

**SHINE AMID THE BRIGHTEST  
WITH THE SCHOOL LIBRARY**

Brief submitted to

***Briller parmi les meilleurs***

**Quebec Forum on Health, Education  
and Economic and Social Development**

March 2004

by

***Coalition en faveur des bibliothèques scolaires /***

**Quebec Coalition for School Libraries**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### The Quebec Coalition for School Libraries recommends :

- that the Ministry of Education formally recognize and support the pedagogical and informational role of the school library and documentation centre;
- that this declaration be accompanied by a policy for the development of the school library which includes concrete steps aimed at upgrading the place of the library within the school itself and within the school boards;
- that this declaration of recognition affect all stakeholders in education;
- that the concept of the school library and its services be integrated into the Ministry of Education's long-range strategic success plan;
- that this plan stipulate that funds allotted by the Ministry for the school library must be used solely for that purpose;
- that a procedure of accountability in this regard be established within the evaluation criteria for school success plans, including standards for the provision of qualified personnel, space facilities, collections and services needed for the promotion of reading and the teaching of research and information skills in schools;
- that the Ministry of Education demonstrate its recognition of the school library by assigning to the department of pedagogical services a person possessing the qualifications and leadership ability necessary to carry such a portfolio;
- that the school library be an integral part of the education process, being one of the essential stakeholders and no longer considered as a peripheral or, worse, optional element of the school;
- that pairing the computer laboratory with the school library be considered;
- that the budget intended for libraries to support the development of collections and the hiring of professional and technically qualified personnel be increased;
- that school-municipal collaboration be considered one avenue to be explored, among others, for service to students;

- that every initiative aimed at offering quality information service to students be encouraged;
- that courses in research methodology and information skills, as well as courses in children's literature, be included in the education and training of teachers.

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## PREAMBLE

The Forum on health, education and economic and social development, convened by Quebec Premier Jean Charest, has come about because of wide-ranging problems resulting from an aging population and the consequent erosion of the base of public finance.

The Quebec Coalition for School Libraries proposes to participate in the discourse under the “education” rubric. First we will call to mind the current situation in school libraries and put that picture into the context of a knowledge-society, a goodly part of which rests on the acquisition and use of timely information. And secondly, we will allude to the current rate of illiteracy, hovering around 15% of the Quebec population, and then to the school drop-out rate, which is in the vicinity of 30%.

The purpose of the Brief is not just to list shortfalls of the education system but to propose recommendations and suggestions for solution.

### **Quebec Coalition for School Libraries** (*La Coalition en faveur des bibliothèques scolaires*)

Created in Fall 2002 following the seminar entitled , “*La médiation de la lecture auprès des jeunes: le temps d’agir*” (“Promoting Reading for Children; Time for Action”), the Quebec Coalition for School Libraries brings together individuals, associations and institutions related to the book industry and involved in the promotion of books and reading.

Through its Mission the Quebec Coalition aims to ensure that the library is able to fulfill its essential role in the school, in order to:

- allow students to develop a lifelong habit of reading;
- allow students to use information competently and effectively, that is to say, critically;
- ensure the presence of professional and technically qualified personnel;
- ensure access to a wide and varied collection of documents;
- ensure access to state of the art facilities
- ensure access to working computers and equipment.

The main goals of the Quebec Coalition for School Libraries are:

- to bring together institutions, associations and individuals for the purpose of forming new partnerships, encouraging collaboration among diverse departments and teaching levels within the education community and developing new ways of fostering dynamic school libraries.

- to influence political, administrative, pedagogical and budgetary decisions at the Ministry of Education and on school boards by implementing the principles defined in the School Library Manifesto (UNESCO / IFLA);
- to demand recognition of the role of the school library in the Quebec Public School Act (*Loi sur l'instruction publique*);
- to ensure the educational and cultural role of the library within the QEP (Quebec Education Plan; *Régime pédagogique de l'éducation du Québec*), which covers preschool, elementary and secondary schools, as well as within the College Education Plan (*la Régime des études collégiales*);
- to support the development of a school library policy within the education system;
- to convince teaching personnel of the importance of the library in student formation;
- to create awareness among parents and of society in general of the benefits of having a library in the school;
- to encourage universities to carry out research in the area of school libraries
- to encourage faculties of Education to include a library unit in the basic courses for teacher training and in various other programs offered for ongoing professional development;
- to publicize the work and accomplishments of the Quebec Coalition for School Libraries through the media and in published reports.

Associations belonging to the *La Coalition en faveur des bibliothèques scolaires* (Quebec Coalition for School Libraries):

- *Association des bibliothécaires du Québec/The Quebec Library Association (ABQLA)*
- *Association des bibliothèques publiques du Québec (BPQ)*
- *Association des distributeurs exclusifs de livres en langue française (ADELF)*
- *Association des libraires du Québec (ALQ)*
- *Association nationale des éditeurs de livres (ANEL)*
- *Association pour l'avancement des sciences et techniques de la documentation (ASTED)*
- *Association pour la promotion des services documentaires scolaires (APSDS)*
- *Astra Zeneca Canada*
- *Communication-jeunesse*
- *Corporation des bibliothécaires professionnels du Québec (CBPQ) / Corporation of Professional Librarians of Quebec (CPLQ)*
- *Fédération des coopératives québécoises en milieu scolaire (FCQMS)*
- *Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels de l'éducation du Québec (CSQ)*
- *Lurelu*

- *Regroupement des Centres régionaux de services aux bibliothèques publiques (RCRSBP)*
- *Société pour la promotion de la science et de la technologie (SPST)*
- *Union des écrivaines et écrivains québécois (UNEQ)*

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

School libraries, as defined in Quebec, refer to libraries in elementary and secondary schools. In this Brief we are specifically looking at this kind of library, keeping in mind that the education process begins in early childhood, passes through primary school and continues on to university. A weak link anywhere in this educational chain can have repercussions extending from childhood to adult. It is therefore critical to consider the issue from the point of view of the educational system in its entirety and situate the school library in the overall vision of lifelong learning.

We will spare you the details of the myriad studies done on school libraries in Quebec over the last forty years and concentrate on the most recent, one which took place in 2002 and the results of which have only recently been made public. Suffice it to say, all of the studies, without exception, revealed a flagrant lack of vision and understanding on the part of “l’État” as to what role and place the school library should have, be it in the school or in society as a whole. For “l’État”, we are taking the definition of the Quebec Superior Council of Education (*le Conseil supérieure de l’éducation*) which uses the term in the broad sense: the Government, the Ministry of Education and public bodies, such as school boards, schools and colleges.<sup>1</sup> In each instance the discourse emphasized the connection of school success, level of scolarity and academic achievement with strong financial support, but never established the very real relationship with one of the essential components in the development – the school library and the school librarian.

This situation, called scandalous by Michèle Ouimet in an editorial in the newspaper *La Presse*, persists: “There exist tons of statistics, one more depressing than the next. (...) This shocking data emphasize to what extent libraries have been allowed to flounder. And it is scandalous. Not a big juicy scandal that makes the headlines, just a little scandal, but a real one, which hides in the woodwork for many years and bothers only those in the know.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rapport annuel sur l’État et les besoins de l’éducation 2000-2001.

<sup>2</sup> Michèle Ouimet, « Bibliothèque cherche livres ». *La Presse*, lundi, 17 novembre 2003, p. A10.

In December 2002, a Report from the Ministry of Education of Quebec (MEQ)<sup>3</sup>, which remains virtually confidential to this day, presents a disturbing picture of the state of school libraries. Let us look at some of the findings in this report:<sup>4</sup>

- At the elementary level, 87% of the libraries visited have non-fiction documents deemed “less than satisfactory”; the fiction collection is considered “more than satisfactory” in only 13% of the cases.
- At the secondary level, 80% of the libraries visited have on their shelves non-fiction that is “less than satisfactory” and 67% of the libraries hold outmoded fiction collections.
- At the elementary level, 40% of the libraries visited need to withdraw 40-50% of their collection.
- At the secondary level, two out of three libraries visited essentially need to withdraw their entire collection.
- 60% of the libraries at the secondary level and 40% at the elementary level have to make major renovations to their library space.
- There is less than adequate networking and computerization and an insufficient number of computers and printers.
- Nearly half of the school libraries at the elementary level have no access to professional or technical support.
- More than 80% of those in charge of the libraries have never attended a conference or any local or regional meeting to continue their professional development.
- **Only 13% of the libraries at the primary and secondary levels are ready to take on the implementation of the new Reform.**

According to Louise Julien, professor in *Département des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université du Québec à Montréal*, forty years after the Parent Report, “one of the glaring errors of the Ministry of Education is not having seen the importance of making the school library a place brimming with animation.”<sup>5</sup>

The education milieu is faced with numerous problems which, if not resolved, run the risk of negatively impacting the future of Quebec society. The reported demographic imbalance calls for a highly informed solution to confront the economic problems looming on the horizon.

What role might school libraries play in this regard? How might they contribute to the development of such a solution. And how might the Ministry invest in the future of the next generation in order that it be prepared to face the challenges which await Quebec society?

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<sup>3</sup> Rapport sur la situation des bibliothèques scolaires québécoises. Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, Direction des ressources didactiques du ministère, décembre 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Fabien Deglise, « Les bibliothèques scolaires continuent à battre de l'aile ». *Le Devoir*, mercredi, 18 décembre 2002, p. A1 et Marie Allard, « Rapport du MEQ ». *La Presse*, jeudi, 19 décembre 2002, p. E3.

<sup>5</sup> 40 ans après le rapport Parent. *L'UQAM*, vol. XXIX, no. 12, 10 mars 2003

The Quebec Coalition for School Libraries intends to show clearly to the Minister of Education that the school library is a critical component of the education system in a society said to be information and knowledge-based.

## Chapter I: LEARNING TO INFORM ONESELF

A Study, sponsored by *La Conférence des Recteurs et des Professeurs des Universités du Québec (CREPUQ)*<sup>6</sup> and conducted by *le Groupe de travail sur la formation documentaire du sous-comité des bibliothèques* in August 2003, brought to light the lack of knowledge regarding research and reference sources. Fifty-seven percent of some 3000 undergraduates registered in Quebec universities completed the Study survey.

The Study reveals that the student, poorly-trained, "(...) goes about doing research in a haphazard fashion, has an awkward mastery of the vocabulary needed to focus an inquiry, does not know how to recognize the hallmarks of a scholarly journal, does not even know how to distinguish between different kinds of research tools and has difficulty interpreting a bibliographic reference."<sup>7</sup>

The Study clearly points up student lack of awareness that the classification of books and research materials is the same from one library to the next and that knowledge of research skills acquired one place can be applied elsewhere. Truly, are our young university students being well-prepared to enter a knowledge-based society? And why are they not? Why this lack of knowledge? The answer to this question is complex. The root of the problem is far-reaching.

Teaching students to work with information involves a process that begins with the teaching of library and research skills. Now, our education system has not yet fathomed the complexity of research methodology and the proper use of information. As a result it has never considered , or at least until very recently, including the teaching of research methods along with instruction in other subjects, right from grade school and also as part of teacher training. Moreover, current discourse on information and communication technologies gives the students the illusion that finding information is easy and puts the emphasis on the hardware and software rather than on the selection process, that is, on the content itself and the critical evaluation of it.

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<sup>6</sup> Étude sur les connaissances en recherche documentaire des étudiants entrant au 1<sup>er</sup> cycle dans les universités québécoises. (*Study of research and information skills of undergraduates in Quebec universities.*) La CREPUQ, août 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Marie Andrée Chouinard, « La bibliothèque pour les nuls ». *Le Devoir*, mardi, 9 septembre 2003.

In fact, the idea of literacy (knowing how to read, write and count) in the context of an information society is henceforth broadened to include knowing how to inform oneself. Anglophones refer to this concept as “Information Literacy”. It is here that librarians can be considered an invaluable resource. Being information specialists by virtue of their training, they are able to make available to the whole education community, to students and teachers alike, a particular expertise, which the education milieu in Quebec seems not to understand, given that librarians have practically disappeared from the school system.

To be a self-learner the student must, from the youngest age, have access to a library both at school and in the neighbourhood. The library,

“a storehouse and disseminator of knowledge, is (...) essential for acquiring, trying out and reinforcing information skills. (...) The [library] provides a forum for instruction appropriate to and integrated into the goals of the curriculum, with a view to developing competencies in young people to be able to identify, find, use, synthesize and present information taken from a variety of sources, and all this from the time they first step foot into school. Such information skills embody the ability to use information and communication technologies and are considered to be “cross-curricular”. The [library] allows [students] to familiarize themselves with organization systems and practices (classification, catalogues, subject headings, indexes, abstracts, search strategies, bibliographies, etc.) with which they can work to develop their own ideas and devise their own work and study methods”<sup>8</sup>.

The bottom line is that the use of the school library and its resources is totally implicated in the philosophy of the Quebec Education Plan (*Programme de formation de l'école québécoise*).

## **Chapter II DEVELOPING AND FOSTERING A LOVE OF READING**

In the most recent census, in 2001, figures for education levels in Quebec revealed that 9.5% of the population have less than nine years of schooling. According to the statistics of EIAA<sup>9</sup>, gathered between 1994 and 1998, approximately one million persons in Quebec between the ages of 16 and 65 – that is, one out of five adults, or 21.1% of the population – have significant difficulty reading and writing. Eleven percent of these are young adults between 16 and 25 years of age. Eighty-five percent of the young adults, 16 to 25 years of age, who at the time were registered in literacy courses, had entered high school behind in their schooling, a situation that was exacerbated the longer they

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<sup>8</sup> Paulette Bernhard, “Perspectives sur l'éducation à l'information”. *Esquisse*. no. 0028-0029-0030-0031-0032-0033, 2003, juin-juillet-août, p. 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Enquête internationale sur l'alphabétisation des adultes. EIAA, 1994.

went on.<sup>10</sup> In an article published in *Le Devoir*, Prof. Régine Pierre, Director of *le Groupe de Recherche sur l'Alphabétisation et l'Acquisition de la Littérature, de l'Université de Montréal*, (Research Group on Literacy and Reading, UMTL.), reports very disturbing statistics related to the difficulties children have with reading in school :

- 80% of children who do not know how to read at the end of first grade will take more than six years to complete their primary schooling and will become part of the 30-40% of adolescents who do not finish high school. (...) For the majority of these children, whom one tends to blame for the pitiable statistics of their school, it all happened in the first year. Eleven years later, they are functionally or completely illiterate. (...)
- The diploma is not a guarantee of having effectively acquired competencies, as has already been reported in *Littérature, économie et société*<sup>11</sup>: there is no direct correspondence between the level of schooling attested to by a diploma and the level of literacy necessary to function in society.
- (...) 30% of each generation of children (...) will never integrate itself into the society because by tomorrow, even more than today, they will not be able to work or even function in daily living, simply because they will not know how to read.<sup>12</sup>

In this same article Prof. Pierre also speaks of “the importance that writing (skills) exert on a knowledge society and the defining role they also play in schooling.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition, it is necessary to instill, and this from early childhood, the love of books and the pleasure of reading! Among the elements that “help children discover the joy of reading and become good readers”,<sup>14</sup> Dominique Demers, author of numerous children’s book, identified four which relate particularly to the role of libraries and those working in school libraries:

- variety and accessibility: first and foremost
- absolutely necessary to make reading come alive
- most important: the human touch!
- To be stimulating, you have to be stimulated<sup>15</sup>

These four “secrets”, so aptly called by the author, are directly related to the essential conditions for a school library that we will be discussing in the fourth chapter of this Brief.

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<sup>10</sup> *Le Devoir*, 6 septembre 2003

<sup>11</sup> *Littérature, économie et société: résultats de la première enquête internationale sur l’alphabétisation des adultes / OCDE*. Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Économiques, Paris : OCDE, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Régine Pierre, « Avant tout, la lecture et l’écriture », *Le Devoir*, 11 novembre 2003, p. A7.

<sup>13</sup> Idem.

<sup>14</sup> Dominique Demers, « Dix secrets ». *La Presse*, 9 novembre 2002, p. A19

<sup>15</sup> Idem.

### Chapter III: CONTRIBUTING TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

“It has been demonstrated that when librarians and teachers work together students achieve higher levels of literacy, reading, learning, problem-solving and information and communication technology skills.”<sup>16</sup>

A critical review of the literature published in 2002, citing research done on the influence of using a school library on the academic success of students, shows the significant connect of its impact on every aspect of learning, even for students at risk.<sup>17</sup> A more recent study, in 2004, carried out with students in schools in Ohio, entitled, “Student Learning through Ohio School Libraries”<sup>18</sup> comes to the same conclusions. Notably, this Study is one of the first to take into account the perceptions of students themselves. It looked at 13,213 responses from students, aged 7 to 20 years (the average being 14 years, that is, high school age) of which 48% were boys and 51.1% were girls. The Study set out to show the impact of the school library on the students’ success, as well as its effect on their lives generally. Key findings of the Study show that:

- The school library plays a significant role in learning how to find and use of information.
- The library provides the opportunity to use a variety of sources and information formats.
- The library provides the appropriate, basic information needed for homework and school projects.
- As regards reading: 76.7% of respondents indicated that the library helped them to have a better appreciation of reading, 74.8% said it helped to improve their reading skills and enrich their vocabulary; and 74.9% said it helped improve their writing skills.
- 82.5% of the students said that the library helped them study better at home.
- From the students’ perspective: The school library helped determine their strengths and weaknesses in using information sources and allowed them to develop their own ideas.
- From the perspective of the teachers: 99.7% of the teachers believed that the library and the services it provides help students.

The Study presented its profile of a successful school library:

- a resource agent
- a knowledge construction agent – developing information literacy scaffolds which allow students to develop new knowledge and understanding

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<sup>16</sup> Manifeste de la bibliothèque scolaire. UNESCO/INFLA, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Dorothy Williams, Caroline Wavell and Louisa Coles. *Impact of School Library Services on Achievement and Learning*, Aberdeen (Great Britain): School of Information and Media, Faculty of Management, The Robert Gordon University, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> *Student Learning through Ohio School Libraries*. Ohio Educational Library Media Association, Spring 2004. <http://www.oelma.org/studentlearning/>

- an academic achievement agent
- an independent reading and personal development agent
- a technological literacy agent

In short, in this Study, the school library is perceived as a dynamic gateway to achievement and learning. The research team that carried out the Study has come to the conclusion that without a library certain students would fall by the wayside. The students surveyed have clearly recognized the link between the assistance they received through the library and from the librarians and their own success in their projects and examinations. Finally, this Study concludes, as do all the other studies reviewed, that student academic achievement depends on the presence of both professional and support staff, on the participation of librarians in teaching how to find information (research methodology) and on accessibility to a wide and varied collection, including access to and proper use of computers, equipment and software.

All of the research therefore places in evidence the influence that the school library can have on the development of student reading, writing, research and study skills. It shows how learning information skills can render students capable of meeting the complex demands of our knowledge-based society. Finally, in order that the school library fully play out its pedagogically supportive role, the results of the studies demonstrate to what degree it is necessary to provide students with appropriate professional and material resources and an adequately equipped facility within the school.

## **Chapter IV ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS TO BE MET**

“Each school must provide a school library in which the resources complement and support the pedagogical goals (...) the library is an essential place at the heart of the school ensuring the quality of educational service”<sup>19</sup> This proclamation taken from *la Politique de la lecture et du livre* (Quebec Policy on Books and Reading) cannot come to fruition unless certain conditions are met. These same essential conditions the Quebec Coalition for School Libraries has made its own. What are they?

### **1) A separate, appropriately equipped library facility**

With the advent of the new Curriculum, teaching and learning methods are becoming more diverse and the requirements changing, as much for the students as the teachers. Learning through projects, for example, very often presupposes working collaboratively. In situations where the library was already welcoming whole classes, it now must also accommodate students who are working in small

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<sup>19</sup> Ministère de la Culture et des Communications. *Le temps de lire, un art de vivre*. Québec, 1998, p. 21.

groups, all the while continuing to respond to needs of individual students. Reconfiguring the library space will become an ongoing preoccupation.<sup>20</sup>

As well, computers and other forms of information and communication technology have been part of the library setting for a good number of years. Most secondary school libraries are already automated and several projects are likewise underway in the elementary schools. Increasingly students need to have access to computers to complete their assignments. Much of the time students as well as teachers do not have access to a library, to appropriate technical equipment, computers and printers, nor to software and databases. The school library, in becoming a hub for these tools, can offer a dynamic learning environment for the students and a pedagogical resource centre for the teachers.

## **2) Qualified personnel, and in sufficient numbers**

In 1989 the Bouchard Report<sup>21</sup> recommended one librarian per school board. In 2004, even with the new configuration of school boards, now numbering only 69, the system has not reached the norm. In 1992, the school system listed 125.6 non-teaching professionals: librarians, teaching specialists and pedagogical advisors; in 1998, there were only 76.4<sup>22</sup>. Now, in 2004, there are about 40. With reduction in numbers continuing, there is little hope on the horizon as few posts remain available.

Holding a Masters of Library and Information Science, the librarian in the school milieu combines the professional expertise of information specialist, teacher-librarian and facilitator. At a time when, inevitably, we are slowly evolving towards the virtual library, a professional such as this can serve as a bridge to ensure the passage to a future already in evidence. In order to keep the students and teachers from drowning in the superabundance of information, the librarian, thanks to professional expertise, can guide users in filtering and selecting pertinent information. Working from the outset with the teaching team, the librarian can collaborate directly in the design of a project by proposing information sources that correspond to the specific needs indicated. As a facilitator, the librarian is able to plan and adapt services to suit different kinds of library users.

Then too the librarian works in hand in hand with library technicians. How many of these are currently employed in libraries? We do not have specific figures in this regard since the school commissions database (*la banque PERCOS* -

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<sup>20</sup> *Commission scolaire des Découvreurs* in collaboration with *Commission scolaire des Premières-Seigneuries* proposes library designs for elementary and secondary schools in a short online guide, aimed at school principals, dated May 2003.

<http://www.csdecou.qc.ca/sed/Bibliotheque/biblio-ecole.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Rapport Bouchard. « Les bibliothèques scolaires québécoises plus que jamais », *Éducation et francophonie*, vol. XXVI, no. 1, automne-hiver 1989.

<sup>22</sup> Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels de l'éducation du Québec. *La passerelle*, CEQ, 1999, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 4.

*Personnel des Commissions Scolaires*) counts library technicians in libraries along with those working in archives. It should be noted however that for some time there has been a tendency to replace this category of employee with secretaries or office clerks. At the elementary level, parent volunteers too often find themselves alone, with no professional support, manning the library at the school their child attends. (76% of parent volunteers are responsible for the library, according to 1997 statistics of *la Ministère de la Culture et de Communications du Québec* on the status of books and reading in Quebec, MCCQ 1998.) In all these instances, the situation needs to be rectified.

### **3) A wide and varied collection**

In order to stimulate curiosity, to answer questions that students have – about themselves and about the world around them - to develop the capacity to analyze and critically evaluate information and to come to know and appreciate human cultural heritage, the library stands as the best investment for a school system.

Today the library/media resource centre plays a role of an information plaza. It brings together in one place all types of resources and in all the different formats (print, audiovisual, electronic). And thanks to electronic networking, the library is accessible from everywhere, from all the classes and laboratories, and even from home.

At once real and virtual, the library is an organization structured for pedagogical services, offering a broad range of documents, information and reference tools, which allow for a variety of learning activities related to the requirements set down by the curriculum. In our opinion the school library is an essential mechanism for putting the reforms into place. It serves as a learning centre; it contributes to the development of research strategies, problem-solving techniques and information skills; it participates in fostering the joy of reading and thereby the lifelong habit of reading which, at the same time, contributes to the cultural development of the student. We might also add that the library serves as an intermediary between the school milieu and the world outside and, by its very nature, acts as a neutral zone where each child has a place, without regard to social or grade level, age, sex or degree of intelligence. In fact, the library incorporates an independent and alternative learning dimension<sup>23</sup>, which allows every child to learn in his own way.

## **Chapter V: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE**

Information is at the base of all civilized society. Today significant change in a developed society comes from putting knowledge on a pedestal and making it a principal commodity of the economy.

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<sup>23</sup> Séraphin Alava. « Documentalistes en errance...Qui somme-nous? », *Inter CDI*, nov-déc, 2000, no. 168, p. 5-9.

The information society, as defined by the sociologist, Manuel Castells, is a particular kind of social organization wherein the creation, processing and transmission of information become the primary means of achievement and knowledge.<sup>24</sup> One of the characteristics of such a society is the increase in information-related professions.

An information society then is one wherein one tends to analyze everything piecemeal and forget the whole, the big picture. But we say it is necessary to look at the school library in a broader perspective, one in which it implicates itself in everything that has to do with the educational process. It is from this perspective that we make the following recommendations:

### **To the Ministry of Education**

1. That the Ministry of Education formally recognize and support the pedagogical and informational role of the school library and documentation centre.

- 1.1 That this declaration be accompanied by a policy for the development of the school library which includes concrete steps aimed at upgrading the place of the library within the school itself and within the school boards.

Currently the school library is part of the educational plan but holds no real status or visibility in the school.

2. That this declaration of recognition affect all stakeholders in education.

3. That the concept of the school library and its services be integrated into the Ministry of Education's long-range strategic success plan.

- 3.1 That this plan stipulate that funds allotted by the Ministry for the school library must be used solely for that purpose.

- 3.2 That a procedure of accountability in this regard be established within the evaluation criteria for school success plans, including standards for the provision of qualified personnel, space facilities, collections and services needed for the promotion of reading and the teaching of research and information skills in schools.

The deterioration of school libraries is largely attributed to the fact that there has been no guarantee that the funding allocated in principle for them was effectively earmarked. Over the years, and with priorities being determined by school boards, the school library has lost the little status it had held since the Parent

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<sup>24</sup> Manuel Castells. « L'ère de l'information. » *La société en réseaux*. Paris, Fayard, 1998.

Report. This situation worsened especially with the decentralization of power towards local authorities following changes introduced by the Public School Act (*la Loi sur l'instruction publique*).

Continuing the logic that recognizes the importance of the role of the school library, as is being put forth in this document, it is essential that the library be integrated into the long-range strategic plan of the Ministry of Education. Such a step would have the effect of alerting school boards, and especially the local school governing boards, to take better notice of the school library, so as to respect the budgetary allotment which would have been assigned to it. This measure would avoid funds being integrated into the general coffer and not being applied as intended. Funds allocated by the Ministry of Education for specific purposes must be earmarked as such; this is part and parcel of controlling the spending of public funds. Moreover, the school library must be included in the educational project of the school, not at the discretion of each school, but indeed as an integral part of the basic educational process.

4. That the Ministry of Education demonstrate its recognition of the school library by assigning to the department of pedagogical services a person possessing the qualifications and leadership ability necessary to carry such a portfolio.

Since the decentralization of power towards the school in 1998, it is practically impossible to obtain information on school libraries and the make-up of their personnel. Professional associations in the field have all had similar experience when, having been mandated to offer continuing education activities under the umbrella of the Policy on Books and Reading, they have not been able to identify contact persons. As a result, persons working in school libraries, which are among the least served when it comes to ongoing training, do not have the opportunity to participate in any activities - offered free of charge - because they never hear about them. The 2002 provincial report, referred to earlier, clearly emphasizes this state of affairs. This one instance, and there are many, is a clear indication of the necessity for a qualified person being at the Ministry of Education. Such an appointment would allow, among other things, the gathering of overall statistics in the area of school libraries and assisting the system to implement major directives as they are identified.

### **To the Ministry of Education, the School Boards and the School**

5. That the school library be an integral part of the education process, being one of the essential stakeholders and no longer considered as a secondary or, worse, optional element of the school.

6. That pairing of the computer laboratory with the school library be considered.

The school library today is made up of collections of various documents in a variety of formats: print, electronic, databases. In order to ensure the role of the library in supporting the pedagogical goals of the school and promoting the learning of research and information skills, one should consider situating the library in the same area where classes for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are held. This would optimize the use of the resources already in place, offer maximum usage of both print and electronic resources and encourage increased use of the library. Such reorganization presupposes a good sense of cooperation among departments and calls for collaboration among diverse groups of employees present in the school.

A change in attitude – a necessary precondition: In the final analysis, we deem it essential to develop a working mentality which supports cooperation in order to reach a common goal, that is, academic achievement. Such a collaborative atmosphere, countless times envisioned in the reports of the Superior Council of Education, but alas difficult to attain, would have the effect of bringing together all the school personnel, including the local school governing board. And it would have to be supported particularly by the school principals, who should be demonstrating leadership in this regard.

We are conscious of the strong resistance to change in the school milieu, each group defending its territory. However, one can envisage, with the number of prospective retirements and the arrival of new teachers and library professionals (librarians and library technicians), that it will be easier to inculcate a new mindset.

7. That the budget intended for libraries to support the development of collections and the hiring of professional and technically qualified personnel be increased.

In order to respond to the 2002 provincial report on the disastrous state of the school libraries, there is need to address the situation as regards both material and human resources:

7.1 Collections: books, reference works, periodicals, audio-visual material, software programs and databases.

Norms considered acceptable for the funding of library collections average \$30.30 per student at the elementary level and \$38.50 at the secondary level. These figures – and they are approximate - come from a document published by the Canadian School Library Association jointly with the Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada, issued in June 2003, and entitled, *Achieving Information Literacy; Standards for Library Programs in Canada*.

Using the number of students at the elementary level (543,546) and the secondary level (370,197), according to data for 2003 from *la Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec*, the total cost for all collections would be \$31M per year.

Currently, the amount allocated for books by the *Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ mesure 30048)* is \$3.75; an additional amount, averaging \$1.50 per student comes from the school boards, yielding a total of \$5.25 per student, or an annual expenditure of \$4.8M -- in other words, an annual shortfall of \$26.4M, according to the quoted norms.

## 7.2 Human Resources

The perception is unanimous, there exists total confusion as to the number and type of personnel currently staffing school libraries. Aside from a massive representation of parent volunteers at the elementary level, one finds a great many library technicians, followed by office clerks and, only far behind in number, librarians or teacher-librarians.

It has been acknowledged, since the time of the Bouchard Report<sup>25</sup>, that there is need to bring the currently miniscule number of professionals in the system up to standard. However, since that time, the numbers have continued to plummet. In Bouchard Report one envisioned one librarian per school board (there being 213 boards); today, there are only 69 boards (60 French-language school boards and 9 English) with about 40 professional librarians.

Taking the student/librarian ratio adopted by the Bouchard Report and the total number of students (913,743) at the primary and secondary levels in 2003, there would be need for a minimum of 182 librarians, or one librarian for 5000 students. It would remain then to fill 142 posts at a cost of \$6 M per year, a minimal step to address a dire situation. And let us be perfectly clear that even this ratio is still well below the norms recognized in the international arena where the presence of professional personnel at the school level is among the criteria for school success and the link is forged with academic achievement.

If one totals the cost of these resources, that is, of collections and professional personnel, one comes to \$37M per year, or \$185M over five years. These figures which, again, are only approximations and do not present the full picture of optimal costs for a functioning school library, nevertheless allow one to appreciate the considerable shortfall between the real need and the amount of \$70M proffered by the former *Parti québécois* government.

How far must one go to correct the situation or what amount is one ready to agree to given the current state of public finances? Compromise is possible only if one considers that a school library worthy of its name can fulfill its educational mission of support and involvement without professional staffing. Moreover, if

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<sup>25</sup> *Éducation et francophonie*, v, XXVI, no. 1, Automne-Hiver, 1989.

one agrees to invest substantial sums, the funding must be managed judiciously at the school board level by professionals who are best qualified to understand the need for developing libraries within the schools, as well as in the system of which they are a part.

8. That school-municipal collaboration be considered one avenue to be explored, among others, for service to students.

School-municipal collaboration is not new in the area of libraries. Although established here and there for more than twenty years, the concept has really taken off in the last few years, notably with the signing of the agreement between the two Quebec ministries of Education and of Culture. In some instances, it makes sense to look at different ways of targeting certain clients for service, as might be the case of primary and secondary-level students. Currently there exist agreements between some Quebec school boards and *Centre régionaux de services aux bibliothèques publiques (CRSBP)* in offering library services to schools in the region, notably in rural areas.

Such a formula, which must be flexible and adaptable to the local situation, is harder to envision for the larger urban centres. And, what cannot be excluded from such service agreements are those aspects peculiar to the library within the school and to the public library in the municipality. It must be realized that, with regard to the respective mandates of each of these kinds of libraries, it is not the intention to substitute the one for the other; rather each would offer complementary services. To be sure, the idea of a school-municipal partnership remains an interesting avenue to be explored and applied in a variety of situations.

We should also mention that, in order to be effective, such collaboration must be based on trust and mutual respect. It can happen that personnel working on the frontlines sometimes feel themselves excluded from the reflections and discussions that surround the collaborative endeavour. Whereas, research shows that regular interaction between the personnel of the public and school libraries and both groups working together as partners figure among the factors that have a positive impact on academic achievement.

9. That every initiative aimed at offering quality information service to students be encouraged.

The Quebec Coalition for School Libraries feels there is reason to explore every initiative aimed at offering quality information services to students, whether it be in the form of a virtual information library project or going the route of using Internet within the schools. Information professionals are capable of collaborating and taking part in any kind of project, including working in concert with multidisciplinary teams.

10. That courses in research methodology and information skills, as well as courses in children's literature, be included in the education and training of teachers.

Young teachers called to give instruction to the next generations must needs, first of all, learn the research and information process and master these basic skills before integrating them into their teaching. Having been made aware of the importance of research and the critical analysis of information in the learning process, they will be better equipped accordingly to develop assignments and student projects that call for the use the library. They will also be more likely to work in collaboration and take advantage of the expertise of the librarians in designing their research projects.

Teachers who have a good knowledge of literature for children and young adults are able to serve as facilitators for the students and help them know and appreciate literary heritage, both past and present, here and around the world. They are able to design projects that call for the use of a variety of resources, as well as vary and individualize their teaching methods. Indeed the new method of "resource-based" teaching and learning is much practiced throughout the English-speaking world.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the context of this Forum for reflection on the future of education in Quebec, the Quebec Coalition for School Libraries has set out to resituate the role of the library in the elementary and secondary school. Forty years after the Parent Report, the Coalition demands that the school library finally be seen for what it is: that it be recognized for the essential contribution it can make towards academic achievement, towards supporting equal opportunity for students and integrating into society citizens who are aware, educated and prepared to face the challenges that await them in the course of the years to come. As a society, we all must assume our responsibility with regard to future generations and agree to provide the resources necessary.

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