

SCHOOL LIBRARY CRISIS NOT UNIQUE TO ONTARIO

PART ONE: REPORT ON SCHOOL LIBRARY SUMMIT (JUNE 26/03) CANADIAN COALITION FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES

OFHSA policies, some dating back to 1971, on teacher duties and qualifications, curriculum and program objectives, school libraries, textbooks, adult literacy, and core subjects all lend support for the need to provide students with strong reading and information literacy skills. It is because of these policies that OFHSA Board of Directors recently gave approval for OFHSA to join the Canadian Coalition for School Libraries. Our membership provides an opportunity to partner with an organization committed to improving the reading and information literacy skills of our children through improved funding for school (and public) libraries. The direct link between reading, improved achievement, and readiness for the demands of tomorrow's society, make this issue important for not only students in Ontario, rather those across Canada. As a member of the Canadian Coalition for School Libraries, I was pleased to be able to attend the School Library Summit held in Ottawa on June 26, 2003. The summit was held in conjunction with the "The Fun of Reading: International Forum on Canadian Children's Literature", held June 26-29.

By holding the School Library Summit in conjunction with the forum, the coalition was able to include experts in Canadian literature and research on literacy from across Canada with the opportunity to be part of the School Library Summit program.

Prior to the start of the School Library Summit, a news conference was held. Participants included Dr. Ken Haycock, author of "The Crisis in Canada's School Libraries: The Case for Reform and Re-Investment", Dr. Roch Carrier, National Librarian of Canada, and Dr. Marlene Asselin, President of the Canadian School Library Association.

In opening comments, Dr. Haycock spoke of the 40+ years of evidence linking the positive relation between school libraries and achievement (test scores), with improvement of 10-20%. These results are based on adequate school library resources, including electronic resources, and the use of school librarians. He noted the World Bank has recently been investing in libraries in Spain. Dr. Haycock also pointed out that "Kids only go through school once", and "because they are comfortable with the internet does not mean they are competent". He said many students today are information rich but knowledge poor. He believes the issue is not more funding, rather priority funding. Dr. Asselin spoke of the need for achieving information literacy standards through national standards for school libraries. This vision is based on creation of a national identity, a knowledge-based society, and the development of skills and technology to utilize resources, resulting in information literacy.

Dr. Carrier stressed the need for improved literacy, noting 22% of people are unable to complete an employment application, and 44% are unable to understand the contents of a newspaper. He pointed out that the ability to access and effectively utilize information is a key asset with the need to start developing information literacy skills early in life.2

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In his travel, he said he had seen schools with one teacher-librarian for 2500 students, and schools with no library acquisitions for the last ten (10) years. He also indicated that he had received a letter from a school alumni member who reported the school library at his former school was closed from 1986-1999, with only \$2100.00 allocated to the library since it re-opened in 1999.

Dr. Carrier announced that a Canadian “National School Library Day” is going to be held the fourth Monday of October to coincide with “International School Libraries Day”.

The keynote speaker was Dave Bouchard, well-known author of many books, including “If You’re Not From The Prairies”, and a featured guest speaker. He thanked participants for being able “to address a group of people who were becoming extinct”. He noted that Canadian schools are not meant for non-readers, as emphasized in the current curriculum. In an effort to promote reading he quoted Einstein who once said “Modeling isn’t one way to influence children, it is the only way. Those who can, but choose not to read, have no advantage over those who do not”. In Bouchard’s view, television was not the culprit. One of the primary sources is the lack of good books in schools. That being said, he said parents/adults needed to start with control of the television, they need to read what their children read, and they needed to reach into their pockets and fund libraries. When speaking to students at an Ottawa-Carleton Secondary School, he noted that students had been given the skills to read, but not for the right reason, that being “heart”. He stressed that everyone needs to advocate for literacy, and pointed out that California spends four times (4X) the Canadian total on library resources. His belief is in the 3M’s “Model, Manage, and Motivate”, and reading is about modeling and lighting the fire. He believes that there is no need for new curriculum or new programs.

Marla Waltman-Daschko from Statistics Canada then addressed delegates, and spoke of the results of a school library survey commissioned by the National Library of Canada. The 2001 survey revealed that the most recent school library data available prior to the survey were from 1982. The survey looked at what data was available, the factors affecting the health of school libraries, and new approaches to collecting data. Among the results were findings of school library suffering due to decreased funding over the long term, and variance in the need for a school librarian. In Ontario, only 2% of schools qualify for a fulltime school librarian under the current funding formula. A new initiative between Industry Canada and the National Library of Canada, planned for September/October 2003, will involve the collection of data on school libraries in both elementary and secondary schools across the country. The survey will look at whether the school has a library, the number of staff, annual expenses for library development, sources of funding, and the number and location of computers in the school. The results of the survey are expected to be available by Spring/2004.

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Dr. Ken Haycock, former Director of the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia, and author of “The Crisis in Canada’s School Libraries” referred to material in his report indicating that while Canadian school libraries were in a state of deterioration, many countries around the world were increasing investment in this area. He pointed to organizations including The World Bank, International Development Agency, and the European Union as leaders in providing support for school libraries. Additionally, the U.S. Congress provided \$250 million of dedicated funding for school library materials in 2002. In his research, he also found that even philanthropic foundations are providing funding for school libraries and teacher-librarians as a means of furthering cultural development. Dr. Haycock also pointed out the discrepancy in access to library resources within Canada, noting that only in Alberta and Saskatchewan are there province-wide licensing agreements for sharing of electronic library resources. **Why not in Ontario, where the government promotes equality of opportunity for learning?** In his report, Dr. Haycock also makes note of the fact that full-time teacher-librarians are found in only 10% of Ontario elementary schools today, compared with 43% twenty-five years ago.

In a video prepared for the School Library Summit, musician Dean Jenkinson who is a well-known regular on CBC Winnipeg provides his thoughts via a song entitled “Reality Check”.

The morning session concluded with a panel discussion moderated by Dave Stevens of CBC Radio “Ontario Today”. Panel members included: Annie Kidder of People for Education; Heather Godden, Teacher-Librarian from the Newfoundland Learning Resource Council; Diane Mittermeyer, University Libraries (McGill University); Don Mills, Public Libraries (Mississauga Library System); Patsy Aldana, English Publishers (Association of Canadian Book Publishers); Robert Cadotte, French Publishers – regrets; and Harry Chan, Business (Bibliofiche).

Annie Kidder presented findings from the Elementary and Secondary Tracking Surveys, completed by People for Education over the last six years for elementary, and three years for secondary schools. In her comments, she highlighted the growing gap between have and have-not schools, the loss of non-core items from schools, and the changing role of the principal in the school. The surveys found that since 1997-98, there has been a 29% overall reduction in the number of full-time and part-time teacher-librarians, with a 60% decrease in full-time positions. In the most recent survey, there has also been a 200% increase in the number of school libraries open less than 10 hours per week.

Heather Godden is a teacher-librarian in the largest school district in Newfoundland/Labrador where school size varies from 125 – 1030 students. Their current funding formula provides for one teacher-librarian for every one thousand students, but is subsidized to 1:500 students.

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Recent cuts have meant the loss of 23 positions (50% reduction). In September, she will be teaching in a school of 539 students, with no library technician, and an instructional workload of 5-6 subjects and her ability to provide teacher-librarian services will affect students.

Diane Mittermeyer from McGill University presented highlights from a July 2002 study involving students at 14 universities on information research skills. The only identifying questions on the survey involved where, and in which program the student received their first diploma. The remaining questions involved knowledge of information research. Of the 5281 questionnaires sent out, 3003 or 56% were returned. More than 55% of the questionnaires' answers demonstrated information knowledge skills deficiency. One of the key findings from the survey was obtained from the comments received in responses. In 56 pages of comments, the most striking comment was respondents thanking the study organizers for helping them identify one of their individual learning needs, and willingness to help meet this identified need. Responses to the survey also identified the wide use of the Internet to do all of their research due to the difficulty in accessing library resources. The study points to an education ministry where there is little concern for integration, the library is not at the center of teacher preparation, librarians are not in the schools in Quebec, and many parents and volunteers have limited knowledge.

Don Mills from the Mississauga Library System provided information on library services in Mississauga, where more money is spent on children's library resources than anywhere in Canada. He emphasized that there is no "best model" for public libraries. In the Mississauga Library System, each grade four student has a mandatory library card. In grade eight, a mandatory research program is operated through the library. Homework clubs also operate out of the library branches.

Patsy Aldana of the Association of Canadian Book Publishers spoke of the cultural importance of reading libraries. Significant cultural identity built over the last 20 years through school libraries is currently in decline. The changes in Canadian publishing regulations have resulted in a greater risk of incorrect information and error in printed material, and used errors with Canadian information on "Encarta" as an example. She also noted that the School Book Fair business is now essentially a monopoly with Scholastic the only active company in this field. As a result, there are fewer Canadian books being sold, and there is an urgent need to push for more Canadian content.

Harry Chan of Bibliofiche spoke of his company's business, which originally was a supplier of furniture and supplies to libraries. He focused on research on 21st Century Trends, and how this was influencing business. In 1997, 11% of Canada's workforce was part-time, compared with approximately 20% of the U.S. workforce.5

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The number of part-time workers is growing significantly as business focuses on “core competencies” and out-sources non-core competency jobs. The result means elimination or a movement of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs to developing countries. There is a need to “add value” quickly to reverse this trend through identification of core competencies and focusing on our strengths. One core competency is the school library, which is currently being dissolved. In the state of New York, where Biblioniche is expanding its business, all secondary schools are mandated to have a library and most elementary schools have libraries. School libraries provide the opportunity to gain research and literacy skills needed for students future success. Mr. Chan pointed out that in Ontario there is a lot of money being targeted to literacy coordinators, but very little money being directed to school libraries.

During the buffet lunch, Lise Bissonette, Bibliotheque nationale du Quebec spoke of the school/public library situation in Quebec. The situation in Quebec is similar to that across the country, only they do not have librarians in the schools in Quebec.

In the second part of my report on the School Libraries Summit, I will present information on the afternoon session, featuring a presentation on the U.S. effort by Jan Cellucci, wife of U.S. Ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci. Also speaking in the afternoon session was Gwynneth Evans on The UNESCO School Library Manifesto, and Dr. Dianne Oberg (Univ. of Alberta) and Dr. Ray Doiron (Univ. of PEI) on National Standards for Canadian School Libraries.

PART TWO: REPORT ON SCHOOL LIBRARY SUMMIT (JUNE 26/03) CANADIAN COALITION FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES

In part one of my report on the “School Library Summit” held in Ottawa on June 26, 2003, I summarized the presentations during the morning session. In part two, I will summarize the afternoon presentations.

The lunch buffet at the School Library Summit provided participants the opportunity to network, and meet colleagues from across the country, all keenly interested in addressing the deteriorating state of school libraries. The lunch presentation by Lise Bissonnette, Bibliotheque nationale du Quebec painted a realistic picture of the school library situation in Quebec, where there are no librarians in the schools, a prelude to the direction other provinces are charting in times of fierce competition for education funding dollars. It was a splendid lead into the first presentation of the afternoon session, with Jan Cellucci, wife of Paul Cellucci, the U.S Ambassador to Canada, and her presentation on how the United States is meeting a similar challenge.

Mrs. Cellucci noted that recognition of problems with student achievement, directly related to the lack of school libraries, teacher librarians, library collections, and the limited availability of the school library to students, was well documented in a number of research studies, including recent research by Dr. Keith Curry-Lance. Dr. Curry-Lance was one of the featured speakers at the May 2002 “Summit on School Libraries”, sponsored and hosted by the Ontario Library Association (OLA), and held in Toronto, Ontario.

The concern of Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States, along with *Paula* Ridge, wife of Tom Ridge, former governor of Pennsylvania, and Secretary of Homeland Security, and Jan Cellucci, for reversal of the decline in school libraries led to a summit at the White House in June of 2002. Invited delegates from across the country attended this summit, including Esther Rosenfeld, representing the OLA.

Ms. Cellucci noted that one of the primary misconceptions of decision-makers within government was the view that librarians “just walked around”. She noted that in the United States, unlike Canada, there is a strong philanthropic connection to libraries. She pointed to Christine DeVita, President of the DeWitt Wallace-Readers Digest Fund as an example of responding to the U.S. “No Children Left Behind Act, 2001”. This fund has contributed \$250million for library resources and to improve accessibility to libraries. The Laura Bush Foundation for America’s Libraries has just recently been established, and on May 05 announced the disbursement of \$640,000 in grants to 132 rural and inter-city school libraries, and community libraries, in 40 states for the purchase of books for their libraries.

The second presentation of the afternoon was by Gwynneth Evans. She began her presentation acknowledging her admiration for books by Pierre Berton, and a past conversation with him. When she asked him which book children liked best, he said it

was “The Mysterious North”, at least according to his children. As to which book he liked best himself, he responded by saying it would have to be “The Secret World of Og”. She then turned her presentation to “The School Library Manifesto”, first presented at the UNESCO conference in 1993. However, the issue of school libraries was not on the agenda of national leaders, and the report, which was based on the Public Library Manifesto from 1974, did not receive attention until presented by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) at the UNESCO General Conference in November, 1999. It received approval at this conference and was released after signatures from member countries. The manifesto sets out the mission, funding legislation and networks, goals, staffing, and operation and management of the school library. It urges governments, through their ministries of education, as well as national and local decision-makers, to implement the principles of the manifesto. In support of school libraries, Ms. Evans referred to Dr. Ken Haycock’s notion of the teacher-librarian as “teacher, manager, and information specialist”. She expressed concern that in a study by Environics titled “Young People in a Wide World”, most children used the internet for chatting, playing games, and listening to music, this in a country where there is a perception that we understand the complexities of literacy facing our nation.

The final presentation for the afternoon session featured Dr. Dianne Oberg, along with Dr. Ray Doirion, and covered the topic of National Standards for Canadian School Libraries. The document entitled “Achieving Information Literacy Through Quality School Library Programs” links the importance of teacher-librarians and information literacy skills through engaging learners, and encouraging them to make the link between cultural resources including galleries, museums and libraries, and the arts, to Canadian society. Key concepts include: a place where Canadian children access literature to help them understand the diverse culture in Canada, the need for a team of people, a portrait of the school library which is different and dynamic, a collection of resources which includes a collage of work which is both print and non-print, teacher-librarians who collaborate and multi-task, a learning environment which is esthetic and fosters life-long learning, language of a learning society (In the U.K. known as “learning city”) which must provide access points to learning resources also known as “CAP” resources or community access points, and standards for school libraries which must be in sync with those of the Council of Ministers of Education.

The outcome of school library information literacy standards for students include:

- Esthetic appreciation of the arts and life-long learning
- The use of information responsibly
- The use of information respectfully
- The use of information critically
- The use of information strategically
- The use of information to make decisions
- The use of information expressively, with the ability to modify the information
- The use of information with technological confidence

Information literacy skills involve values, processes, and products. The standards, both quantitative and qualitative, must reflect a balance as to what is needed.

The importance of reading and development of literacy skills for our children are clearly presented by many of the speakers at the White House Conference on School Libraries hosted by Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States of America in June 2002. In his keynote address to the White House Conference on School Libraries (2002), Dr. Vartan Gregorian of the Carnegie Corporation stated “The greatest challenge facing us today is how to organize information into structured knowledge. We must rise above the obsession with quantity of information and the speed of transmission, and focus on the fact that the key issue for us is our ability to organize the information once it has been amassed, to assimilate it, to find meaning in it and to assure its survival. And that cannot be done without reading and literacy. In the decade ahead, our democracy and our society will be facing a major challenge. Many, in our society, will have access to information, to knowledge, hence to power; power of autonomy, power of enlightenment, power of self-improvement and self-assertion, power over their lives and their families’ future, and there will be others who will have no access to information. Such a cleavage will have tremendous consequences on the future of our nation. Our nation cannot afford the “luxury” of having one-fifth of its population to be illiterate. For reading is a means to education; education is a means to knowledge; knowledge is a means to power and a bright future. Those who undergo the test of learning to read and write do so not only for themselves and their families but for our nation as well. They learn in order to become good citizens and good ancestors. That is why reading and the love of libraries and books has to begin in the earliest stages of education. School libraries constitute an indispensable introduction to literacy and learning about the world and the universe. They are pathways to self-discovery. They are instruments for progress and autonomy”.

At the conclusion of the School Library Summit, interested participants were encouraged to meet, to share contact information, and discuss the next steps in bringing the school library issue to the forefront of political action. The formation of provincial coalitions to direct more local involvement and effort was discussed, and a follow-up meeting for the Canadian Coalition For School Libraries was tentatively set for August. The summit provided inspiration to those passionate about school libraries, and a challenge to those shaping the future of our society.

Respectfully,

Brian Peat, 1st Vice-President OFHSA