

## Learning Labs Offer Ongoing Challenges — and Benefits

In addition to the stimulation of a high-interest curriculum, GRC's Learning Labs provide exceptional children with hands-on courses, in-depth academic experiences and unique opportunities for personal growth.

### High-Interest Curriculum

For nearly two decades Gifted Resource Council has developed a repertoire of courses which engage and challenge bright students to explore areas of special interest. Students continue to enroll in GRC courses year after year because of their ongoing appeal.

Perennial favorites like chess, Spanish and chemistry are offered along with newer courses in robotics, web page design and engineering a mousetrap car. Sixty percent of the course offerings are new each session.

"Learning Labs offer us the opportunity to teach courses we have a passion for, and our enthusiasm inspires students as much as the topics themselves," says veteran GRC teacher Barbara Roussin.

### Open Enrollment – No Testing Required

Any child, ages 3 through 14, ready to explore an engaging topic in depth can participate in Gifted Resource Council's Learning Labs.

Bright children are screened into the courses by their interest, not by having to excel on standardized tests.

By design, GRC classes are inclusive. Children are gifted in different ways, and if a child is interested enough to spend six weeks building a robot, mapping human genes, discussing Harry Potter, enjoying math games or studying the Latin roots of words, he or she is gifted enough for GRC's Saturday Learning Labs.

### Small Classes, Hands-on Involvement

GRC courses are unlike any that students take in their own schools. Small classes - typically 8 - 10 students each, rarely more than 12 - enable students to receive the individual attention they need to thrive.

The content level and pace of the courses are accelerated, and the in-depth focus allows students to move far beyond the limitations of text books and traditional courses.

Perhaps even more important than the enriched

content of the courses, though, is the hands-on way these students learn. GRC students are active learners. They experiment make things, debate and explore alternatives. With instructors raising challenging questions,

**New Clayton Location**  
GRC has moved its Learning Labs to Wydown Middle School. This new site at 6500 Wydown is centrally located just south of Washington University, midway between Skinker and Big Bend.

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## Dialogue with the Director

I have long been fascinated by stories of one-room schoolhouses. I love to read articles about them and the experiences of students who attended. Whenever I meet people who themselves attended a one-room schoolhouse, I want to ask them all kinds of questions about how they relate their schooling experience with their success in later life. (Yes, they frequently seem to be a very successful group of people!)

Without fail, the smallness of the one-room schoolhouse experience and the interaction between students of multiple ages leads the discussion. These seem to be the defining points when comparisons are made to our current educational model, which places children in single age classrooms. Of course, the relationship with a teacher, which spanned numerous years of education, also brings back profound memories.

Then my thoughts turn to Gifted Resource Council and our efforts to replicate the best of educational theory and practice. And I find that what GRC holds as most valuable are many of the things that one-room schoolhouses did so well.

We value smallness of classes and personal attention of a consistent, caring teacher as primary to the GRC experience. Our Saturday Learning Labs are designed to have no more than ten or twelve students in a class. More often, the group numbers seven or eight! The teachers are experts in their field of study, whether chess or chemistry or coin collecting. But beyond their academic expertise, GRC teachers are chosen because they understand gifted children and can relate well to their needs and interests. Teachers are further trained to facilitate group sharing and cooperation.

We also always place children in multi-age groups. GRC believes strongly that bright children learn almost as much from each other as they do from their teachers. The interaction between gifted students across grade levels is truly a wonder to behold! I have often observed that the personal growth of children in our Summer Academies extends far beyond the classroom... to the Extended Care experience and noon recess activities among others. The constant stimulation of young bright minds brings out the best in all of us!

Ah, the mystique of the one-room schoolhouse experience! We hope you'll find the best aspects of it with Gifted Resource Council...



*Sue Flesch, GRC executive director*



*Scientific experimentation is always a popular subject for Learning Lab students.*

## “What Should I Say When I Don’t Know the Answer?”

By Dennis O’Brien

When bright children wonder about things adults take for granted and ask questions we cannot answer, parents may become anxious. Some feel threatened, others guilty about “letting their child down.”

Although distressing to parents who believe they should know all the answers, precocious questions are signs of giftedness and should be welcomed and nurtured by parents and teachers alike.

Parents need to keep in mind that “not knowing” is normal and that much good can come from it. Learning to ask and explore good questions is a much more important life skill for children than knowing what we currently consider the correct answers to be.

Here are some ways to help children get the most out of their questions by focusing on the process of learning rather than on the correctness of an answer.

*F* Just say, “I don’t know,” when you don’t. A parent who can acknowledge this readily is modeling a healthy self-confidence for children and also communicating that knowing “correct” answers is much less important than many other things, including knowing how to learn.

*F* Expand the focus by asking, “What makes you ask?” Asking about what prompted a question gives your child an opportunity to describe the context of the question and for you to understand how your child thinks.

*F* Help your child explore the issue by asking, “What do you think?” Show interest in what your child says and ask follow-up questions to help

clarify facts and reasoning. This “nondirective” style is utilized by the best teachers because it fosters both creative and analytical thinking.

*F* If your child has a serious interest in a query, encourage further investigation. How might your child explore his or her question? What resources could he use? Encourage your child to use primary, up-to-date sources, including field research, interviews and the Internet.

*F* Try to help your child avoid the dead-end of “why questions” and translate them into the much more useful — and usually answerable — reportorial questions involving “what, how, where, when and who.”

*F* Don’t turn every situation into a learning experience. Sometimes a question deserves a simple, direct answer, especially when it concerns your own actions, values or behavior.

*Dennis O’Brien is a licensed clinical social worker, experienced educator and therapist, and executive director of KidzLink, an organization serving medically fragile children.*

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**If you have questions  
or for more information,  
call 314-842-0666 or visit our website:  
[www.cybam.com/grc](http://www.cybam.com/grc)**

## Gifted Resource Council Loses a Valued Teacher, Mentor and Board Member

While battling cancer, master teacher and mentor of teachers, James C. Harpel made it known that he would like memorial tributes in his honor to go to Gifted Resource Council.

Harpel was very supportive of Gifted Resource Council, according to his wife Cindy, "because he felt it really made a difference in the lives of young people. He believed that all children had gifts which needed to be nurtured, and Gifted Resource Council offered opportunities to many students which were not available elsewhere."

Jim had a distinguished career as a teacher in the Ladue School District, and his death is certainly a loss to many he knew and taught there.

Harpel became involved with Gifted Resource Council as a math and physics teacher shortly after GRC was founded in 1983.

"Jim was always looking for ways to make math and science an engaging, hands on activity," said former GRC executive director Beverly Berla. "This fit well with us, and

we have continued to use the same approach. He had a very special way of helping kids understand and enjoy science."

Harpel was more than an innovative teacher of students. He was also a mentor for other teachers, and well known in the community for his involvement with several other nonprofit educational organizations. Soon he was asked to join GRC's Board of Directors.

According to Sandy Kalin, Harpel's longtime colleague on the Board and fellow teacher with GRC, he brought valuable leadership experience to the board. His reputation lent credibility to this newly organized nonprofit formed to meet a glaring gap in the services available to gifted students.

Harpel continued to serve on the Board and later on the Advisory Committee until his death on August 25, 2000.

"Most of all, I remember Jim as a very fine teacher who brought out the best in his students," added Kalin. He will be missed by GRC and many others, but is

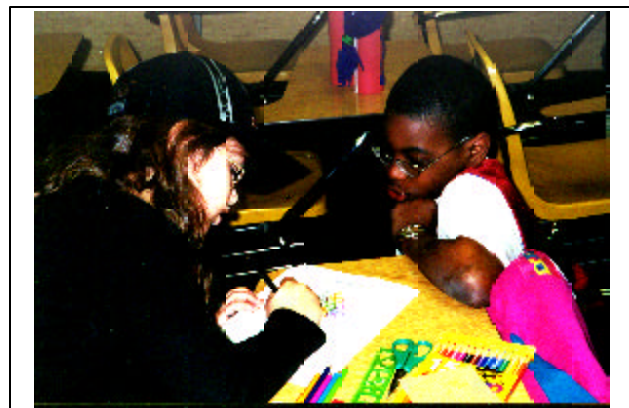
very well remembered.



*Jim Harpel, GRC  
Advisory Committee*



*Barb Roussin and her Learning Lab students visibly enjoy their interaction.*



*Two young students are deeply engrossed in an activity during their Saturday class.*

## ECO Academy Teaches in the Present, Looks to the Future

By Dawn Franzen, M. Ed.

One hundred years ago, our country thrust itself into the Industrial Revolution. Factories sprang up “overnight” and the assembly line concept transformed the automobile from fantasy into reality. But at what price progress?

The twenty-first century has dawned with the next level of so-called progress: The Technology Revolution. And we can no longer ignore the impact our actions have on the earth. Gifted Resource Council recognizes that we must instill in future generations the idea that ecological awareness and fiscal responsibility can no longer be mutually exclusive. Completing its second year, ECO Academy, GRC’s newest summer camp, has tried and succeeded in helping kids understand the complex interplay of technological advancement and ecological preservation.

ECO Academy students began their two-week program with a mission: to create a financially viable and environmentally friendly business. The students created “Tie-Dyed T-Shirts, Inc.” With the direction of teachers Tricia Brown, Patrick Halladay and Sandy Kalin, the class learned, step-by-step, the marketing, financial and production elements of creating a business. As they made business decisions, they constantly had to ask themselves: “What are the potential environmental consequences of these decisions?”

Job descriptions were written and each student had to “apply” for a job by filling out an application and stating why they thought they would be suitable for the job. As a result, the third through eighth graders worked together across grade levels.

After conducting market research and determining that there was a niche for their product, students got busy raising start-up cash. What better way to do so than by selling shares of stock in their company? After a highly informative discussion on the topic from Monsanto ecotoxicologist, Dr. Michael McKee, they approached “venture capitalists” (parents, friends and other students), presented the business plan they wrote and sold stock in their company for a dollar a share.

With money in hand, they made a list of supplies needed for the production of the t-shirts. The main ingredient, of course, was the dye; and this led them to their first ECO decision: Synthetic dyes make more colorful, more appealing shirts and are easy to use. But disposing of natural dyes (made from onion skin and other vegetables) would not pose a threat to the environment, even though the colors they produced would not be as vibrant and might affect the appeal of the product to buyers. Phone calls to Rit Dye

Company and a professor at Washington University, who is an expert on water quality issues, reassured the students that the synthetic dye could be disposed of without harm to the environment. Here they learned first-hand that it is possible to have a win-win situation: they didn’t have to sacrifice potential profits for ecological safety; nor did they have to harm the environment in order to keep their business viable.

Production of the t-shirts went into full swing. Students spent several afternoons, assembly-line style, rubber-banding, dipping, rinsing and hanging their product. Delivery to customers was made and soon the class was staring at a pile of hard-earned cash.

But not so fast! First, they had to pay back their suppliers. Dividends were paid to their stockholders (who, by the way, got a 150% return on their investment). The pile of money did shrink; but lo and behold, there was still some left. Profit!

Actually, there was quite a bit of money left. After rewarding themselves with a pizza party perk, yet another decision awaited the ECO Academy students: What do we do with our profit? Do we divvy it up and individually “blow it” at the mall? Or is it our responsibility somehow to give back to the community? After much discussion, the students altruistically decided to use the money to set up a scholarship fund for a

worthy student who will want to attend ECO Academy next year.

As you can see, Gifted Resource Council’s ECO Academy is definitely not your run-of-the-mill lemonade stand. Rather, it is a camp where problem solving and teamwork combine with basic economic principles and pressing ecological issues. It is real life for kids and adults. Because in this class, the teachers cannot plan the lessons into neat little units: they must live them right along with their students.

It is said, “We don’t inherit the Earth from our parents; we borrow it from our children.” Soon it will be time to turn over our planet to the next generation. And that is exactly what GRC’s ECO Academy is doing.

Gifted Resource Council recognizes that we must instill in future generations the idea that ecological awareness and fiscal responsibility can no longer be mutually exclusive.

To enroll your child in GRC’s ECO Academy for 2001, watch for your Summer Academies brochure in February.

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providing resources and facilitating their explorations, Learning Labs maximize the interests and talents of students.

### **Learning Without Grades Bolsters Self-Esteem**

Unless parents are savvy and very determined, gifted children tend to narrow their focus to areas in which they excel. Fearful of not being the best at something, they may avoid many healthy activities, causing their world and sense of self to constrict. Even their academic work may focus on making top grades rather than learning and growing.

GRC's non-graded curriculum enables high achieving students to open up and explore their talents and interests. In the supportive environment of Learning Lab, they acquire the self-confidence to take risks and develop additional skills outside of the narrow range within which they had previously defined themselves. They begin to try things they may do adequately but not superbly.

### **Cooperation, Teamwork Foster Social Skills**

Learning to work together is an extremely important life skill for any student, but it is even more important for students who tend to be isolated by their unusual gifts.

Since they learn much more quickly than other students, gifted children tend to relate to adults more readily than to other children and to build their self-esteem on adult approval of their intellectual prowess. Because their social skills are often under-developed they become isolated from their peers.

Gifted Resource Council is well aware of this danger, and for this reason courses are taught in ways to maximize the social interactions of the students. The Learning Labs challenge them to engage in interactive learning. Instead of competing to be the best, they function as learning teams pursuing common objectives.

This is a new experience for students accustomed to working alone or being isolated as the unchallenged class leader by virtue of being "the brightest."

Although it may initially feel uncomfortable to be teamed with so many other bright students, this is an important developmental experience in a gifted child's trek toward becoming a well-rounded person.

In addition to the stimulation they receive from the courses themselves, even students who participate in a gifted program at their own school benefit from GRC's emphasis on team projects and the opportunity to meet and form friendships with other gifted children from throughout the metropolitan area.

"It's a great way for kids to spend time on Saturdays - making friends while pursuing their interests," adds Roussin.

### **Exploring Interests**

Bright children have many interests, and a six-week immersion in a Learning Lab class is the perfect amount of time to explore a topic in which a child may be curious.

A student may select as many as two ninety-minute courses during the six-week fall session, and as many as three during the winter session. Almost fifty classes are offered each session. Over the course of both sessions, a curious student could explore a variety of different topics, or cluster courses in areas of greater personal interest.

After six weeks of studying the fossil history of Missouri, one fourth grader may want to preview algebra, while another may wish to continue delving deeper into geologic time.

Either way, both benefit from an enriching experience without the pressure of having to live up to a reputation of knowing the most and being the best.

### **Premier Faculty**

Gifted Resource Council not only structures the Learning Labs 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.

"Because classes are small, I can be more creative with what I teach and have more individual contact with each child," says Roussin to explain why she values the GRC teaching experience so much.

### **Unique Opportunities**

The faculty, the high-interest curriculum, the hands-on approach and the emphasis on teamwork make each course a special opportunity for students. They can explore their interests while developing social skills and friendships with intellectual and chronological peers from throughout the metropolitan area. Children who have the opportunity to participate in these unique experiences are indeed fortunate.

**For more information on GRC's  
Learning Lab, call 314-842-0666  
or visit our website:  
[www.cybam.com/grc](http://www.cybam.com/grc)**

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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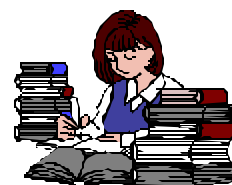
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GRC needs your charitable support to continue providing talented children with special enrichment opportunities. Tax deductible membership gifts keep fees as low as possible and provide scholarship assistance to those who need it.

Please use the enclosed envelope to mail your membership gift today.



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.