

1982 W.O. Mitchell's *How I Spent My Summer Holidays* - hardcover - \$14.95

1997 Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* - trade paperback - \$19.99

2001 David Adams Richards *Mercy Among the Children* - hardcover - \$32.95

2003 (a month ago) Margaret Atwood's *Oryx & Crake* - hardcover - \$38.95

Not only are these books still being read, but they have appreciated in value. So, on the good side we have some valuable, well-read books. But on the other hand, we can't afford to buy new, increasingly more expensive books. Our budgets have been effectively stagnant over the past 10 years and have certainly not kept pace with the 200% to 400% increases in book costs and the increases in technology costs.

In addition, you might be shocked to know that approximately 50% of our schools do not get any funding from their school budget to buy resources. They are raising money through book fairs or appealing to school councils and other organizations to give them money. Is this because there is no money in the board or school budgets? Or is this because the money is being siphoned off to meet other priorities? We are seeing the effects of long-term neglect in aging book collections, not just in this board but across the province, and we would like to suggest that now is the time for some strong investment. Library resources need to be on your priority list!

It is indicated in your budget report that you are giving \$500,000 for Early Years Literacy to develop reading and writing skills, teacher PD, and the acquisitions of classroom resources (p.14 Budget Report). But is any of this money coming to the libraries, a location where information and reading materials are catalogued and tracked, a location where resources are made available for all students and for all teachers? One way to get good value for your money is to keep your resources in a library, where copies are shared. Libraries can save you money in the long-term and still allow for a diversity of

resources to be available to all students and all teachers.

Or what about the special textbook funding we have seen to meet the needs of the new curriculum over the past few years? Have our libraries had a similar infusion to meet the changes? No they haven't, yet they are still expected to meet the research needs of all students who are currently studying those new courses.

Our libraries need to be rejuvenated and brought back into the spotlight as central to all learning in our schools. The restrictive definition of classroom has resulted in reductions and a loss of many dollars from our libraries. For your consideration, the Toronto school board has set some benchmarks that might be useful in guiding your future investment. The board suggests allocating \$20 per pupil for elementary school libraries and \$30 per student for secondary school libraries. Remember, every dollar that you spend on resources for our school libraries is a dollar spent for all children — not just for one or for just a few, but all students. The province has committed money over three years to increase benchmarks for classroom computers, etc. and you are proposing budget increases in these categories by double the funding announcement. All I can say is invest, and send some money our way.

When asked if computer networks and technology would eventually spawn the efficient, bookless library, Clifford Stoll, author of *Silicon Snake Oil*, responded that what will happen might be far more insidious. "Computers may deviously chew away at libraries from the inside. They'll eat up book budgets... libraries will become adept at supplying the students and the public with fast, low-quality information." The results, he says, won't be a library without books, it'll be a library without value. (*School Libraries in Canada* - Winter 1996) And this warning is coming true. Our collections need an infusion of cash, because that's what it takes to buy books and resources for our libraries: cold, hard cash!