



**Submission: The case for Libraries and qualified teacher librarians in primary and secondary schools.**

*I am a teacher librarian at a Catholic Secondary School in Ballarat. At this stage the library is adequately staffed with Reading programs operating in years 7 to 10. Information Literacy classes are also taking place in years 7 – 12, with an intensive program held on a fortnightly basis in year 7. With the proposed amalgamation of our 2 campuses into one next year and financial constraints, we believe that the library staff could be facing future cutbacks.*

*(Information Literacy is defined on the RMIT web site “as a set of abilities that support independence in the practices of identifying, accessing, evaluating, organising and communicating information. It is relevant to all disciplines, to all learning environments and to all levels of education. As the volume of globally accessible information expands, so too does the need for developing sophisticated ‘information handling’ skills. These skills are now essential for learning, working and participating in society. Information literacy encompasses a wide range of competencies from evaluating the quality of information to the effective use of information technology, which supports accessing, organising and communicating information. Information literacy forms the basis for life-long learning.”)*

*Over the last few of years I have been appalled at the lack of research skills of our incoming year 7s. I have found that students only know how to use the Google search engine, and rather poorly at that. It is apparent that in many primary schools, students are only using Google for research purposes and not making use of the wide range of web and print resources available to students (Last year one student in year 7 asked me ‘what is an encyclopedia?’). Since many primary schools no longer have teacher-librarians nor active libraries, my guess is that primary teachers are too busy and not specialised in the area of information literacy. Primary teachers have a lot to deal with so the use of Google is a quick and easy option, and with their priorities of educating students in literacy and numeracy, art, science and technology one can understand the “instant” appeal of Google.*

*I am also concerned that some secondary teachers also suggest students just use Google for a hit-and-miss instant result, without explaining the excellent alternatives available for student research nor best practice for the use of search engines. One of my main concerns is that some students are not reading, thinking or learning but are often copying and pasting information into assignments instead. (without the teacher’s knowledge)*

*So it is clear that many teachers are not switched on to research in our “IT-rich” schools. Computers are everywhere but what are students learning? Are they learning how to find information and use it properly? Are students becoming “information literate” in a world with expanding globally accessible information? Teacher librarians have this knowledge and expertise and are best positioned to teach and guide students and staff in this information literacy in our schools’ digital environments.*

*The over-use of search engines like Google is such a habit that many students need to be constantly reminded about other alternatives or appropriate use of Google which means that Information literacy skills need to be ongoing and built into the curriculum. Also good quality web resources need to be available to students – eg. Weblinks, Ebsco, Newsbank, EDNA. Teacher librarians are aware of these resources – how to locate them and teach students to use them.*

*Teachers also need Professional Development on the use of resources available to students so that they can recommend and show how to use these resources. As a teacher librarian I have been involved in conducting such PD with teachers as this is my expertise.*

### *Reading programs and the teacher-librarian's contribution to literacy*

*English teachers are keen for the improvement in literacy therefore the need for reading programs with up to date, appealing literature for students to read and the promotion and monitoring of this reading. Teacher-librarians are well positioned for such a role because another of their expertise and knowledge is in children's and teenage literature. Most teacher-librarians promote reading and encourage it as an important activity for all students and staff. Many teacher-librarians run reading programs in their schools and these are supported by English teachers.*

*Learning doesn't just happen in the classroom - students also learn outside the classroom eg. at home, in the playground, at museums, TV, computers and libraries. Therefore the need for information-rich spaces with trained staff for assistance and guidance like the teacher-librarian. Our school library is a well organised, well resourced place which is always open and available for students to learn before and after school as well as during school hours. It contains well-maintained and supervised spaces with computers and printers as well as cameras, data projectors and other equipment for staff and student use. Good school libraries contain good quality literature and print resources for students to independently access and use. And last but not least libraries are a place where students can relax, work, study, socialise or read.*

*In summary: Well-resourced, adequately-staffed, professionally-run school libraries are important for learning and teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*



*Students using our library during recess 14/4/2010*