

## Take a Pew

By Sue Osborne

Okay, I admit it, I've been wracking my brains for weeks, trying to work out what to write about for my next column. Then the whole *Forbes* magazine 'We don't need public libraries anymore because we have Amazon' debacle blew up. Suddenly everyone was jumping up and down about the importance of libraries, talking about how they were so much MORE than 'just the books'. It was heartening, inspiring, and not what I wanted to write about.

If you are reading this journal and, what's more, making the effort to read as far as this little ole column, you already know that stuff. What I want to talk about are some of the websites and research used to back up all those impassioned articles. What is out there, online, to help us – the school library professionals who need to advocate, to increase awareness, and to justify our very existence to management, parents and the community. Every. Day.

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**Pew Research Center** (sic) prides itself on being non-partisan and non-advocacy. Presenting research and surveys in a balanced way, so people can make their own judgements. Of course, that doesn't mean you can't find some of that research and use it for your own purposes. Take the **2016 Libraries Survey** by PRC. This was the survey referred to again and again during the surge of public opinion following the *Forbes* article. Granted, the survey was about public libraries, but it doesn't take much to extrapolate the results to a school setting. Also, the data concerns the United States, but again it is not unreasonable to think there are similar concerns and issues being raised here in Australia.



<http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/09/libraries-2016>

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The best part of this report is not even the report itself. It's all the other invaluable material that comes attached to it. There is the complete PDF report, but you can also see the datasets from the survey, read about the methodology, and see the actual questions used. Looking deeper is extremely useful if you are thinking about conducting some similar, more local, research. You have a model in front of you – bonus! Pew Research is not just about libraries, in fact there is so much research here you will be hard pressed to read it all. Media and news, social trends, internet and technology, and science are a few of the broad areas covered by the website and it's worth looking at them all because many of the reports touch on things that are relevant to our work as school library leaders and staff.

Another site presenting interesting and thoughtful points of view is *The Conversation*. The editor, Misha Ketchell, gave a fantastic, insightful presentation at the March SLAV Conference 'Real Libraries vs Fake News'. With the mission of 'academic rigour, journalistic flair' *The Conversation* discusses Australian and international issues in an accessible and factual way, offering us, and our students, a trustworthy source of academic opinion and investigation. A few searches on the words – libraries, reading, schools, education standards – bring up a cornucopia of great articles that could be used, for instance, when pitching or advocating reading for pleasure or enjoyment as a vital part of learning.

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Further afield is the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) website. A little exploration of this website reveals lots of public access material such as **country profiles** that detail curriculums, standards and organisations linked to school libraries across the world. Now that SLAV has partnered with IASL, its members can benefit from the association in tangible ways. Dr Susan La Marca, quoted in a March 2018 article in SCIS publication *Connections* elaborates:

*By joining as an association, SLAV members, who might otherwise not consider joining the international body, have access to the community of school librarianship beyond their own state and country. Understanding school librarianship in other countries, making connections, and learning about the school libraries in other parts of the world are benefits we hope SLAV members will embrace as opportunities to extend their own professional understanding.*

The opportunities are there, all over the internet. These are only three. I would love to hear about other places our members are finding valuable and useful information in the public space. Please contact me if you have an online source you would like featured in this column – I would enjoy the challenge.

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After all, I can't be across EVERYTHING!

## References

International Association of School Librarianship <https://www.iasl-online.org/>

La Marca, Susan (2018) 'International Engagement: The SLAV/IASL Partner Association Program' in *Connections*, SCIS, Issue 106.

Pew Research Center <http://www.pewresearch.org/>

*The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/au>

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