning, two key areas targeted for development in the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*.

A final relevant benefit from the *Support Network* has been fostering productive partnerships between public funders (*Canadian Heritage, Industry Canada, HRSDC, and the Inukshuk Foundation*), private service providers (*Rooney Productions*), and community-based learning organizations (the *Quebec Learners' Network* and the *Centre for Literacy of Quebec*).

Overall, this has been an extremely gratifying, challenging, and interesting project to conduct on behalf of the English-speaking community of Québec, and we at the QLN sincerely hope it provides a useful model for achieving broad impacts in lifelong learning activities for dispersed and under-served populations in general.

Peter MacGibbon

Quebec Learners' Network

March 15, 2007

Appendix Table 1 - Phase 1 – Outreach and Needs Analysis (2003-04)

Project activities	Targeted direct results	Performance indicators	Summary of achieved activities
Research/ Community Outreach	Knowledge gained about level of awareness and understanding of ADD/LD in rural Quebec	Community support for and level of interest in workshops	Recruited & oriented parent and school advisors, community resource persons, workshop presenters
Development of an Evaluation Strategy	Knowledge gained about the type of support parents would most value	Actual levels of participation and feedback from participants, advisors, and resource persons	Developed web-based surveys and feedback forms
Workshop up-front planning	Immediate benefits (support and knowledge) to parent advisors participating in the project	Engagement of parent advisors throughout the project ("repeat customers")	Ongoing cooperative development of the workshop model, themes, content, format, and schedule
Technology selection and testing	Practical understanding of how technology can be used to provide support for parents in rural communities	Documentation of response to technical issues, problems, and questions that arise	Web portal design, development, and testing; audio-conference orientation; identification and preparation of video-conference locations
Training participants	Knowledge about the training needs of potential support providers for an ongoing support network	The development of a prototype for an ADD/LD support service delivery model that is both inexpensive and effective	Training in methods of addressing ADD/LD issues, methods of community networking, use of new communications and information-sharing technologies
Workshops: Live conferencing/ workshop presentations between up-to-five locations	Participation from parents, teachers, and school board resource personnel in at least three rural communities	Number of participants in the workshops, anecdotal feedback from resource people at the sites	<p>Workshop 1/ Videoconference: Noranda, Temiscaming, Thetford Mines, Hull, and Montreal - total 35 participants</p> <p>Workshop 2 / Audiographic conference: Noranda, Temiscaming, Thetford Mines, Aylmer, and Montreal - total 56 participants</p> <p>Workshop 3 /Videoconference: Noranda, Val d'Or, Aylmer, and Montreal - total 19 participants</p> <p>Workshop 4 / Audioconference CD distribution, and online multimedia: Temiscaming, Val d'Or, Aylmer, and Montreal - total 25 participants</p>

Appendix Table 2 - Phase 2 – Content Development (2004-05)

Startup & Design	Description
Preparations for the working team, partner organizations, and subject-matter experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project working budget and “to do” list established - Identification of terms of partnership with partners - Confirmation of design & development team: script-writer, content advisors, graphic designer, technical designer, recording editor, narrator - Development of detailed work schedules
Learning Object Prototype - basic design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prototype object developed and posted online for evaluation
Resource assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of current print / online resources for learning disabilities
Validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confirmed learning object outcomes - Validation of methodology and format
Content design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detailed content outline developed in collaboration with project advisors
Prototype – version 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online prototype object tested, reviewed, and evaluated by development team -
Development & Revision of Content	
Development of audio scripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of original audio scripts (including graphics) based on detailed content outline and learning outcomes
Script review / revision 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initial vetting of scripts by Development Team - Revisions to scripts
Script review / revision 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Script reviews by Content Advisors - Validation of content, learning outcomes - Development of evaluation guidelines, results measurement
Development of slide template	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Template design, including original graphics
Selection / development of visuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Selection of photos, graphics, etc.
Slide creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Layout of photos, graphics, text on slides
Script narration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recording of narration - Editing of narration sound files
Synchronization of slides with narration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Editing slide timings - Animation of objects within slides - Creation of separate CD versions
Testing, Evaluation, Delivery	
fv4reTechnical implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tested quality of streaming capacity of learning modules - Technical implementation
Resource lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compilation of three sets of web links, document, and book references for modules
Product testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hosting of focus-group session on-site in Aylmer, off-site with Val d'Or, Noranda, and Montreal - Feedback team of Special Education Advisors, teachers, and parents in rural and remote Quebec communities
Adjustment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adaptation of features of product after focus-group testing
Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Duplication of CD's for distribution by partner organizations - Posting of modules on website for free access

Appendix Table 3: Outreach and Demonstration activities conducted for the project (2005-06)

Event	Approximate # of participants	Outreach & promotional activities
Four QLN teleconference workshops (video, audio, audio-graphic conferencing)	135 (2003-04)	Presentations and discussions from family psychologists and other guest experts in Montreal to interconnected teleconference sites in rural English-speaking communities.
Outaouais Health & Social Services Network (OHSSN) / Regional Consultation	100	Multimedia presentation and demonstration to full assembly.
Community Health & Social Services Network (CHSSN) / Research and Community Development Conference	150	Demonstration and display station and print material distribution.
Centre for Literacy of Quebec / Focus Group	12	Moderated discussion with a selected group of LD specialists, educators, parents, and individuals with learning disabilities
Learning Disabilities Association of Quebec – Chapter 1 Meeting	25	CD and print material distribution.
Association Québécoise des troubles d'apprentissage / Outaouais Chapter Conference	75	CD and print material distribution.
Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton Conference	75	Demonstration and display station and print material distribution.
Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting	25	Multimedia presentation and demonstration to full group.
Community Health & Social Services Network Telehealth Program	60	Multimedia demonstration and moderated videoconference discussion with family psychologist Peter Gantous.