

Gifted Resource Council Offers Year-Round Enrichment Opportunities

The three primary areas of focus for Gifted Resource Council are Learning Labs, Summer Academies, and Academic Challenge Cup.

Learning Labs

Learning Labs are offered on six Saturdays during the fall and winter at Wydown Middle School in Clayton. More than 40 dynamic courses are available each session, including topics related to chemistry, the arts, history, foreign languages, literature, creative writing and the ever-popular subjects of chess and robotics. These courses last for 90 minutes. A child may select one or two such classes each semester.

Summer Academies

GRC's Summer Academies, held in June and July at Ronald E. McNair School in University City, are full-day camp experiences. These two-week, academic day-camps challenge students to problem-solve while engaging in a wonderful variety of high-interest, hands-on experiences with other gifted peers. The Academies offer children unique opportunities to explore a topic in-depth and develop new learning skills.

Students in kindergarten through eighth grade can study ancient history, space science, math concepts, creative expression or environmental science. There is a physical activity component in all programs.

The curriculum of every course is different. For example, Space Academy, Advanced Space Academy, Jr. Science Searchers, and Ancient Academy are each offered twice during the summer, but each session is different. That's true from year to year as well. Despite similar sounding names, each course is unique. Teachers plan for months in advance to provide new curricular experiences every summer.

Academic Challenge Cup

Academic Challenge Cup gathers student teams from schools throughout the metropolitan area for a seven-day, three-part series of academic competitions.

Talented students in grades 2-8 participate in friendly

competitions in three areas: creative problem-solving, math and language usage. The competitions are held over seven days at Washington University. Approximately 1,700 students participate each year.

There is much more to the experience of Academic Challenge Cup than what happens on the actual day of competition. Teams prepare for the competition working under volunteer teacher or parent coaches. Although what happens at each school is different, quite often teams prepare for months in advance. This preparation improves their academic skills and at the same time gives them an opportunity to practice cooperating with peers in an academic setting.

GRC offers free training sessions for the volunteer coaches during the fall.

Commitment to Parents

GRC offers parenting classes in conjunction with the Learning Labs and Academic Challenge Cup. While students are engaged in their learning activities, experienced educators and counselors hold parenting workshops for parents and teachers.

In addition, each issue of *mindwonders* contains a valuable column for parents. In this issue, for example, the Parents Ask column discusses ways that parents can help a gifted child develop healthy self esteem. These columns and many other resources for parents are available on the GRC Web site, www.giftedresourcecouncil.org.

Accessibility

A child does not need to be in a gifted program to participate. GRC experiences are designed for bright, curious children who want to be challenged by new materials and new experiences. This is a great opportunity for talented students who may not yet qualify for their district's gifted program.

Educational Philosophy

GRC enrichment programs utilize the most up-to-date
Enrichment, continued on page 5

Dialogue with the Director

Have you ever played around with anagrams? That's the sort of thing that gifted students, who enjoy language, like to do from time to time. Just to stretch their brains....

In case you're not as familiar, an anagram is defined as "a transposition of the letters of a word or sentence to form a new word or sentence". And this time it was one of GRC's favorite teachers, who brought to my attention a few weeks ago, an anagram for "GIFTED RESOURCE COUNCIL": RIGOROUSECLECTICEDFUN. Wow! What could say it better?

"Rigorous eclectic ed fun" is truly an apt description of "Gifted Resource Council" and the goal of what we offer for bright and talented young people.

RIGOROUS! Yes, the classes that GRC offers for children are meant to "push the top of the envelope", to offer academic content in a way that is challenging and exciting to young minds yearning to know more and do more! Whether your child is a Kindergartner, fascinated with oceans and the mysterious animals that inhabit them, or an almost-teenager who is concerned about the environment and how it is being managed by the adults of today, GRC has just the Summer Academies for both of these gifted children....Jr. Science Searchers and ECO Academy. And so much more!

ECLECTIC! "Not following any one system, but selecting and using whatever is considered best in all systems." Truly, Gifted Resource Council offers an eclectic approach to

teaching and learning. Our talented teachers put their heart and soul into the topics that are so important and special to them individually. Then they share their intense passion for those subjects with children who also find joy in discovery and knowledge of so many diverse topics, from neural tissue engineering to Newton's Third Law of Motion to the philosophy of Plato.

ED! Education – that's what GRC is all about! Learning in its broadest sense. As I often say to students, whether they are participating in GRC's Academic Challenge Cup or Summer Academies, "I hope you learn something new today (or this week). Whether it's a fact about mathematics or a discovery about what it means to be a part of a team or something that you realize about yourself... If you learn something new today, then we all will have succeeded!"

FUN! How can it be otherwise? Children deserve to have fun! So do adults! That is what learning should be about! The enjoyment of learning something new can bring pleasure of the deepest and most lasting kind.

Won't you and your children join us at GIFTED RESOURCE COUNCIL for some RIGOROUS ECLECTIC ED FUN? See you soon!....



Sue Flesch, GRC executive director



Three young ladies are "all smiles" during Space Academy.



ECO Academy entrepreneurs take a break from their work.

What GRC Teachers Offer Gifted Kids

Outstanding teachers like Kathleen Murphy and Terry Umphenour, combined with an exploratory, hands-on approach to learning, are one of the most important reasons that academically talented students have such unique and very positive experiences participating in GRC programs. Teachers like these know how to bring out the best in gifted children, both intellectually and socially.

Kathleen Murphy, MEd, who also teaches 7th grade science at Ladue Middle School, has a wealth of experiences teaching for Gifted Resource Council over the past eight years. She's taught basic science to kindergartners. She's taught physics, robotics and crime scene science to older children. She's been involved with Space Academy and twice taken students to the Ecuadorian Rainforest to study the water and soil quality of Jatun Sacha.

Clearly, she knows gifted kids and how they are different from the students she serves in her regular classroom. "The students at GRC are excited and eager to learn. There are very few discipline problems, and we can learn a lot in a short amount of time," she said. "The students' positive attitudes make our classes quite enjoyable."

Murphy stresses the importance of really bright students learning how to interact cooperatively with others. "The largest challenges for gifted students are not intellectual, but social. When students excel at school, they are often allowed to move ahead through individual activities. Many times they do not interact with other students in a social manner. All of the programs which I have designed at GRC foster a social, cooperative learning experience," she stressed. "That is where the growth takes place. Scientists need to be able to work well with each other. You can be the greatest mind of all time like, for example, Albert Einstein, but if you cannot convey your ideas to others, your gift is lost."

"GRC is a place where kids with similar interests find challenging classes. Because the class sizes are so small, we are able to develop friendships with the students. Last summer a student who went to Ecuador with me worked as an assistant during Space Academy. It's great to know that GRC alumni want to give back a little of what they received from our programs."

"These GRC programs are unique. They are designed for a unique group of kids," she said. "I wish more parents knew how important it is that academically talented students get the chance to work with other students who are at their intellectual level."

parlayed some of his GRC teaching experiences into a book that will be published June 1. Umphenour has eight years of experience teaching a variety of science classes for Gifted Resource Council and has taken four groups of GRC students to study and conduct scientific research in the Amazon Rainforest. In fact, Umphenour dedicates his book to the GRC students and leaders who participated in the Amazon Rainforest Project.

Beyond Tears: The Point of No Return is the second book in a projected nine-book series that Umphenour plans to write. Each book blends science and a positive character trait. *Beyond Tears* explores rainforest ecology and personal responsibility.

The first book in the series, *Across A Broken Sky (Karina)*, has earned a 5-star rating by readers on Amazon.com. The books are designed "to encourage girls to experience science" and are intended for 12- to 16-year-old readers. Umphenour donates 40% of the profits to nonprofit ecological causes.

"The Rainforest trips helped students grow personally because they had to take care of themselves in a different culture. They also experienced and learned to appreciate one of the most beautiful and enticing places on the planet," he said. "Being in another culture also helped them see and appreciate what they

have as Americans and often take for granted."

Umphenour, who is currently the principal and a science teacher at Concordia Middle School in St. Louis, will begin a three-year stint teaching and developing curriculum at Concordia International School in Shanghai, China, this fall. Meanwhile, he has some reflections on what it means to teach GRC students.

"GRC programs offer gifted students the opportunity to work with high quality teachers who work to bring out the best in them. Sue (Flesch) is always looking to hire only the best. Students select the courses of study, but the GRC teachers challenge them to think outside of their comfort zone. This isn't just a part of regular classroom instruction. GRC teachers continually stress teamwork and cooperation. Many gifted students are brilliant in one area or another, but they may have difficulty working with others. That's why GRC stresses teamwork and cooperative learning. They need to learn that not everything revolves around them."

"We took the Amazon Rainforest Project participants to the Missouri Botanical Garden and the St. Louis Zoo as part of their training, but we also worked explicitly on their teamwork before the trip. The students played initiative

GRC teacher and author Terry Umphenour will participate in a special Book Signing on June 30th, 3:30-5:30 p.m. at Ronald E. McNair School.

Terry Umphenour, MS Ed Administration, has

GRC Teachers, continued on page 7

Thanks to . . .

. . . the following individuals who made financial contributions to Gifted Resource Council from May 2004 through April 2005. We apologize for any names which may have been inadvertently omitted or misspelled.

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techniques and philosophies, with emphasis on experiential, multi-disciplinary, hands-on activities.

GRC's programs offer gifted children the opportunity, often for the first time, to work with other academically talented children. Learning to work together for a common goal in group situations is very important because gifted children sometimes have poorly developed social skills. Thus, GRC instructors emphasize cooperation, teamwork, and the process of learning, not the results or individual prowess.

Faculty

GRC recruits some of the most experienced and talented teachers in the metropolitan area to inspire and guide these children. In addition, GRC provides in-service training sessions each semester to reinforce its educational philosophy.

Why Are GRC Programs So Essential For Your Child?

The short answer is that participation in a GRC program offers your child opportunities that are simply not available during the regular school day.

Often these are called "enrichment" opportunities, but the truth is they are "essential" experiences for the growth and development of a gifted child. They may be "extras" in terms of the effort and money expended on them, but they are "essential" in terms of a gifted child's intellectual and social development. Here's what your child gains by participation in GRC programs:

- ★ Opportunities to interact with other gifted peers.
- ★ Opportunities to explore high-interest topics in depth.
- ★ Opportunities to focus on the process of exploratory, hands-on learning rather than earning a grade.
- ★ Opportunities to meet and form friendships with gifted peers from all parts of the metropolitan area.

How Can We Raise a Child with Healthy Self-esteem?

By Dennis O'Brien

Gifted children are an at-risk group precisely because they are gifted. Parents who want to raise a well-rounded, durable child with healthy self-esteem face a real challenge.

Here are some strategies that will help concerned parents raise a healthy, well-rounded, confident and socially competent child.

★ First, acknowledge what a real challenge you face. To parent successfully, you must understand why it is so important and why it is so difficult.

Here's how it works. A child with superior cognitive ability may have difficulty relating to children her own age and gravitate toward adults. As she becomes increasingly focused on pleasing adults, she loses both the ability to form healthy peer relationships and the natural support such relationships provide. Intellectual success comes easily, and soon the child's sense of self depends on her ability to outperform all those around her and gain recognition by adults for her intellectual prowess.

The result? A bright child whose brittle self-esteem is based on the narrow and ultimately untenable notion of being the best.

★ Assess your priorities. Are you as aware as you should be of the importance of helping your child to grow emotionally and socially? Do you sometimes get too caught up in what your child can learn or accomplish at the expense of her development as a well-rounded person? If so, your well-intended, though misguided, emphasis on intellectual growth at the expense of overall personal development can make it harder for your child to have real-life success and happiness.

When cognitive abilities become the center of a child's life and the primary focus of parental responses, academically talented youngsters may grow up without the interpersonal skills that would allow them to form nurturing friendships and be sadly lacking in experiences that teach them to cope with adversity. Is this what you want for your child?

★ Next, assess your child's situation. How well does your child interact with peers? Has she learned to cooperate? Does she have friends? How frequently does she have them over to play? Do they call her? Is she willing to do what others want to do, or does she push her own agenda? What do her teachers say about her relationships with other students? What kind of coaching and support does she need from you to improve her relationships?

★ Agree on priorities with your spouse. Both of you must share the same values for your child and agree on what the current priorities are for her personal growth if you expect her to take you seriously.

★ Make your priorities clear to your child. Let her know how important it is to get along with others and that you want her to have same-aged friends who may or may not be her intellectual equals. Encourage her to respect others, to listen to them, to compromise and cooperate. Discuss the social aspects of her day at school: Whom does she recreate with? What did they do? How did she handle herself? Coach when you need to.

Make sure that your child is engaged in activities like sports, drama, Scouting or Junior Achievement that teach cooperation with others. Gifted children accustomed to working independently may lack the social and communication skills necessary for teamwork and emotionally satisfying participation in their peer community. They need frequent opportunities to interact in situations where the focus is on teamwork, not individual performance, on cooperation, not competition.

★ Encourage your child to become involved in activities where she will probably not be "the best." This will help her learn that she is OK as a person, valued and valuable just for being who she is. To be resilient in life, a child needs to learn to try things, to enjoy activities without measuring the results, and to continue despite frustrations.

Should you force your child to participate? If you must. Obviously it is better if your child participates in activities that interest her, but sometimes a child who fears "not-being-the best-at-everything" must be compelled to participate. "You must try soccer now. If you really don't like it at the end of the season, you can switch to swimming, dance or theater," you could say. Of course, these activities also help your child become more well-rounded.

★ Praise your child for participating, not for excelling. Most children experience frustration and failure repeatedly in the normal flow of their lives and, with support from nurturing adults, learn to cope with it. But things come so easily to the gifted that they often breeze through school seemingly without effort or failure. They are so accustomed to dominating in the areas of their strengths that they tend to restrict their participation in areas where they may not excel. Learning to cope with the frustration of being average broadens their sense of self beyond the constrictions imposed by their intellectual prowess, helps them understand others who do not have their special talents, and develops a healthy persistence in the face of adversity.

Team sports provide wonderful opportunities for a gifted child to both experience the frustration that most of us

Self-esteem, continued on page 7

Self-esteem, continued from page 6

feel at being just good enough at something, not great, and to learn about working together with others.

★ Take advantage of GRC's carefully designed programs. Your child will be challenged by peers who are his intellectual equals and nurtured by master teachers specially prepared to make it a safe environment for children who may be facing this situation for the first time in their lives.

GRC instructors promote cooperation, not competition, and focus on the process of learning and discovery, not on the product. Talk to your child in advance about what to expect and what you expect from her—to cooperate, to enjoy the experience and to respect the talents of others.

“Perhaps nothing we do is more important than helping parents raise healthy, well-adjusted children,” said Sue Flesch, executive director of Gifted Resource Council. “Our holistic approach provides academically talented children with challenging, hands-on learning experiences in a nongraded environment while nurturing their social and emotional development as well.”

With parents setting the right priorities, gifted children can grow to be healthy, happy and extremely productive people. Gifted kids are like intellectual sharks—relentless eating machines that seek out and devour information. What they need the most help with is learning how to develop the emotional and social aspects of their lives.

Parents who make it safe for their children to experience frustration and the “failure” of not being the best, who encourage participation in team activities and nurture the development of friendships are doing the most important things they can to help them develop the healthy self-esteem and interpersonal skills necessary for lasting success.

Dennis O'Brien, MA, LCSW, is an experienced educator and therapist who writes educational materials for the Washington University School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry.

GRC Teachers, continued from page 3

games, communicated through dramatic skits without using words, wrote articles, learned to conduct soil research, and did photo-journal essays.”

Umphenour wishes that more parents of gifted students knew that Gifted Resource Council exists. “It has such a wide range of programs for pre-kindergarteners through eighth grade, and the curriculum is always improving. GRC programs also give bright students a chance to get to know and work with other gifted kids.”

BECOME A MEMBER OF GIFTED RESOURCE COUNCIL

Now **you** can participate in shaping America's future by becoming a member of **Gifted Resource Council**, a not-for-profit education agency serving bright and talented young people. Your tax-deductible contribution will enable us to improve existing programs, extend offerings and reach more children. Your membership will not only benefit gifted children, but also entitle you to receive the following:

Member: \$50

- ☆ Priority registration for all programs
- ☆ \$10 discount off a Learning Lab registration
- ☆ *FREE parenting classes*
- ☆ Use of GRC Library
- ☆ Free registration at selected workshops and lectures

Friend: \$75

- ☆ All of the above, *plus*
- ☆ \$10 discount off a Summer Program

Sponsor: \$125

- ☆ All of the above, *plus*
- ☆ Additional \$25 discount off a Summer Program (\$35 total)

Patron: \$250

- ☆ All of the above, *plus*
- ☆ One FREE Learning Lab course or
- ☆ Learning Lab scholarship in your name at your request

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informs the public about activities of Gifted Resource Council and about issues relevant to the development of bright and talented children and youth.

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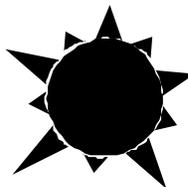
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Summer Academies
June 20 - July 29
will be held at
Ronald E. McNair School
8136 Groby
(just east of the Innerbelt)



Still a few openings!
Call 314-962-5920 for details

Gifted Resource Council is a not-for-profit education agency serving the greater St. Louis Metropolitan area. Its purpose is to bring together the resources of the community, the schools and parents to help bright and talented children achieve their potential.