

GRC Fulfills Broader Mission -- Training Gifted Teachers While Serving Students, Parents and Community

For the past 25 years, Gifted Resource Council has been renowned for offering gifted students hands-on, high-interest classes that stimulate, challenge and give them opportunities to work with equally talented peers—as collaborators rather than rivals. Space Academy (since 1984) and Ancient Academy (since 1986), have long been perennial favorites, while classes on American history, ecology, enterprise, green science, math marvels and robotics are more recent attractions. Parents consistently value the emphasis GRC puts on developing children’s social as well as academic skills.

Enlightened donors support GRC because they understand the importance of providing gifted students with challenging enrichment activities, thought-provoking teachers and the inspiration they need to become the leaders of tomorrow. Donors realize that, all too often, these opportunities are simply not available in many schools and the potential of our most talented future leaders is jeopardized.

Because GRC was started by parents, it has a longstanding commitment to helping parents meet the challenges of raising a gifted child. While their children are participating in GRC events, parents may attend workshops by educators and psychologists who are experts in working with gifted children. For the past 11 years, every issue of *mindwonders* has contained valuable parenting tips, ranging from how to communicate with a gifted child’s teacher to dealing with being average in some areas, boredom in school, perfectionism or nurturing healthy self-esteem. These articles by psychologist Dennis O’Brien and other useful information can be found on the GRC Web site, www.giftedresourcecouncil.org.

Parents, teachers and other professionals also appreciate the biennial conference for educators and parents of gifted students that GRC cosponsors with the University of Missouri – St. Louis, Gifted Association of Missouri and St. Louis Association for Gifted Education.



But the GRC mission goes beyond direct service to gifted children and their parents: GRC enriches the prospects of many other gifted students by training their teachers. GRC has recently initiated a special program to help teachers learn how to engage students in ‘hands-on’ science lessons. GRC also offers teachers opportunities to earn certification as gifted specialists while interning at GRC. To earn certification as gifted specialists, teachers must complete 90-135 hours interning under master teachers in addition to completing their academic courses. GRC offers them the opportunity to focus on *how* students learn rather than on *what* they learn.

Already dozens of teachers are positively impacting talented students throughout the metropolitan area, using skills and attitudes they acquired while interning at GRC. In their own individual ways, these gifted specialists expand the GRC tradition of challenging students with interesting hands-on investigative assignments and cooperative learning.

Last summer eight graduate school students from Maryville and Webster Universities—all experienced teachers—interned at GRC. Here’s what two of these interns had to say about their experiences at GRC’s 2009 Summer Academies.

Kristina White has taught second graders at Wilkinson Early Childhood Center in St. Louis for nine years. She earned a BA in elementary education and MA in administration from the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Katy Kriegshauser is enjoying her first year as a fifth grade instructor of the gifted in the Rockwood School District. Prior to this, she taught fourth grade for St. Martin of Tours School and fifth grade at Bayless Intermediate. Kriegshauser earned a BA in elementary education and

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Dialogue with the Director

On the first Saturday of GRC's Fall '09 Learning Lab classes, two people approached me with questions. The first came from a mother whose two children were participating in a Gifted Resource Council program for the first time ever. "This seems so small! Why are there so few children in the classes?" I explained that the class size of eight to ten children is NOT unusual for GRC's Saturday classes. We purposefully limit the number of students in each class – in order to maximize the possibility for true "hands-on", experiential learning – a hallmark of GRC programs. While we would strive for more classes (supported by a larger total enrollment) engaged in everything from chemistry to Dr. Seuss' stories to engineering, we will always endeavor to maintain a small number of students in each individual class.

The second question came from a person who has a long history with GRC who was wondering, "How is GRC doing???? There are so many small, not-for-profits that are disappearing..." To this query, which indicated concern for the stability of GRC as an organization during these challenging economic times, I responded that, "We'll be fine." Gifted Resource Council has always been a small endeavor – intensely focused on its mission of bringing together the resources of the community to enable talented children to achieve their potential.

We have continued for more than 25 years to center our three main programs – Academic Challenge Cup, Learning Labs and Summer Academies – on children for whom there is potential to "change the world". And even in tough times, we continue to offer new opportunities through which we can

encourage the broader community to impact the curious nature of young children. (Note particularly the "Teachers Turn On to Hands-On Science" class offered for teachers who want to expand their abilities teaching science in the regular classroom.)

This is not to deny that the current economic landscape requires a heightened level of stewardship of resources – both for organizations and families. As such, GRC has decided to not raise tuition for our Summer Academies for the third year in a row – nor for Learning Labs or Academic Challenge Cup. We want to be affordable for as many children and families as possible.

Yet the reality is that tuition covers only 77% of the cost for each participant in a Gifted Resource Council program. The rest must be made up by the support of committed individuals and civic-minded corporations – through grants, donations and memberships. For all of these sponsors,

we are grateful. Whether large or small, donations enable us to continue to provide the finest in academic enrichment for more than 2,500 children whose lives we touch each year!

While we at GRC tighten our belts, please help us share with others. Tell your friends and neighbors about our wonderful programs. Consider a gift of any size to support GRC. Join us in ensuring that children whose future is ours can continue to learn and grow for years to come...



Sue Flesch, GRC executive director

Susan C. Flesch



Academy Americana trailblazers work together to "pack their Conestoga wagon".



An Ancient Academy scribe serves as a model for a "mummy" - complete with amulets.

Co-Founder Reflects on GRC's Beginnings, Progress

Beverly Berla, now a gifted specialist at Old Bonhomme Elementary School in the Ladue School District, was one of three women who identified the need for special programs for gifted students in St. Louis and decided to do something about it. The other co-founders in 1983 were Linda McCall and Michele Peters. McCall served as the first executive director until 1984 when she moved out of the area. Berla succeeded McCall as executive director in 1985 and served until 1995 when she left her administrative work at GRC to return to full time teaching. However, she remains involved with GRC because "it is a great organization with a steady, focused mission. It's also a great group of people I enjoy being with." Here Berla reflects on those early days.

What were your motives and initial challenges?

Our motives were simple. We knew gifted children who were looking for after-school learning opportunities beyond what was being offered in St. Louis at the time, especially in science. We also knew adults who wished they had had such opportunities in their own lives. And the memory of my own sister who would have thrived in our programs was also an ongoing inspiration. Back then, none of our cultural institutions were offering challenging classes for young kids, and they would not permit children to go into classes for advanced grades. So we decided to make that happen.

Our major challenges were having no funds to start with, gathering the people to make things happen, and simply getting the word out. We also ran into some objection about our open policy of not requiring strict test scores for participation in our programs. However, we believed that a student's depth of interest and passion for a subject were also appropriate indicators, and we used these criteria for participation from the start.

How did you deal with these challenges?

Primarily by networking. We talked to everyone we knew and anyone who we thought might have an interest in gifted children. We learned about not-for-profit organizations. And we used the motto of walk, talk, act, think and conduct yourself in every matter of your affairs as if you have already accomplished what you are about to do. We just didn't see any barriers. We had a mission, and we had fun working toward it.

Why has GRC survived for 25 years, grown and thrived when many other nonprofits have not?

That is pretty simple—need, quality and leadership. The need was obviously there in our community for high quality resources for gifted youngsters. Schools alone cannot do the whole job for gifted kids and their families. So we tried to fill the gap. We had great board members who shared their creativity and expertise in areas of education, business and fundraising. With Sue Flesch as director, the programs have remained strong and evolved with the times.

Has GRC produced the benefits for children you hoped for? What are they?

I think it has. When I talk to former students who tell me how much they enjoyed programs, I know we are accomplishing something. When I see young men and women in their twenties and early thirties who met at GRC camps and are still friends, I know we served a purpose in their lives. When I talk to a young professor of astrophysics who as a boy was looking for challenging classes about space in St. Louis in 1982, and never gave up his dream, I know we have provided a valuable service in our community.

GRC has remained a small, strong and focused organization, but we have had an impact on larger ones by encouraging educational programs. Without needing to label youngsters, we have encouraged opportunities for so many children. It is a great feeling to look back and see the growth from a tiny grassroots program to one that has had a great impact on St. Louis and continues to serve gifted youngsters so well.



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.

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an MAT in educational technology from Webster University.

Why did you want to become a gifted specialist?

White: While public education puts a great deal of focus on students with special needs, I have worked with many gifted children and think it is important that we focus on their needs as well. I do not think that a high IQ is the only thing that describes a child. These children have a vast amount of needs that need to be met also.

Kriegshaus: I wanted to become a gifted specialist because I was yearning to work with students on a more abstract level. I enjoyed working in the regular classroom, but it didn't challenge me enough as a teacher. I wanted to go into more complex topics that were outside the traditional curriculum. Now, I'm working at the Center for Creative Learning in Rockwood and the Fall Learning Lab for GRC, and I couldn't be happier.

What did you learn through your GRC experience?

Kriegshaus: I learned that teaching gifted students is a thrilling occupation. Just when you expect your gifted students to do one thing, they completely blow you away with something else. For example, when I was assisting the Ancient Egypt class, we set off to decorate a mummy case. Before I knew it, I had a team of gifted students who not only drew hieroglyphs for the case, but wrote actual messages in hieroglyphs from the Book of the Dead on the case! It was great to see them take on the challenge with enthusiasm.

How did the GRC experience prepare you to become a gifted specialist?

White: It was great to have this experience with strictly gifted students. I was able to focus on the different levels and needs of the students within the gifted range. It was also neat to see how these students interacted with other gifted children. In a regular classroom, gifted students are often competing to show the teacher they are the smartest. Here, however, they weren't competing. They were enjoying the chance to work cooperatively with their gifted peers.

Kriegshaus: I often refer to my time at GRC's Summer Academies as my "training wheels" before I actually entered the gifted teaching profession. It was my chance to learn as much about gifted children as I could before beginning my new position in Rockwood. Interning with GRC helped prepare me because it taught me how much patience, time, and effort I would need to help each gifted child succeed. If I had gone straight from graduate school into a gifted classroom, I think I would have had a much harder time adapting from my regular classroom teaching background to this new environment.

How did the GRC emphasis on a hands-on, interactive approach to learning work?

White: I have a constructivist philosophy of teaching and

learning, which I believe helps meet the needs of learners at all levels. It was exciting to see constructivism in action here at the GRC Summer Academies. The program was interest driven and involved a great depth of hands-on and minds-on learning experiences.

Kriegshaus: When my students were allowed to do hands-on activities, they were more focused on their work. They also seemed much happier because they were creating an actual product from their learning. It made them feel like they were really contributing to the class instead of just learning facts from a book.

I wasn't expecting the amount of passion my students had for their work. It was amazing to see them work so hard on the littlest details during class. They really took pride in what they did during the Summer Academies.

Why should parents enroll a child in a GRC program?

White: The students are able to choose a program that they want to learn more about. They are given many opportunities to explore and engage in meaningful activities. The students will have fun while learning more about an area of personal interest. They will also have a unique opportunity to socialize with other gifted children with similar interests.

Kriegshaus: Any gifted student would benefit from the GRC program. The teachers really go out of the way to make sure that it is a challenging, enlightening, and fun place for students to be. The smaller class sizes make it great for those students who need that extra attention. Plus, the relationships the students form with the instructors are priceless.

What was most memorable?

Kriegshaus: Working with the great GRC staff was my most memorable experience. I learned so much from them. Each day, they were extremely encouraging and supportive. I couldn't have gotten through the experience without them.

What would you say if a teacher said that interning at GRC would not be helpful because the situation is so different from a traditional classroom?

White: I disagree. This experience, especially the hands-on, minds-on interactive approach, can be eye opening for any teacher. Taking yourself out of your current setting and watching another program in action can have a great effect on your personal philosophy of teaching and learning.

Kriegshaus: As a teacher who came from a traditional classroom, I would say that teacher needs to take a better look at GRC. Everything they do there can be used in the traditional classroom. In fact, if more teachers used the techniques that are used at GRC, I bet their classrooms would be happier and more productive to the point that even the teacher couldn't wait to get to school in the morning!



Parents Ask: How hard should our child strive for perfection? He's extraordinarily talented. Should we push him to excel?

By Dennis O'Brien

No. Stop promoting expectations that might be possible, but might also ultimately be destructive. Instead, identify realistic and healthy goals you can guide your child to pursue. Unhealthy expectations pose serious dangers for talented children.

Children who face this jeopardy come from loving, well-educated families and, if helped to develop in a healthy fashion, will make significant contributions to our society.

But sometimes it does not work out so well. With a little misguided help from their parents, many talented children drive themselves crazy trying to achieve perfection. Their sense of identity and personal well-being get tangled up in the notion that they must be the best at whatever they undertake. Pushing for perfection often backfires by sending a child the message she must be perfect—or she's a failure.

Some of these children defend themselves against the pressure to excel and the pain of failure by deliberately underachieving or refusing to try many activities that they may actually enjoy just because they fear they cannot do them "perfectly."

Talented but misdirected kids too often define themselves by their achievements. They live in a black and white world, and "being best" at whatever they do becomes the enemy of being good enough at a variety of things they might enjoy and benefit from.

That's tragic, and it's also why they need to learn to do things "poorly." Often in life doing something well enough is more important than doing it perfectly. This is another reason why goals need to be both realistic and healthy.

Parents must help academically talented children keep life in perspective and activities in balance. Gifted kids who don't learn to live a healthy, balanced life may place terrible pressures on themselves until they snap, frequently when they begin college. More than a few National Merit scholars drop out to wait tables and write the great American novel. Here are some tips for raising a healthy, well adjusted child:

Examine your own values and attitudes.

☞ Begin with an honest self-assessment. Do the unspoken norms of your family require perfection? To what extent are you inflicting success-at-all-costs values on your children by the way you lead your own life, plan activities or communicate? How does your child reflect this?

☞ Discuss your concerns with your spouse. Identify current challenges and the gains your child seems to be making to become a well-rounded person with appropriate goals and behaviors. Make sure you and your spouse are on the same page so that you can send your child a clear, compelling message.

☞ Help your child set appropriate goals and plans to pursue them.

☞ Evaluate how your child defines failure. Is success too important? Will your son work hard even if not rewarded by complete success? Is he defensive when he falls short, or can he

shrug it off and keep going?

☞ Help your child set reasonable goals and develop a practical plan to achieve them. Can you help your daughter redefine success in terms of making a reasonable effort, not perfection? "Not perfect" should not mean failure. The real failure is staying on the sidelines of life and not trying at all.

☞ Help your child develop a strategy for school. Does your child know how much he needs to study to earn an acceptable, though not a perfect, grade? Does he realize he doesn't have to know everything to be prepared for a test? How important is an "A" on a fourth-grade French quiz? Has getting all "A"s become more important than learning? Than being well-rounded?

☞ Train your child to recognize when it is really important to do her best and when "good enough" is good enough. Never say, "Just do your best" unless the circumstances really call for it. This will allow your child to do well—or "poorly"—enough to succeed and still have a life! When should a child "do her best"? That depends on priorities and circumstance. For some, it might be taking a school entrance exam such as the ACT. For others, it may be memorizing her lines for a school play. The take-home message is that not everything a child engages in can be a top priority. Help your child sort it out.

☞ Encourage but don't pressure. We all want our children to work hard and accomplish much, but pressure usually backfires. Gifted children are not inherently lazy and do not need to be flogged through life. Praise your child's efforts and risk-taking, not the results. Parents have to be extraordinarily alert to avoid putting too much pressure to achieve on children who seem to have the most promise.

☞ Empower your child to develop a sense of self. Encourage her to pursue her personal interests and talents. Be careful not to inflict your ambitions on her. Far too often, high achievers are pushed to pursue their parents' dreams so vigorously they don't have time to develop their own. No wonder the pre-med student shuts down her freshman year: she no longer is willing to pay the price required to fulfill her mother's ambitions for her.

☞ Nurture a well-rounded child. Encourage him to participate in a variety of activities, which are fun or enriching, even if they are not venues in which he excels. Praise your child's participation and his efforts, not his performance.

☞ Be sure to stress your interest in your child's social skills and progress developing relationships with peers. Too often parents of gifted students focus narrowly on their child's academic progress—especially grades—to the detriment of the development of the whole child.

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Don't enable irresponsible behavior.

☞ Expect appropriate social behavior and reasonable efforts to achieve healthy goals your child has set. Hold the line on this. However talented your child may be, she needs to learn to live in the real world, get along with others and behave responsibly.

☞ Don't make excuses for your child. Parents of gifted kids often do, and it drives professionals crazy. Who wants to hear mom say, "He only did it because his older brother does that to him?" Sure, and who lets older brother get away with that? Besides alienating others, parental excuse-making damages the child. Parents who rescue and excuse their child's behavior actually enable him to misbehave repeatedly and avoid responsibility for his actions.

☞ Examine your motives if you are tempted to excuse your child's misbehavior. Some parents make excuses because they doubt their child can live up to their expectations. Others make excuses because they are anxious and want their child to be seen doing everything perfectly—beginning in preschool. Having the perfect child proves how wonderful they hope they are. Of course, in reality, it does nothing of the kind. It actually signals a parent's personal insecurity and inability to separate her life from her child's and to parent responsibly.

Bottom line: Assure your child that you want her to be happy, well-rounded and enjoy activities with friends. Then follow up with parenting strategies that will make this possible.



*A GRC Space
Academy cadet
proudly displays his
robot!*

Equipping Teachers for Engaging, Hands-on Science Lessons

In keeping with its broader mission of positively impacting the education of gifted students throughout the metro area, GRC has initiated a series of workshops to prepare teachers who have been trained as generalists to creatively engage students in "hands-on, minds-on" science lessons that will stimulate as well as inform. This program for teachers of pre-K through elementary students combines discussions on methods and curricula with opportunities to engage in observation and live teaching under the supervision of a master science teacher at GRC's Saturday Learning Labs.

Dennis Grzenczyk shares his experience – and success – using items readily available to make science active and fun for learners. Grzenczyk first taught a Learning Lab class for GRC in the Winter of 1999 - and he has taught a class in every session of our Learning Labs since! That same summer, 11 years ago, he taught his first Summer Academy, and for years his Math Marvels & More and Space Academy classes have been perennial favorites. One of his earliest classes was entitled "Science: A Playground for the Mind," and any parent of a child who has taken a Grzenczyk-taught class knows how indicative this title is to his approach.

The workshop is designed for teachers looking for practical high-interest, low-cost science lessons. Curricular topics include force and motion, gravity, light, relativity, the physics of flight, simple machines, sensory perception, the solar system and states of matter. Participants are guaranteed to leave with curricular ideas and actual experiments to take back to their classes. When you finish this program, you should never need to buy an official science kit again!

Tuition is only \$95, and three full scholarships are available. For more information about "Teachers Turn On to Hands-on Science" beginning in January, call 314-962-5920. Call now. Class is limited to 20 teachers.



*Dennis Grzenczyk shares his joy of teaching with
Sean McFowland, kindergarten teacher at
Sacred Heart School in Florissant.*

Mark Your Calendar

January 27 or February 2, 2010 – Teacher Workshops for “Teachers Turn On to Hands-on Science” at GRC Office, 357 Marshall Ave., Suite 6

January 30, 2010 – Summer Opportunities Fair at John Burroughs School, 755 South Price Rd.

February 6-March 13, 2010 (Six Saturdays) – Winter Learning Lab at Wydown Middle School, 6500 Wydown Blvd. Parenting Classes will be offered.

March 8 & 9, 2010 – Academic Challenge Cup’s **Creative Convention** at Washington University’s Mallinckrodt Center. Parenting classes will be offered.

March 8, 2010 – Academic Challenge Cup’s **LinguiSHTIK** Competition at Washington University’s Mallinckrodt Center. Parenting classes will be offered.

March 9-12, 2010 – Academic Challenge Cup’s **Equations** Competitions at Washington University’s Mallinckrodt Center. Parenting classes will be offered.



Call GRC at 314-962-5920 for more information on any of these events.

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:

Gifted Member: \$60

- ★ Priority registration for all programs
- ★ *FREE parenting classes (\$160 value)*
- ★ Use of GRC Library

Intelligent Friend: \$100

- ★ All of the above, *plus*
- ★ \$10 discount off two Learning Lab registrations

Sharp Sponsor: \$150

- ★ All of the above, *plus*
- ★ Additional \$25 discount off a Summer Academy

Talented Patron: \$250

- ★ All of the above, *plus*
- ★ Additional \$25 discount off a Summer Academy (\$50 total)

Brilliant Benefactor: \$500

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

Wise Philanthropist: \$1,000

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Imaginative Institution: \$100

- ★ For schools and other not-for-profits

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mindwonders

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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Fall 2009

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Enhancing the potential of talented young learners

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New Opportunity for Teachers!



Curious about how to make your science classes more "real" for children? Join GRC's new workshop for teachers of preschool and elementary students: "Teachers Turn On to Hands-on Science". See page 6 for more details. Three scholarships are available for teachers. Register by calling the GRC office at 314-962-5920 or visit our Web site: www.giftedresourcecouncil.org

You'll never need to buy a "science kit" again!

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.