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PROMISING
PRACTICES



FADIO: Promoting distance education

UNESCO-UNEVOC Promising Practice in Focus 2020

Context

Supporting inclusive teaching and learning through distance education

FADIO (Formation à distance interordres) is a cluster of educational institutions located in the Eastern Quebec region of Canada that have joined forces to share their expertise in pedagogy and technology in order to become frontline players in distance education.

Distance education as a knowledge exchange and skills development platform

Distance education is a useful tool for reaching students who might otherwise be excluded from traditional learning settings. It also creates digital spaces for the sharing of pedagogical and technical insights beyond the confines of the classroom. This model has been particularly successful in Quebec, as it provides easier access to continuing education and skills development for a population dispersed over a vast territory. As lower enrolment rates and increasingly hectic lifestyles require a more flexible learning schedule, distance education offers a viable solution that can be adapted to the learner's needs.

Objectives

The people driving this initiative are teachers, educational consultants, educational technicians, computer analysts and technicians, and managers.

The objectives are:

- To develop quality training and efficient distance learning practices;
- To enhance human resource expertise at the pedagogical, technological and technical levels;
- To continue to improve the infrastructure and quality of the network; and
- To develop quality, low-cost technological solutions.

Overview

Implemented by: Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles and 17 other educational institutions throughout Quebec

Where: Eastern Quebec, Canada

Theme: Distance education

Funding: Government-supported

Status: Active since 2015

The Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur du Gouvernement du Québec promotes the sharing of expertise in distance education among stakeholders at all levels of education. This makes it possible to promote best practices and stimulate innovation, collaboration and excellence in this field. FADIO receives financial support for implementing an innovative collaborative model comprising of 18 institutions across two regions.



The FADIO Partnership

FADIO represents a unique collaborative initiative that takes full advantage of education in a digital environment. Not all educational institutions have the resources to develop the pedagogical and technical aspects related to distance education on their own. Working collaboratively allows the 18 FADIO partners to benefit from each other's expertise, to work effectively and efficiently, and to make judicious choices, for example, in developing practices or purchasing equipment and services.

This inter-level distance education network is comprised of 8 school boards, 5 general and vocational colleges, 4 schools and 1 university, and caters to 8,000 distance learning students. Each member contributes with their own expertise in the educational, pedagogical and technical sector, which enables knowledge exchange within the network and the effective utilization of available resources. In addition, individual action plans submitted by all members are used to identify common objectives and targets, and produce a collective action plan for the advancement of distance education.

To ensure that it meets the needs of the community, FADIO has established its model based on a bottom-up approach. The work is oriented towards establishing cohesion between pedagogy and the technical and organizational aspects of distance education. This collaboration and sharing of resources allows educational institutions to benefit from the support and expertise of the most competent people in the region and to experiment with new practices in distance education. By doing so, there is optimal management of resources for the benefit of the region's institutions.

To measure the impact of the actions undertaken, an evaluation survey is circulated at the end of each year. The results are used to verify that the training activities and support services put in place meet the needs of students and educational stakeholders.

Outcomes

Increased collaboration between educational stakeholders

Since establishing the FADIO partnership, the "silo effect" has given way to enhanced collaboration between educational stakeholders. More than 150 people have been mobilized to contribute to the development of distance education and they are all actively involved in various committees and communities of practice (CoPs). This educational ecosystem is thriving due to the CoPs that enable people to share their expertise and engage in problem solving.

Enhanced quality of distance education

The development of a regional support team, comprising of expert resources from the 18 partner institutions, has ensured that all institutions receive the support, training and guidance they need to advance their distance education projects. This approach has proven to be effective by affording each institution access to competent resources at all times. To enhance the quality of distance education and to document the practices tested in the region, a network of practitioners and researchers has been set up. This network is also working to promote experimentation in techno-pedagogical innovations in distance education and to identify quality criteria. Large-scale activities are also organized to publicize and highlight good practices. For example, Distance Learning Week, a symposium held entirely online, is offered free of charge to the international francophone community.

Achievement of a common goal

Those who were once accustomed to a singular institutional focus are now reaping the benefits of a working environment where trust, collaboration, transparency and mutual assistance between educational institutions are paramount. The gap in expertise used to be much greater than it is today. However, this project has shown that expertise flourishes in a decentralized environment. FADIO has become a collective project in which all the institutions have a vested interest and each one has understood that by contributing collectively, the impact is beneficial for everyone involved. Moreover, the challenge of working with all levels of education demonstrates that there are common denominators between the institutions and that it is possible to work together towards a common goal.



Challenges and Insights

Levelling the playing field

A major challenge was ensuring a level playing field between the different educational stakeholders. Some institutions already offered significant distance education courses while others were new to the sector. A concerted effort had to be made to train and support all institutions and ensure that needs were being met.

Overcoming differences in technical infrastructure

The technical aspects of distance education can be a challenge for network institutions as the availability and quality of the equipment, and the knowledge required to operate it, may vary significantly. Technology is constantly evolving, which complicates the process of choosing the best solution. Furthermore, it might not always be financially feasible to choose the best solution. At some point, choices have to be made to keep costs down. By joining forces, the members came up with solutions that were tailored to their institutional contexts, thereby creating additional incentives for collaboration.

Managing time constraints

The limited availability of teachers, trainers and educational stakeholders meant that adjustments had to be made to maximize the benefits from their participation in training and community of practice meetings. In addition, identifying common priorities was not an easy task. Throughout the process, there was an emphasis on fostering constructive dialogue, close cooperation and a collaborative approach.

Future of the initiative

Due to the success of FADIO, the number of enrolled general and vocational colleges is projected to steadily increase over time, further enhancing the capacity and the influence of the network in the field of distance education. The FADIO initiative has already sparked interest across other provinces and the expertise that has been generated is being recognized as a model for quality distance education.

Learn more

Daniel LaBillois, Pedagogical Consultant, helped to compile this document. For more information, you can contact him at dlabillois@cegepgim.ca. To learn more about Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles, a UNEVOC Centre, visit <http://www.cegepgim.ca/>

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Questions or comments? Contact our team at:

unevoc-pp@unesco.org

Further references

FADIO website: <https://fadio.net>

Government of Quebec (2017): Policy on educational success http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/PSG/politiques_orientations/politique_reussite_educative_10juillet_A_1.pdf

Quebec Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2018: Digital Action Plan <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/current-initiatives/digital-action-plan/digital-action-plan/>

