



Report on the Meetings

The National and European Conference on illiteracy was held in Lyon from 13 to 15 November 2013. Organised by the French National Agency against Illiteracy (ANLCI), in partnership with the 67 supporters of the Grande Cause Nationale 2013 and the Europe-Education-Formation France (2e2f) Agency, this event brought together nearly 900 participants for numerous debates on illiteracy prevention issues, as well as the different measures to be implemented to ensure that the **2.5 million members of the French population** concerned – in addition to the one in five other Europeans affected by this problem – will finally be able to master the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.

These meetings were linked to **the European Agenda for Adult Learning (AEFA)**, an EU Council Resolution adopted in November 2011. The European Agenda set five strategic guidelines for Member States:

- ✓ improve the quality and effectiveness of the education and training provided to adults;
- ✓ increase the number of the least-qualified adults benefitting from training;
- ✓ promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- ✓ develop the creativity and learning environment of adults;
- ✓ improve knowledge of the adult education and training sector.

The emphasis is on the acquisition of basic skills by the low-qualified adults, through “second chance” schemes and the opportunity of acquiring a higher level of qualification.

Besides France, of the 34 countries that have appointed National AEFA Coordinator to implemented the resolution, Norway (VOX), the United Kingdom (NIACE), Luxembourg (Ministry of Education) and Italy (ISFOL) were represented at the event.

A summary of the discussions is given below.

Editorial

Hervé Fernandez



▲ *Hervé Fernandez, Director of the ANLCI*

One of the first tasks facing the ANLCI when it was founded was to agree on a single definition for illiteracy: “we use the term ‘illiteracy’ to refer to people over 16, who, after having been educated, have not acquired sufficient mastery of reading, writing, and arithmetic; in other words the basic skills needed to be independent in simple, everyday situations.” This was followed in 2004 by a national survey that enabled us to measure the extent of the phenomenon: **9% of people aged 18-64 years and educated in France were affected by illiteracy at the time.**

The same survey repeated in 2011 showed a **two-percent decrease in the French illiteracy rate.** This progress was mainly due to the ANLCI’s implementation of systematic preventive measures across the country with the assistance of the European Social Fund (ESF). This being said, 2.5 million people are still affected (compared with 3 million in 2004). This worrying situation led to collective action being taken by **67 organisations coordinated by the ANLCI** with a view to making illiteracy a Grande Cause Nationale (great national cause). This goal was achieved in 2013, thus enabling free space for expression in the media and greater visibility for our struggle! The mobilisation confirmed that we can only eradicate illiteracy by pooling our efforts. No single institution alone can provide THE solution. We must therefore all continue to work together, while respecting the unique qualities of each of us!

Speech by Antoine Godbert

The fight against illiteracy is an effort that requires the participation of all stakeholders. It is a European priority; this is particularly clear from the working groups set up under **the European Agenda**, headed by regional authorities, associations, social partners, etc. Our aim at the **2e2f Agency** is to help mobilise all the stakeholders in a struggle that is not just French but also European. As joint organiser of this National Conference on the fight against illiteracy, I am delighted with the large number of attendees. The presence of several European observers also testifies to how we are continually strengthening the close relationships needed with the other partners. Within our agency, we know how important it is to be able to compare systems and how much we can learn from each other.

These Lyon meetings have also given me an opportunity to talk to representatives of the associations, businesses and local authorities who attended, about the future of the European Agenda and **the new Erasmus+ programme.** In particular, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that this programme will be receiving more endowments. Erasmus+ will also involve greater collaboration between the different players, more strategic partnerships for greater employability and a crossing of institutional boundaries. We will no longer see, as was previously the case, approaches restricted to particular sectors: higher education, vocational training, etc. It will now be easier to implement cross-sectoral projects, following on from programmes such as **Erasmus+ “School education” or Erasmus+ “adult education”** that are particularly suitable for initiatives aiming to combat illiteracy.

We all need to work together. This three-day conference was a prime example of what we can do to continue this fight.

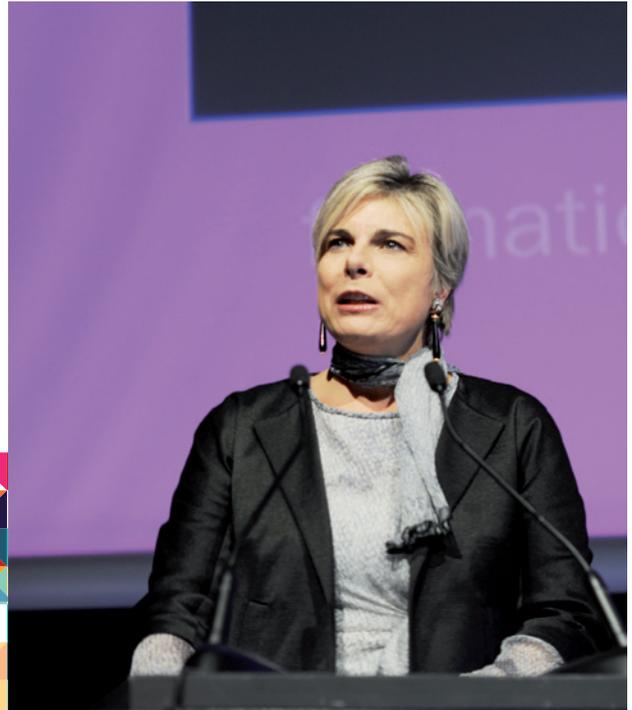
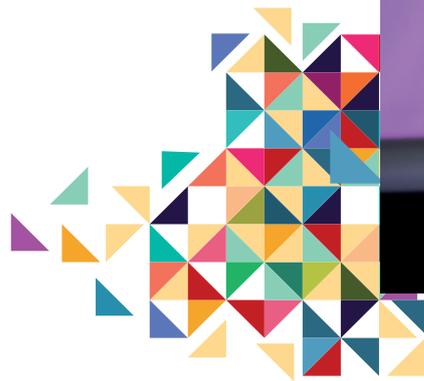
▼ *Antoine Godbert, Director of the 2e2f Agency and national coordinator of the European Agenda for Adult Learning in France*



Plenary

13 november

« ONE PERSON OUT OF FIVE
IN EUROPE IS ILLITERATE »



▲ Princess Laurentien, Chair of the High Level Group on Literacy

Speech by HRH Princess Laurentien

“Many things have been accomplished since we began fighting illiteracy together,” said **Princess Laurentien**, Chair of the high-level expert group on literacy established by the European Commission. Stressing the need, “of course, to always celebrate the small achievements that lead to great results,” she pointed out, however, that the subject “is not yet a central and permanent political and social issue. Here is the greatest challenge we face in my country, in yours, and certainly in Europe and the rest of the world. **In the European Union alone, one person out of five is functionally illiterate. One in five!**” she exclaimed. And she recalled that the findings of the report by the expert group she chaired are as follows: “For one in five Europeans, the world is still difficult to read... **Action is needed right now!**” Princess Laurentien continued: “What matters next is what we are going to do with this report.” In her view, action should focus on three areas: breaking the vicious circle of illiteracy, positioning literacy as a socio-economic problem extending beyond the education sector, and implementing effective European cooperation. “Too often, prevention and reduction of illiteracy are regarded as two separate approaches,” lamented Princess Laurentien. And yet she believes that “illiteracy is an intergenerational

struggle.” While several countries in Europe have “fantastic programmes” that encourage reading among children, the Chair of the European expert group asked “What are these children – especially the very young – going to do with all these books if their parents are unable to help and support them?” This is why, she added, **the actions must take into account not only the children’s difficulties, but also those of their parents**, who themselves are often affected by illiteracy. She gave the example of the “Language for Life” programme in the Netherlands, which is based on these principles and beginning to bear fruit. Princess Laurentien went on to emphasise that “It is our responsibility to make employers, policy makers and politicians realise that the functioning of the society in which they play a part is largely determined by the ability of citizens to share, use and understand information.” Lastly, noting that the expert group’s report gives many examples of good practice, she announced that in the coming years she will undertake “to get this issue onto the European agenda and establish transnational frameworks that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our joint action against illiteracy. **Those who have the privilege to know, have the duty to act,**” concludes Princess Laurentien, quoting Albert Einstein.



Partnerships and projects

Founded in 2000, the ANLCI is a public interest group that enables all those working against illiteracy to take decisions around the same table. A struggle which has begun to bear fruit, since the number of people affected by illiteracy has declined substantially since 2004. Here are some examples of its actions and partnerships.

▶ The ANLCI's major partners include **the SNCF Foundation**¹, which is particularly involved in prevention, said **Marianne ESHET**, its Chief Executive. "This is a cause that is particularly meaningful for us," she explained "because our foundation's main goal is to help young people who are facing difficulties. Our motto is: help young people build a future. Reading, writing, arithmetic and reasoning are the essential prerequisites for this." To achieve this, the SNCF Foundation created the "Between the Lines" call for projects, which supports initiatives focused on two critical stages: early childhood (up to age 6), to get children interested in words by using fun methods and to encourage parental involvement; and middle-school years (11-15 years) to strengthen basic knowledge, free expression and creativity at an age when children often withdraw or become disinterested.



Another type of partnership is the one signed with the French family association, the **UNAF**². "Families remain the centre of the child's environment. Of the 2 million illiterates in France, there are bound to be people who have been or will become parents," said **Rémy GUILLEUX**, Vice-President of the UNAF. He noted that since this partnership agreement was signed, the number of departmental-level unions involved has continued to grow. "Volunteers who do not always have the necessary skills make an effort to get trained, so they are able to locate, identify and encourage the people affected by this problem."

Finally, a third example of collaboration is the one that started ten years ago with the **AGIRabcd** association of retired volunteers, explained **Jacqueline PRIA**, **AGIRabcd**³ **Coordinator**. "To give you an example of the projects we work on, we were contacted by a company in Alsace and asked to help train some of their employees affected by illiteracy. Another type of action: we support struggling pupils at a middle-school in Trappes. The Grande Cause Nationale has helped raise awareness among our members that they were involved in a large-scale civic action."

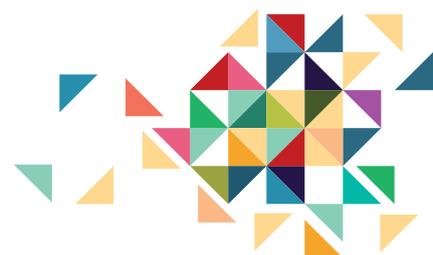
The 2013 Grande Cause Nationale: boosting initiatives

Although the new status of the illiteracy issue as a 2013 Grande Cause Nationale should not be seen as a "trophy", this achievement by the group of 67 organisations has nevertheless helped to nurture many initiatives and has reenergised the fight against illiteracy. Here are some stories.

▶ **The Boîte aux Lettres (Mailbox) association** in Alençon, directed by **Catherine FORNER**, held departmental conferences in 2013 for volunteers from associations in the Orne département, to encourage them to get involved in the fight against illiteracy. These focused on two areas :

- 1). Learning to identify those involved and help them get training ;
- 2). Proposing an initial training approach to those not eligible for enrolment in a training organisation or who lack the courage to do so, on topics related to the associations' respective activities (cooking - parenthood - reading - budget management).

"**The Grande Cause gave us a voice and helped us get support from local authorities such as the Basse-Normandie region**," reported Catherine Forner.



1 - The SNCF is the French railways operator - www.fondation-sncf.org 2 - www.unaf.fr 3 - www.agirabcd.org

◀ **In Guadeloupe, unprecedented outreach.**

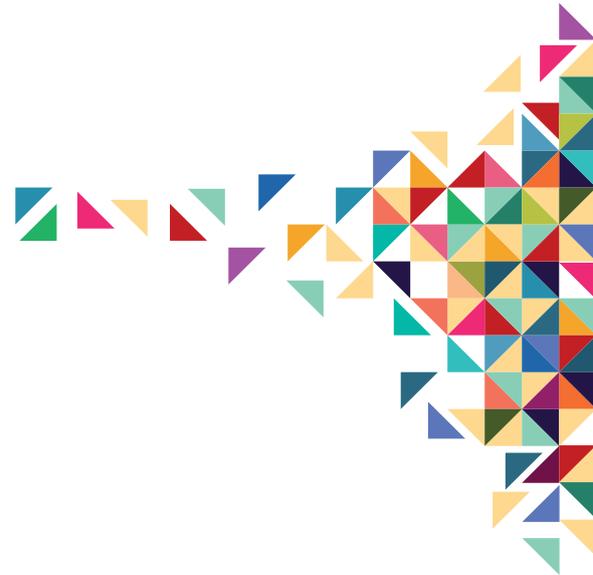
“This label has helped us communicate with the people involved and their families through the introduction of a cheap-rate telephone helpline” said **Georges DRUMEAUX**, ANLCI Regional Officer in Guadeloupe. “The Grande Cause was an important relay and gave us real leverage,” she added. “In 2009, 25% of Guadeloupians were identified as illiterate.” With an orchestrated media plan and dissemination of inserts in newspapers and films on TV, Guadeloupe succeeded in talking openly about this problem for the first time on such a large scale. “We don’t want this project to fall flat. We will be continuing this communication campaign in 2014 by making our fight a regional issue,” added Georges Drumeaux.

◀ **Apprentis d’Auteuil : a three-pronged attack.**

“Our foundation has been preventing and combating illiteracy quite naturally,” said **Paul Malartre**, administrator. “We took action in three main areas: working to prevent dropping out, helping children and teens who have dropped out of school, and taking measures in favour of vocational education. The Grande Cause has helped us change the vocabulary and clarify what we mean by “illiteracy”. This cause is now in the spotlight. We know that this effort will need to be maintained over the next few years and we urge all our members to pass on this message.”



◀ *Paul Malartre,
administrator of Apprentis d’Auteuil*



Plenary

14 november

« ILLITERACY IS A SOCIAL HANDICAP »

Mrs George Pau-Langevin,
Deputy Minister for Educational
Success



Speech by the Deputy Minister for Educational Success, Ms George Pau-Langevin: “illiteracy is a social handicap”

“The world is a hostile place when you cannot read it,” said Mrs **George Pau-Langevin**, Deputy Minister to the French Minister of Education, responsible for Educational Success. “We know that illiteracy is both a subjective trial for those affected by it and also a social handicap. Reading difficulties bar access to skilled jobs and reduce opportunities. Illiteracy is not necessarily an obstacle to performing a job but is an obstacle to successful professional relationships,” continued the Minister. **Referring to the problems parents may encounter when getting involved in their children’s education**, she believes that “in order to be able to meet these challenges adequately we must deal with the unique nature of these situations: the pupil and the child are not two separate beings. We cannot ignore the school and the child’s environment.”

“**We recommended in a circular that the school should do more to help families with vulnerable children**”, said the Minister, adding that illiteracy prevention is one of the priorities of national education. “Dropouts are children who have trouble deciphering written texts. Such cases have to be dealt with very early in primary school. **When you work on the parents’ illiteracy, it helps the children as well**,” insisted Mrs George Pau-Langevin. “The child’s family and home are places of refuge. We believe that it is necessary to recognise illiteracy and measure its impact, but also to take advantage of the children’s schooling to raise the parents’ awareness. We will be proposing

this dual recognition.” According to the Minister, when teachers understand that someone has an illiteracy problem, they know how to guide them. However the family still needs to agree to tackle the problem. “The academic success of the child can be a motivating factor,” suggested Mrs George Pau-Langevin. For her, the fight must be on three fronts: raising awareness among staff, strengthening institutions and promoting actions. “The combination of these actions will allow children to resume learning.” She announced several forthcoming initiatives, “a circular that will include these points and mobilise national education, an educational kit for teachers and trainers, the appointment of an academic contact person responsible for language matters, who will liaise between schools and partners, and finally the development of educational measures within the family.”

“At the end of the 19th century, with the introduction of compulsory schooling, the French Republic dealt a decisive blow to illiteracy. But more than a century and a half later, we must admit that education is essential but not always sufficient. Persistent illiteracy shows the gap we face today between the ideal and reality. It is not easy to acknowledge that schooling in 2013 does not yet guarantee the basic skills, but this is also why we are rebuilding the school system,” concluded the Minister, recalling that “France is most true to itself when it concentrates on its values.”

Mobilisation in France and the European framework

French mobilisation against illiteracy can draw on European programmes that promote education and training.

“The European education and training programme focuses on key skills and in particular on reading,” stressed **Dana-Carmen BACHMANN**, head of the vocational training and adult education unit at the European Commission (Directorate General for Education and Culture). “Economic growth also depends on the population’s ability to read,” she added. Hence the need to develop policies to combat illiteracy, whether for children of migrants, pupils, young adults or workers. **In the next generation of programmes that will emerge in 2014, “a very strong emphasis will be placed on adult education,”** said Dana-Carmen Bachmann. In France, explained **Sandrine Dickel**, Deputy Head of Development Department at the **2e2f Agency**, the Agency manages implementation of these European programmes and **the European Agenda for Adult Learning**, with the support of **six ministries** and **11 major national and regional players** (Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue (DGEFP) / Ministry of National Education (DGESCO) / Ministry of Defence (EPIDE) / Ministry of Justice (DAP) / Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (DGER) / Ministry of Overseas Territories (DGOM) / / French Job Centre (Pôle Emploi) / French National Agency against Illiteracy (ANLCI) / Association of Regions of France (ARF) / National Council of Local Missions (CNML) / Network of second-chance schools (E2C) / the AGEFOS-PME association / Permanent Assembly of Chambers of Trades & Crafts (APCMA) / French National Chambers of trade and industry (CCI France) / National Conservatory of Arts & Crafts (CNAM) / Joint Fund for Securing Professional Career Paths (FPSPP) / Institute for Training and Research on Continuing Education (INFREP)).

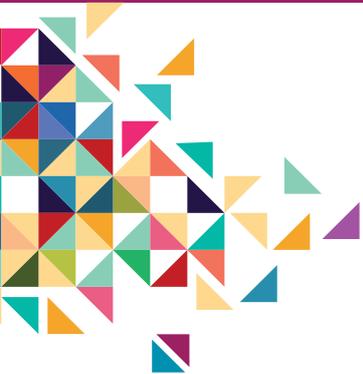


*Dana-Carmen BACHMANN,
head of the vocational training and
adult education unit at the European
Commission (Directorate General for
Education and Culture)*



Four working groups were set up for this mission, with themes defined by the Steering Committee, explained Sandrine Dickel. “The decision was made to focus specifically on the least qualified adults.” Four working groups for four themes: **conditions for successful alternance learning at all ages, specific guidance for those most marginalised by the labour market, professionalisation of guidance counsellors for low-skilled adults, and assessment of transversal skills.** The work will be supported by comparing practice and observations at European level. These groups meet regularly and will soon begin experimenting in the field.

“There is great interest in illiteracy in Europe,” said **Graciela SBERTOLI**, Deputy Director of VOX, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning and also the national coordinator of the European Agenda in Norway and member of the European Basic Skills Network. “The Commission has launched a call for projects for a global European network on illiteracy, we can feel mobilisation taking shape,” she enthused, adding that this is a “glass half full.” She goes on to lament that “In the glass half empty scenario, there are still a lot of depressing things to be seen. In some countries, 10% of the population does not have an acceptable reading level.” In Norway, employment maintains a certain level of proficiency in basic skills, said the deputy director of VOX. “But in Spain, where unemployment has exploded, what is going to happen? In France too, the illiteracy rate is a serious problem for obtaining real qualifications. We need to learn and make progress on understanding what literacy is in each country. The training institutions must be brought together,” said Graciela Sbertoli. “In my view, the most important question is still governance. I respect the voluntary sector, but continuing to believe that volunteers can do all the work is just wrong. It is primarily up to governments to deal with this. **When adults are not proficient in the basic skills, then governments must act.**”



EXAMPLES OF EUROPEAN ACTIONS

Although the fight against illiteracy is a shared challenge in Europe, the ways in which action is implemented and the problem considered differ from one country to another.

Here are some examples...

BELGIUM

« Link the collective and the individual »

“Our goal is to link the individual and collective dimensions of the fight against illiteracy,” said **Sylvie PINCHARD**, Director of Lire et Ecrire, a literacy organisation in Belgium formed by the Christian socialist and labour movements. In French-speaking Belgium, one in ten adults cannot read or write, she reports. “We worked upstream on a communication campaign with a group of learners,” she said. The resulting film addresses the issue in the following way: individuals are interviewed in the street on this topic: “How would you vote if you couldn’t read?” “In Belgium, voting is compulsory, hence the film’s focus on the right to vote,” explained Sylvie Pinchard: “But what is the government doing to ensure that everyone fulfils this duty?” The next step is to work on how job seekers are perceived: “While the market is under pressure and some of the people who have lost their jobs are faced with new standards for their work, we want to work on stereotypes, change perceptions and separate the issue of unemployment and illiteracy from the individual issues.”

And somewhere else ...

Communication on illiteracy outside Europe : the case of Quebec

QUEBEC

“I don’t think we’re in a battle, I can’t relate to the image of the war against illiteracy,” said **Linda SHOHET**, Director of the Centre for Literacy in Quebec. She takes the example of an advertising campaign in Quebec based on fairy tales. “The message involved explaining that when someone cannot read, imagination disappears.” Hence a short film showing key fairy-tale characters in a bad way in the hospital, that was intended to illustrate the danger posed to a child’s imagination if we do not solve the problem of illiteracy. Another example of action is the establishment of a family literacy day, on 27 January of each year, with activities taking place in schools, hospitals, etc.

IRELAND

Reality TV joins the fight against illiteracy

The Irish national body, the National Adult Literacy Agency (**NALA**¹), has developed a television programme to inform the public and “break down barriers,” said **Clare McNally**, Public Relations Manager: “The aim is, by featuring people affected by this problem, to show the degree of proficiency in basic skills you need to perform daily tasks such as buying a train ticket, etc.” 290,000 people watched the programme each time it was broadcast. “Illiteracy means many things. You can be strong in numeracy and not in spelling, etc. When we made this programme, we had no script. Participants accepted because they had something in common. For eight weeks they worked together on it. It was important that everyone understood the role they had to play.”

UNITED KINGDOM

Family learning

Programme Coordinator of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (**NIACE**²) and national coordinator of the European Agenda for Adult Learning in the UK, **Joyce Black** is certain of one thing: **the whole family must be taken into account when fighting illiteracy**. Referring to a programme under way in England that consists in providing underprivileged children with a book at three key moments in their life: 9 months, 18 months and 3 years, she insists that this type of initiative “bears fruit”: “studies have shown that children who had benefited from this programme were more open to reading, happier to enter kindergarten, and less afraid.” That said, she continued, “it’s not enough.” She advocates the implementation of “family” learning programmes in all schools and public funding for these programmes. “**Illiteracy is a major economic and social issue. If we don’t help the parents who suffer from this problem, their children will also have difficulty getting by. Giving books to little ones is not enough!**”

1 - www.nala.ie 2 - www.niace.org.uk



Plenary

15 november

WHEN COMPANIES TAKE ON THE PROBLEM OF ILLITERACY

Illiteracy is everyone's concern and action should not be limited to individual support for young adult job seekers or children with learning difficulties. Measures can also be taken within companies, to help employees affected by illiteracy. This is one of the lessons from the various discussions that took place during the plenary sessions of this conference.

An emblematic example of the growing awareness of some companies in the fight against illiteracy, is the experiment conducted by the Amphion plant of Evian Mineral Water, in Haute-Savoie. The issue of illiteracy was discussed within this bottling plant's logistics department, but without the term "illiteracy" actually being used, as the HR department prefers to speak of basic skills. "The term itself is frowned on, as these people don't see themselves as illiterate," said **Stéphane Dupays**, Director of the Amphion plant.

On a voluntary basis, training was offered using working materials and tools: production scheduling, procedures manual, emails. **The idea was to avoid separating this training from the assignments of the employees concerned.** The aim was to improve certain "processes" such as relaying of instructions, implementation of schedules, etc. "We found that some people got left out, and did not progress," explained **Marion Jousse**, HR Assistant in charge of logistics. "The complexity was due to the fact that we were offering assistance to employees who had not asked for anything and who were trying to hide their skills gaps." For the operation to work, the involvement of the head of the workshop, François Nogueira, was a determining factor, she insisted.

Following the training, **François Nogueira** noted some changes: fewer restocking errors and different attitudes in people who had previously been on the defensive and had now become more autonomous. "They were allowed to speak out. We'd given them

▼ Marion Jousse, HR Assistant in charge of logistics



▲ Thierry Lepaon, Secretary General of the CGT

the desire to learn again," he observed. "They became conscious of the importance of written communication in their work," said **Marie-Hélène Royon**, from the Greta agency associated with this training. Some forklift operators received a general training certificate validating their achievements, which was even more rewarding for them, and many then applied for further training leading to qualifications.

"Illiteracy means a loss of skills and talent for the company and the country. Both the economic and the human and social impact need to be assessed to enable long-term effective action in this area," said **Muriel Pénicaut**, Executive VP of Human Resources for the Danone Group, which owns Evian. For the Evian logistics workshop alone, a calculation by **Pascal Moulette**, a university researcher, in partnership with OPCALIA, shows that the training undertaken led to theoretical recovery of 75,000 euros out of the 166,460 euros lost as a result of low proficiency in basic skills.



“There is a relationship between company performance and training of vulnerable employees,” added Serge Geri, Regional Director of AGEFOS-PME. For his part, Thierry Dez, Director of Uniformation, emphasised the need to raise awareness among business leaders: “We need to demystify the issue of illiteracy and rely on training within the working environment” insofar as it contributes to a “real social advancement.”

To meet this challenge, the French Association for Adult Vocational Training (AFPA) – 6% of whose trainees, or 10,000 people, are affected by illiteracy – created a kit for identifying people most in need of help. It enables them to be identified without discrimination and prior to training. The scheme is being tested in four regions: Midi-Pyrénées, Basse-Normandie, Bretagne and Rhône-Alpes. “Our educational methods, based on the professional tasks they undertake, are well suited to these groups,” said Hervé Estampes, General Director of AFPA, who wants to improve the integration of trainees in their workplace by developing their transversal skills in order to ensure lasting employability.

“Things are changing,” admitted **Thierry Le Paon**, Secretary General of the CGT labour union. According to him, there

are “two kinds of company”, those that have discussions and those in which nothing happens. He identified five goals for the coming months. The first, “to negotiate with the company for the training plan in order to deal with illiteracy issues at this time.” **The second goal is to reconsider the funding of the right to training:** “an individual right that isn’t guaranteed collectively is not a right,” continued Thierry Le Paon. The third goal is that “wherever social audits are carried out, the issue of illiteracy must be addressed.” The fourth goal is to “take advantage of partial unemployment to train those members of staff most in need of the basic knowledge.” Finally, said Thierry Le Paon, “**we cannot allow employees who have worked for more than 20 years in a company and who cannot read or write to be made redundant.**” The company’s responsibility in this loss of their experience and know-how must be acknowledged. We will also identify companies laying off staff that have failed to maintain their employees’ basic skills.”

“We are looking for major national issues around which to mobilise French people, and this is one of them! We have to fill the gap between words and action and this will be our struggle for 2014,” concluded the Secretary General.

Testimony of a former Greta trainee, **Robert Benoni**: “A happy man.”

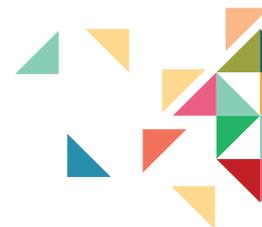
*“The Greta trainer who helped me during the basic training that my company gave me restored my self-confidence. She reassured me, and applied methods suited to my specific case. She gave me individual attention until I understood and succeeded in reading, writing and arithmetic. I have not had much education, I belong to the Travellers community and I dropped out before the end of middle school. Since completing this training, the world has changed for me. **I have four children: being able to read them stories and help them with their homework is a dream come true.** I can now pass on to my children what I’ve learned. I’ve become more curious, I’ve progressed in my company and have been given new opportunities. **I think I can sum it up by saying that I’m now a happy man.**”*

Zaïma HAMNACHE, Book & Reading Directorate at the French Ministry of Culture:

*“The idea of the “Premières Pages” (First Pages) scheme is to use the occasion of a child’s arrival in a family to encourage reading in this family, by suggesting that young parents set out to discover a children’s book with their child. This initiative was implemented by the Ministry of Culture and the Family Benefits Fund (CAF) in 7 French départements between 2009 and 2013. **In this framework, each new set of parents is offered a book, reading tips and an information guide.** This project was very popular in families. During the experiment, we identified various strengths and weaknesses. For instance, not all families came to claim the book, despite being invited. This led us to undertake “fallback plans”. **We decided to visit places frequented by families:** mother and child welfare clinics, nurseries, etc. This was very interesting in that it enabled us to build new partnerships.”*

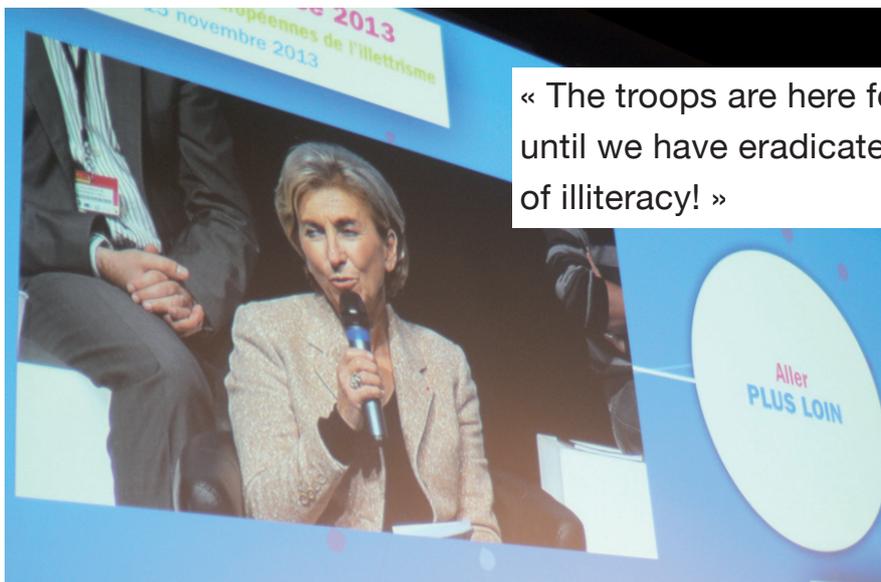


Conclusion



What about after 2013?

Conclusion by Marie-Thérèse Geffroy.



◀ Marie-Thérèse Geffroy,
President of the Board of
the ANLCI

“It is so difficult to conclude a meeting like this, that we were so eagerly anticipating!” exclaimed Marie-Thérèse Geffroy, President of the ANLCI. “For ten years, we have worked to ensure that people are made aware of this awkward and disturbing issue,” she continued. It is not fashionable to talk about illiteracy, noted **Marie-Thérèse Geffroy**, observing that everyone has preconceived notions on the subject. “At the ANLCI we opted for this terminology: person with literacy challenges” she explained. “We know that you can have super-qualified people who are unable to put up a concrete-block wall,” the President went on. And she insisted: **illiteracy does not make people “different”**. Regarding the “2013 Grande Cause Nationale”, she stressed that its goal was not only to “get people to speak out” but also to “encourage change.” “All the labour unions were there, and Thierry Le Paon, Secretary General of the CGT in particular was a great help,” she said appreciatively. “We managed to

get a whole lot of people with divergent interests to work together,” said Marie-Thérèse Geffroy. “The fact that we used resources from all quarters is because we are committed to solving the problem by looking at the people involved.”

We needed statistics, and yes, illiteracy is declining, noted the ANLCI President, recalling that **“It is not the name of the schemes that matters, but the number of people who are no longer illiterate.”** Outlining the prospects after the end of the Grande Cause Nationale, she called for “action to change perceptions and attitudes: we should not observe people with literacy problems as if we were scientists.” Repeatedly in the future, we need to “be very careful that things don’t deteriorate further.” There is, she insisted, no single solution. The only valid rule is that of gathering all the goodwill together, “of which there is an abundance in our country.”

In conclusion, Marie-Thérèse Geffroy invited each participants of the three-day national and European conference to propose, in the first two months of next year, an idea capable of carrying on the work done by the Grande Cause Nationale. **“It could be a national day, for instance. Together, we can trigger a new dynamic,”** she insisted.

“This national conference, held under the aegis of Europe, attracted more than 800 attendees. I believe that this achievement means that the troops are here for the duration, until we have eradicated the problem,” concluded Marie-Thérèse Geffroy. “In five years, half a million adults have overcome their illiteracy. There is still much to do before declaring victory, but we can also be proud of the achievements so far!”





Synthesis of AEFA's workshops

WORKSHOP 1

HOW TO PROFESSIONALISE GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS FOR LOW-SKILLED ADULTS



As part of French coordination of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (AEFA), led by the Europe-Education-Formation France Agency, four working groups were set up under a steering committee, to focus on the following:

- ✓ **Group 1** : Promotion of alternance learning and employability: a study of the conditions for bringing dropouts of all ages back into successful alternance training ;
- ✓ **Group 2** : Guidance (into, during and after training) of those most marginalised by the labour market ;
- ✓ **Group 3** : Professionalisation of guidance counsellors for low-skilled adults ;
- ✓ **Group 4** : Assessment of transversal skills: tools, techniques, methods.

Two of them reported on part of their work during the national and European conference on illiteracy. A summary is given below.

How to professionalise guidance counsellors for low-skilled adults ?

“The strategic objective of our working group,” begins **Gilles Schildknecht**, Deputy Director of Training at the CNAM and group supervisor, “is to provide support to the key players in adult training.” Ultimately, the challenge is to improve knowledge on the professionalisation of these people, disseminate the good practices identified and lastly transfer these practices. “We operate according to an overall working-group schedule. We have met several times and are about to enter the final phase of our mission, writing our report for the supervisory bodies for the end of December.” Meanwhile, Patrice Granier, from the Association of French Regions (ARF) and also a working group supervisor, explained that “We are currently identifying and cataloguing practices.”

The supervisors explained that some questions arose from the comments made since the group's work started. Here is a partial list:

- ✓ **Some people were found to be afraid to enter the resource centres.**
- ✓ **The guidance counsellors often asked how much inducement should accompany the advice.** In other words, should the person being advised be free to choose from the options offered to them, or should the counsellors, as prescribers, insist on certain choices.

✓ Another question concerned **professional specialisation**. There are indeed several networks, with varying degrees of specialisation depending on the status or profile of the people they help. This raises the issue of training and stigmatisation of people depending on where they go to get help. For the professionals themselves, in terms of recognition of their profession, they suffer from a lack of visibility. There are

several systems for recognising counsellors, but no common reference for guidance counsellors. Each institution has, so to speak, its own tools.

✓ **Is there not a need to pool practices?** A number of professionals seek to adopt common values, by means of charters, or by working together to implement a public service project; this line of thought could be explored further.

The example of the “*Cité des Métiers*” by Bernadette Thomas, in charge of the Cité des Métiers international label at Universciences

The network of Cités des Métiers (career guidance centres) now includes nearly forty platforms around the world, located in around ten countries, mainly in Europe. The first was set up within the Cité des Sciences in La Villette. A Cité des Métiers is a multi-stakeholder space, a versatile platform providing professional advice and resources on working life. It is focused around the user and offers a confidential service, free of charge, without prior

appointment. It is an opportunity to meet with specialised professionals, who include representatives of the national education system, guidance counsellors, representatives from the French job centre (Pôle Emploi), institutional partners involved in career guidance, various associations, local missions, etc. It is jointly managed by several partners. Various types of services are offered: advice from competent professionals, training workshops, learning sessions conducted by peers, informal chat sessions. The people coming in are generally reassured by this framework, which enables them to work on their

career plan with people in the same situation. Our work also requires our counsellors to stay on their toes and keep learning, as the needs and demands of jobseekers evolve over time. We need our professionals to have a framework that allows their skills to be fully exploited and formalised. When a new Cité is created, all staff undergo initial training. This covers procedures such as how to conduct interviews, etc. Counsellors also receive ongoing training and attend unit meetings in which they can discuss their specific questions.



WORKSHOP 2

ASSESSMENT OF TRANSVERSAL SKILLS: TOOLS, TECHNIQUES, METHODS



Jacques BRETAUDEAU of the CAFOC¹ training centre in Nantes and **Mathieu CARRIER** of AGEFOS-PME², supervisors of this working group. **They point out that more work is needed on employee mobility. In France, this rate is in fact “half that in the United States.”** This skills assessment is also a European priority mentioned in the Education and Training 2020 strategy.

1 - CAFOC : Centre Académique de Formation Continue, regional Continuous training centre linked to Ministry of Education, www.cafoc.ac-nantes.fr/

2 - AGEFOS PME collects taxes to finance vocational education and training for SMEs / www.agefos-pme.com/



The first stage of the work involved agreeing on definitions:

✓ Having a **skill** means knowing how to act while mobilising and effectively combining a variety of internal (knowledge, cognitive ability, interpersonal know-how, procedural know-how, physiological resources, etc.) and external resources (networks, software, databases, resources in the work environment, etc.) within a situation in a given context.

✓ **Transversal skills** are skills that can be mobilised in a wide variety of professional situations. This does not, however, mean that they are all mobilised simultaneously in every professional situation.

With regard to skills assessment, this involves collecting data from many different sources in order to determine the individual's level of proficiency, the degree to which they have mastered the internal and external resources that can be mobilised and combined, and the range of situations in which they are able to deploy these skills. This skills assessment is the purpose of the working group set up as part of the European Agenda. The aim of the experts is to identify best practices and make recommendations for field experiments in 2014. **To do this, a dozen experiments were observed by the experts, in order to determine the extent to which common procedures for assessing these skills emerge.** Following these observations, several lessons came to light. First, regardless of the schemes studied, the concept of “transversal” always appeared in the assessments, bearing in mind that the more the skills are used in the different activities, the more they become transversal.

In addition, ten skills were identified on which there appears to be a consensus:

- ✓ Teamwork
- ✓ Oral communication and adapting speech depending on the situation/other parties in the conversation
- ✓ Written communication and transmitting/transforming appropriate messages
- ✓ Compliance with procedures, rules, standards and social codes in various professional environments
- ✓ Organisation, planning, establishing priorities (for managing one's work and/or career plan) and movements in time-space
- ✓ Independent problem-solving and finding solutions to unexpected events
- ✓ Use of maths skills according to various situations
- ✓ Use of digital and IT resources in professional situations
- ✓ Processing information to optimise one's actions and changing ways of learning
- ✓ Promoting one's skills, highlighting professionalism (leveraging past experience)

Finally, three techniques for assessing these transversal skills can be distinguished:

- ✓ **Self-assessment:** the individual evaluates his or her own proficiency in the identified skills.
- ✓ **Role-playing** (external assessment): the individual is placed in a real or simulated situation in which he or she is asked to perform tasks, solve problems, implement strategies.
- ✓ **Comparison:** following a self-assessment or role-playing exercise, the individual's judgment is compared with the view of the assessor.



Conclusion

A collective effort that should be continued beyond 2013...



The fight against illiteracy is an effort that needs to be developed with the participation of all stakeholders. This is one of the main lessons of the three days of national and European conferences on illiteracy, which brought together nearly 900 people in Lyon, on 13, 14 and 15 November 2013.

During the discussions, emphasis was placed on the number of people concerned by this affliction, which is still too high: 2.5 million in France and one in five in Europe. It is an insidious phenomenon, because it is invisible and still underestimated, and yet well and truly omnipresent.



For the fight against illiteracy to gain ground, the players stressed that it was essential for the actions to take into account not only the difficulties of the children but also those of their parents, who themselves are often affected by this problem. Indeed, taking into account the difficulties encountered by some families has a big impact on the children's ability to progress. These strategic issues are also taken into account by the government at two levels: firstly in school, since the Minister for Educational Success, George Pau-Langevin, announced at the meeting that a forthcoming Circular would recommend that the school should do more to help families of highly vulnerable children - and then in work, with the establishment of a personal training account for the low-qualified groups (young people, job seekers and vulnerable employees), a point that was raised repeatedly by the labour union representatives.



Another equally fundamental focus is training for everyone required to be in contact with those affected by illiteracy. This may include reception staff in certain administrative or employment counselling departments, volunteers who do not always have the skills to detect, identify and encourage the people affected, or teachers, nursery staff, etc. These related



issues of professionalisation of staff providing training and guidance for low-qualified adults, and access to training for the people most marginalised by the labour market, are a central issue for the working groups set up in France within the framework of the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

It was also reiterated that French mobilisation against illiteracy could draw on the European programmes for lifelong learning, and more specifically on the next generation of programmes such as Erasmus+, which will give a prominent place to adult training.

The participants furthermore insisted that illiteracy is everyone's concern and that the fight against this social handicap must also be conducted within companies. Indeed, 6% of people affected by this phenomenon are currently in employment. The examples of detection and training measures implemented at some industrial sites show that such initiatives help not only those who are the direct beneficiaries, but also the competitiveness of companies that have decided not to shut their eyes to the problem.

In France as in Europe, the successive transformations and crises in the labour market must be met by constant change and adaptation. Support to encourage autonomy is needed to enable workers to grow and develop professionally; autonomy in social life and employment involves mastering basic skills. These priorities in terms of quality, development and access to lifelong learning for adults are the primary reasons for the European agenda.

Finally, while the Grande Cause Nationale 2013 has successfully highlighted the fight against illiteracy, the participants stressed the need to renew efforts for 2014, to ensure that the impetus provided by the Grande Cause does not go unheeded. All the players are asked to reflect on the next steps in this fight and share their thoughts on the way forward with the ANLCI.





MORE INFORMATION

/// www.2e2f.fr/page/agenda-europeen-des-adultes

/// www.erasmusplus.fr

/// ec.europa.eu/education/adult/agenda_fr.htm



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