

Summer Academies Opportunities are Wonderful - and Unique!

In addition to a curriculum rich with offerings ranging from the well-known Space Academy to the ever-popular Ancient Academy (now featuring Egypt!), Summer Academies provide exceptional children with opportunities for personal growth unavailable anywhere else in the area.

Learning to Learn

Gifted children tend to focus on proving to adults how smart they are rather than on the experience of learning itself, being well-rounded or developing healthy peer relationships. They expect to “be on top” and to prove it by earning scores as near to perfect as possible.

These fragile underpinnings of a child’s self-esteem reduce the richness of learning to racking up “measurable achievements.”

To counter these destructive tendencies, GRC’s Summer Academies are ungraded and students are empowered to explore their interests and transcend the confines of what they will be tested on.

As they discover learning can be exploratory and fun, not simply linear, their motivation shifts from external approval to internal curiosity, from competitive to cooperative learning. “For many children,” veteran teacher Sandy Kalin observes, “this is a very liberating experience.”

No Longer “The Best”

GRC’s Summer Academies provide many students with their first experience of not being the best of the best.

Determined to nurture talented students and fragile egos craving recognition as “the best,” GRC teachers insist on cooperative learning, teamwork and creative, fun-filled approaches to problem-solving. As they learn to cooperate, students develop respect for one another and accept their own limitations.

As Kalin puts it, “Many students discover that being the best isn’t always possible — or even that important.”

Thinking Outside the Box

Not only are the Academies ungraded, but curricula emphasize trying new things, understanding connections, and utilizing multiple approaches.

Seven years ago Kalin, who has taught a wide variety of subjects at the Summer Academies, helped create an enduringly popular Academy for young children: Math, Marvels & More which links math with various creative arts and sciences. As the course evolved over the years, Kalin points out, it has involved a changing variety of creative activities, but has never narrowed its focus to simply being a high-powered math skills course.

The most recent Academy helping students learn to “think outside of the box” is the remarkable ECO Academy which was piloted just last summer.

Kalin, who serves as principal of Bethel Lutheran School and has a background in science, was also instrumental in designing this program to help students learn about how economics and ecology interface.

Kids loved it, Kalin reports, even if a few didn’t really understand what they were getting into. For instance, one boy was initially frustrated because he wanted to be allowed to simply study the stock market so that he could learn how to make money.

Because a narrow focus and learning in isolation are not the GRC way, Kalin and her colleagues insisted that the boy get involved with peers eager to learn how the stock market relates to the overall economy, the monetary evolution from bartering to stock options, and ways the economy and ecology impact one another.

ECO teams form corporations, design products and market them to other students. This hands-on approach makes learning more concrete and strengthens interpersonal skills.

And the boy who only wanted to retreat into the stock market? He got caught up in the interactive, interdisciplinary, in-depth approach and thoroughly enjoyed himself.

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Dialogue with the Director

Not long ago I received a mailing from a university which had opened opportunities for our son, picturing in full color a variety of doors found on their campus. The doors symbolized the different paths that students could choose in the pursuit of their academic career.

This prompted me to contemplate the vast number of doors that are before all students as they follow their paths in life. How many doors does your child face each day? Are the doors welcoming? Do they open wide? Are they sometimes heavy and hard to open? How often should we as parents help to open the door for our child? What are the doors of opportunity that our children will enter?

Gifted Resource Council offers a variety of welcoming doors for children. From our Saturday Learning Labs to our Summer Academies to Academic Challenge Cup and the Amazon Rainforest Project, GRC provides doors of opportunity for gifted children throughout the metropolitan St. Louis area.

Just this Spring GRC opened doors to more than 1,400 students from over 90 schools and 21 school districts at our annual Academic Challenge Cup. Children from public schools, private schools, parochial schools and home schools all came together to challenge themselves to new ways of thinking and learning in the areas of mathematics, language usage and creative problem solving.

Beginning in June, our Summer Academies will open doors for 400 children to learn about the wonders of space or ancient history or economics and ecology. They will challenge each other and themselves to dig deeper in their search for answers to perennial questions. They will pose new questions from many points of view – even questions with multiple answers.

GRC's Amazon Rainforest Project will also enable a select number of middle school students to explore unique research opportunities and experience dramatic cultural diversity this summer in Ecuador.

Even more significantly, we at Gifted Resource Council hope that in all these varied endeavors of learning, children are growing in knowledge of themselves and their relationships with others. We believe that interaction with caring teachers and intellectual peers helps to broaden a child's perspective, creating clearer vision of what they can aspire to become.

Thus, doors of opportunity are opened and countless young people are encouraged to create their own dreams for the future...



Sue Flesch, GRC executive director

Parenting Classes Inform, Reassure

By Peggy Harris, M.A.

Parents of gifted children face many challenges. We try to stay one step ahead of the unlimited questions our precocious children pose. We look for opportunities to enrich their worlds by exposing them to the wonders of the arts, different cultures, sciences, and technology. We also try to ease their pain when the world is not as sensitive as we would prefer.

Until I discovered Gifted Resource Council when my daughter was in kindergarten, my husband and I felt alone in our struggle to raise a gifted child.

We knew our daughter was brilliant — doesn't every parent believe this about his or her child, especially a first-born? However, when her teachers and the parents of her preschool classmates marveled at many of the behaviors that we took for granted, we started our journey to nourish those special talents by involving her with GRC's wonderful enrichment activities.

While our daughter attended her GRC Learning Lab, I attended Parenting Classes. She left each class excited about her adventures ("Mom, I didn't know that learning could be this much fun!"), and I rushed home to eagerly share my own discoveries with my husband.

Professionals who work with gifted children shared their expertise at the Parenting Classes and provided useable strategies for us to adopt at home. I learned about the characteristics of gifted children, special social problems that they encounter, how to encourage creative thinking, and how to discipline.

I had heard that parents of children with disabilities must advocate for their children, but I hadn't given any thought that I might have to fight for my child to be mentally stimulated. GRC Parenting Classes showed me how to be an advocate for my child. I wish we had discovered this two years earlier, before she clashed with a preschool teacher who wasn't comfortable with kids who keep asking a lot of in-depth questions.

When other parents shared their experiences with various schools and special gifted programs, it helped us make the decision about the right school for our child.

Now that our daughter is in middle school, we face problems that are even more complex: stress brought on by perfectionism. I had been painfully aware of our daughter's perfectionism since she struggled as a toddler to arrange and rearrange her doll's blanket so that it was "perfectly" placed. I tried to tell her that it was acceptable to make mistakes while I secretly cringed inside from making similar errors myself!

As her classes became more difficult this year, I watched her stress levels continue to increase as she strived to write the perfect paper or achieve a perfect score on an

exam. Telling her to relax didn't work when she was two, and it definitely was not working when she was twelve. Her awareness of her self-imposed high standards of performance led her this past winter to examine those standards when she decided to study perfectionism for a class project.

Timing is everything, and the Spring 2000 Parenting Classes were especially helpful. For example, John Yunker explained how parents could help our gifted children cope with the unique stresses and pressures they face. Karen Preusser, Ph.D., discussed how perfectionism is often passed from one generation to the next. She noted some perfectionists display maladaptive behavior while others are more adaptive and realistic perfectionists.

As a result of these Parenting Classes, I realized that my daughter's perfectionism was helping her achieve realistic high standards in the areas where she excelled, and that she was setting reasonable goals to explore a new topic or to enjoy the experience in areas where she was just a novice.

Gifted Resource Council also served as a springboard to other resources. I learned about the National Association for Gifted Children, SAGE, the Gifted Children's Information Office, annual conferences for educators and parents, and dozens of resource books.

I'm glad that I saved my notes and handout materials from previous classes because our son displays gifted talents that must also be nurtured. The questions and answers are different for each child, but GRC Parenting Classes can answer questions that you didn't even know you had.

Peggy Harris is a parent of two gifted children who have attended Gifted Resource Council programs for 8 years.

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GRC Summer Academies: Looking Back - To the Future

by Dawn Franzen, M.Ed.

As parents, we always want the best for our children. So as we fill out their GRC Summer Academies applications, we hope this year they will make new friends, have a good time and learn something new.

But with all of the busy-ness in our daily lives - scheduling carpools, helping with homework, fixing dinner - it is hard sometimes to see beyond the here and now: How enrolling our children in Summer Academies might impact their future lives. But it can, and has, for one Summer Academies alum.

Katie Grzenczyk attended Ancient Academy nine years ago and loved it. In fact, she loved it so much that she returned last summer as a teacher assistant. Now a sophomore at Princeton University, Katie recalls how her participation in Ancient Academy sparked her current passion: theatre. It was a playwriting and performance activity back then that led to her love of acting, to which, she says, "I now devote most of my working hours and energy." What she received years ago Katie now gives back to other students and continues to pursue on her own.

Katie's Summer Academies experiences continue to find their way into her life in other ways as well. When she sits in the lecture halls at Princeton taking notes, for example, something she hears will often spark the memory of a fact or concept she picked up at the Summer Academies. "It's nice to be able to share some knowledge that I had gained at GRC with other kids in my school-year environment," she notes.

But perhaps the most important knowledge Katie has taken away from her GRC days is that which cannot be compartmentalized into a course of study or factualized in her class notes: "My summers spent at the Academies," she says, "marked the first time I had truly felt accepted by peers who were as excited about learning as I was.

I carried that feeling of acceptance with me through tough times in elementary school and junior high, knowing that I did have friends who liked me for me."

So as you wait your turn to pick up your child from camp each day this summer, forget for a moment about baseball practice at seven or the chicken thawing in the 'fridge. As the car door opens, the seatbelt clicks and you begin to chat about your day on the way home, think for a moment about your child's future. And wonder, with excitement and maybe a bit of awe, where Gifted Resource Council Summer Academies may take your child. The possibilities are endless.

Dawn Franzen has taught with GRC's Summer Academies and Learning Labs. She is a parent and a free-lance writer for St. Louis Parent magazine.

**If you have questions
or for more information,
call 842-0666 or visit our website:
<http://www.cybam.com/grc>**

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Special Relationships

Kalin believes that the relationships students form with one another are among the most important benefits of their participation in the Summer Academies.

Gifted children often feel estranged from peers who are not as talented, and this discomfort limits their opportunities to laugh and play, be silly or athletic, or even make casual conversation. Instead, they gravitate toward adults and concentrate on perfecting their special talents.

GRC's Summer Academies allow children to interact with others who are equally gifted and form friendships with students throughout the entire metropolitan area.

According to Kalin, children cherish these relationships and look forward to seeing their friends when they return year after year. "They form friendships with peers who share comparable talents, similar interests and different interests, similar experiences and different experiences. Many times they don't find this experience in their regular schools, and GRC provides a very healthy, stimulating environment."

Premier Faculty

Gifted Resource Council not only structures the Summer Academies to provide students with these

important learning experiences, but also hires the finest teachers in the area to work with them. Teachers are encouraged to stress interpersonal relations, as well as the social and emotional growth of students.

Kalin, for instance, loves working with these students. "I look forward to seeing them return summer after summer, excited about the program, thrilled to reconnect with friends, and growing more mature every year. That's why," she adds, "teachers keep returning and former students return to teach. They know from experience how much the Summer Academies can mean to a talented — but often isolated or one-dimensional — child."

Simply The Best

GRC's Summer Academies offer students much more than simply an enrichment curriculum. Students have unique opportunities to work with others from many backgrounds and experiences who are their intellectual as well as chronological peers. These relationships, in combination with the carefully structured educational style, stimulate invaluable emotional and social development that are essential if children are to be healthy and well-rounded.

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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:

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- * 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: \$60

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

Sponsor: \$100

- * 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

Institutional Membership: \$100

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