

Gifted Resource Council: Serving Children, Families and Community

Webster defines resource as “something ready for use or available as needed.” In keeping with the spirit of that definition, Gifted Resource Council offers quality programs and services, not just for our number one priority, our children, but also for the families of those children and the community that educates and supports them.

For example, GRC attends to the needs of parents by providing free parenting classes for its members. Raising a gifted child is certainly a wonderful, exciting experience; but it is nonetheless challenging and oftentimes perplexing: “He worries about everything.” “She can do that; but she’s so afraid to try.”

GRC’s parenting classes help answer these and many other questions parents have about their gifted children. Executive Director, Sue Flesch, understands the necessity and value of this service: “perhaps nothing we do is more important than to help our parents raise healthy well-adjusted children. For years we have tried to meet this challenge by sponsoring workshops for parents.”

Past workshop topics include “What Do the Numbers Mean? From Standardized Achievement Tests to Individual IQ Scores” with Leslie Rebhorn and “Nurturing Gifted Children: Creating a Great Society” with John Yunker. Judging from parents’ reactions after attending these classes, “Wow! What an eye-opener!” “It was

great to realize other parents have the same parenting issues,” they really seem to help parents look beyond intelligence and see their child as a whole person, with fears and weaknesses in addition to their great strengths and achievements.

Gifted Resource Council also extends its services and expertise to both families and community. Family Fun Night allows everyone a chance to learn more about GRC as they spend an evening together playing games and learning new skills.



Try to get the ping pong ball in the middle! Family Fun Night participants try their luck completing the Academic Challenge Cup exercise.

Gifted Resource Council is also co-sponsoring the Inquiring Minds conference at UM-St. Louis March 29-30, 2000. Open to parents as well as teachers, this event will feature Dr. James R. Delisle as its keynote speaker. Noted gifted educator, author and professor of education at Kent State University, Dr. Delisle, along with other professionals, will assist the community in learning how best to help its gifted children achieve their potential.

Lastly, in response to a parent’s suggestion, GRC has incorporated a new column in *mindwonders*, beginning with this issue. (Please see page 3.) It will feature St. Louis-based educators and psychologists discussing common issues and practical solutions for families of gifted children.

“It takes a village to raise a child,” so the saying goes; and Gifted Resource Council is right there, helping that wonderful process along.

Dialogue with the Director

Gifted Resource Council – the name itself conjures images of bright children intensely involved in the exploration of a scientific concept or deeply ensconced in a game of chess. Yes, GRC does offer those academic opportunities on a regular basis, through our Saturday Learning Labs and Summer Academies.

But do we do MORE than offer academic enrichment for gifted children?

YES! I believe strongly that the mission of Gifted Resource Council encompasses not only providing academic opportunities, but also the environment in which young people can learn about themselves.

Every time that I speak with teachers for our programs (who are among the most talented group of professionals in the entire metropolitan area), I emphasize to them the paramount importance of nurturing the affective side of the talented children that they encounter in classes. When I speak with parents and students at our Academic Challenge Cup in the spring, the emphasis is on teamwork, striving together to reach a common goal. Surely our 7th graders who venture to the Amazon Rainforest of Ecuador, armed with insatiable enthusiasm and seeking knowledge about issues of rainforest preservation, come back not just with new facts about scientific endeavors, but also with new insight into their own abilities to “make a difference” in this world.

Yes, through all of the programs that GRC sponsors, children are challenged to learn more . . . about the world around them, about interpersonal relationships with peers and adults, and about themselves. We offer a safe place where young people can stretch their minds, not being embarrassed to ask questions or think profoundly deep thoughts.

A place where other students are interested in similar questions and searching for answers of their own. A place where learning the “give and take” of daily life might come more easily because of the groupings of academic peers. A place to dream dreams and reach for the stars . . .

An event that happened at the end of our 1999 Academic Challenge Cup reminded me of the entirety of what GRC can offer for bright

students. As I was announcing the winning teams at our LinguSHTIK competition for sixth through eighth graders, I was struck with the realization that all three places in that particular competition had been won by three teams from the same school.

As the students came forward to receive their ribbons and first place trophy, they were exceptionally excited, surprised and appreciative. Only later did I learn from their coach that this event held an even greater

significance for these fifteen students. For that morning, as they were leaving their school to participate in GRC’s Academic Challenge Cup, the students had learned that one of their teachers had died the night before. On the way to the competition the students talked about this teacher, remembering what he had meant to them, and together, working through their grief, they decided to compete that day for their former teacher, in tribute to this fine man who had influenced their lives. Together these students accomplished more than they had dreamed. And indeed, they learned something about themselves in the process. And I know they made some adults think twice . . . I certainly did!



Sue Flesch, GRC executive director

Healthy Self-Esteem Requires Friendships . . . and Failures!

by Dennis O'Brien

Parents who are raising a gifted child face many unique challenges, including that of developing a well-rounded and durable child with healthy self-esteem.

It isn't as easy as it might seem. If things go awry, gifted children can be handicapped for real life success by their parents' well-intended, though misguided, emphasis on intellectual growth at the expense of overall personal development. With cognitive abilities so precocious that they become the center of the child's life and the primary focus of parental responses, talented youngsters may grow up bereft of the interpersonal skills that would allow them to form nurturing friendships and are sadly lacking in experiences which teach them to cope with adversity.

Here's how it works. A child with superior cognitive ability may experience some difficulty relating to children of his own age and gravitate toward adults. As the child becomes increasingly focused on pleasing adults, he loses both the natural support of healthy peer relations and the ability to form such relationships. Intellectual success comes easily, and soon the child's sense of self has come to rest on his ability to outperform all those around him and be recognized by adults for these achievements. Beneath the facade of competence and success, this child is vulnerable because he has been unable to develop satisfying friendships and self-esteem rests on the fragile underpinnings of his demonstrable intellectual superiority.

What can concerned parents do? Here are some valuable strategies to begin addressing potential problems.

- First, assess your priorities. Are you as aware as you should be of the importance of helping your child 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?

- Next, assess your child's situation. How well does your child interact with peers? Has he learned to cooperate with them? Does your child have friends? How frequently

does he have them over to play? Do they call him? Does he seem to be attuned to doing the things others want to do, or does he push his own agenda? What do his teachers say about his relationships with other students? What kind of coaching and support does he need from you to improve his relationships?

Gifted kids are like
intellectual sharks—
relentless eating machines
that seek out and devour
information.

- Make your priorities clear. Let your child 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 she played with and what they did. Coach if you need to.

- Make sure that your child is engaged in activities like sports, drama, Scouting or Junior Achievement which teach cooperation with others. Typically, gifted kids who are used to working on their own may lack the social and communication skills necessary for teamwork and participation in their peer community. They need frequent opportunities to interact in situations where the focus is on teamwork, not individual performance.

- Encourage your child to become involved in activities in which she may not be "the best" so that she learns she is ok as a person, valued and valuable for whom she is. To be resilient in life, a child needs to learn to try things, to enjoy activities without measuring the results, and to keep participating.

Should you force your child to participate? If you must. Obviously it is better if your child participates in activities which 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." Of course,

these activities also help your child become more well-rounded.



This gifted young person is applying artistic principles to a scientific problem.

Self-Esteem continued on page 7

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Spotlight On...

In this issue the spotlight shines on two relative newcomers to GRC's Board of Directors who have dedicated themselves to helping families of gifted children. **Agnes Meyo, Ph.D.**, is a licensed psychologist who specializes in working with gifted children and their families, and has been on the Board since 1996. **Carolyn Phipps**, with two years of service on the GRC Board, brings a commitment to finding ways for gifted children to interact with one another.

Agnes Meyo

"We need to view the gifted child as a total child, not just an intellectual being," says Dr. Meyo. "We need to address all their needs – social, moral, physical, spiritual and artistic – as well as intellectual."

"One idea that I focus on in the parenting classes I do, whether for GRC or another organization, is that only by addressing the whole child can that child be happy," she says.

"I've become very interested in the role athletics can play in a child's life." Athletics can be a good way for gifted children to socially interact with their peers. It gives them a comfortable, common ground. Gifted children are frequently fiercely competitive and a sport can be a logical outlet for their competitive spirit.

On the other hand, sports such as martial arts or distance running can be a way for children to explore physical fitness, with a non-competitive focus. "Physical activity is good for everyone," she continues. "With the de-emphasis on physical education in some schools, many children just don't get the opportunity to stretch their bodies."

Artistic, dramatic and musical endeavors can also help gifted children learn to work together in groups, for a common goal. Dr. Meyo continues, "We neglect some of those pieces because we assume they aren't interested in them. But we need to really listen to our children. Perhaps they have heard the messages, both intentional and unintentional, that their parents have sent."

Dr. Meyo believes that with effort, parents can send the message that their children are treasured for who they are. And in return, gifted children can achieve their potential, in whatever types of endeavors they choose.

Carolyn Phipps

One of the main reasons Carolyn Phipps joined Gifted Resource Council's Board of Directors was to help develop activities in which children can interact with each other. To accomplish this, she has spearheaded Family Fun Night for the last two years.

"Gifted kids frequently feel more comfortable talking

with adults than other kids," says Carolyn. "When they're very young, they are often interested in totally different things from other kids. Once they get to grade school, they can spend a great deal of time at school feeling alone."

Gifted Resource Council programs help, because the children learn to interact with other bright children, at least for a few hours a week. "The teachers are really great, too," continues Carolyn. "GRC teachers are not offended by the range of questions from the kids."

"But I feel that we need to create additional ways for kids to interact with one another," she says. "Family Fun Night is a great opportunity. The children can get together and have time to bond; parents get the chance to meet one another and talk. It also allows parents the opportunity to see the kids in action."

Although she's only been on the board for a couple of years, Carolyn has been going above and beyond for GRC for quite some time. In the summer of 1995 her daughter Whitney participated in Ancient Academy, studying Ancient Egypt. "Sue Flesch had located a museum in Kansas City that had Egyptian artifacts that students were allowed to explore. But she didn't have a way to get them to St. Louis. So she put a note in the summer packet, asking if anyone was going to Kansas City before the program, who might volunteer to bring the Egyptian artifacts to Ancient Academy. We didn't have a trip planned, but I figured, 'how far could it be?' We loaded up the car and headed out. Sue and the rest of the Summer Academies crew were amazed that we just went and got these two huge boxes full of all kinds of Ancient Egyptian stuff. There could have been a mummy in there, there was so much stuff."

Clearly, Carolyn Phipps has supported Gifted Resource Council, her children and many others in a wide variety of ways.

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

Self-Esteem continued from page 3

Why is experiencing “failure” so important for gifted children? Most children experience 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 and certainly without failure. What’s more, they are so accustomed to dominance in their areas of strengths that they tend to restrict their participation in other 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.

Incidentally, team sports provide wonderful opportunities for a gifted child to both experience the frustration that most of us feel at being just good enough at something, not great, and to learn about working together with others.

• Enroll your child in GRC Summer Academies and Saturday Learning Labs where he will be challenged by chronological 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. Every year GRC

trains its instructors to promote cooperation, not competition, and to 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 him—to cooperate, to enjoy the experience and to respect the talents of others.

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, 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 they will need for lasting success.

Dennis O’Brien is a licensed clinical social worker, an experienced educator, regular columnist for West/South County Kids, and executive director of Zink the Zebra Foundation of St. Louis, an organization serving medically fragile children.

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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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Please mail check to: Gifted Resource Council, 12225 Eddie and Park Road, St. Louis, MO 63127

GiftedResourceCouncil II Spring 1999 II Enhancing the potential of talented young learners

minutes

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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Enhancing the potential of talented young learners

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