

To the House Standing Committee on Education and Training,



I believe that school libraries can play a crucial role in the provision of gifted and talented (GAT) education, an area that has been traditionally overlooked, as it is often wrongly assumed that these students can succeed without added assistance. "Gifted" is not a measure of achievement, but a measure of potential, and it is this potential which needs to be nurtured for students to achieve to their best ability.

My children don't really fit into the school system so well, when it comes to curriculum.

Miss 9 is in Year 4, but was working on a Year 4 curriculum two years ago. Miss 7, as a result of early entry, is in Year 3, and has just brought home the Year 6 spelling list. Master 6 is very happy playing with his age peers, but is isolated in the classroom when it comes to academic work. Our state school caters as best they can, and my children are happy, but this is not by accident.

The situation wasn't so rosy in 2007. I was fast learning that stifled students made for very unhappy children. Further reading supported my observations. Gifted students are students at risk, just as those students at the opposite end of the academic spectrum, if not offered appropriate tasks.

Many schools offer gifted and talented (GAT) programs, but usually these start in the upper primary years. Unfortunately, able learners don't magically appear at this age. A great GAT program for Year 4 didn't offer a solution to my 5 year old who cried herself to sleep every night.

My own teacher training, like most others, had not covered GAT education, but the more I read, the more I saw the close parallels between GAT education and teacher librarianship.

So why is it no accident that my children are happy at school? Because I searched for a school that had a teacher librarian, and a library that was open for recreational use. Miss 9 has some good friends, but at times prefers solitude, so she has somewhere to go and read. My 7 year old entomologist doesn't have to wait for insects to be studied in the classroom to learn more about her passion for all things six-legged. Master 6 can get his fix of dinosaurs, monster trucks, superheroes, kittens, castles and dragons whenever he wants. They all benefit from having teachers who have the resources at hand to support individual learning plans within the classroom. And because their intellectual needs are met, they are happier, and succeeding at school.

A curriculum has a place to offer core skills and expose students to a wide range of new ideas and subjects. School libraries support a school's curriculum, but within themselves, do not work to such a structure. It is the one place in the school that students are not compared to any benchmarks. They enter and are met at the point of their individual need. There's no repetition or revision of previous work, no expectation of set outcomes, no prescriptive reading list, and no limit on how far learning can go. These are all key strategies for teaching GAT students, and teacher librarians are likely to be the only member of staff trained in such methods.

I believe every student has the potential to be passionate about, and great at something, regardless of their academic ability. Do we expect them to wait for one term in seven years of primary schooling for it to be studied in the classroom? Or do we create a space where

they can be guided to be independent learners in the context of their passion? It's not just our GAT students who benefit from access to a well resourced library and qualified teacher librarian, but such a resource meets a need for high achieving students that is often overlooked in the regular classroom.

A curriculum doesn't always fit every student, but every student fits in a library.

Leonie Paatsch