The Wisconsin Center for Gifted Learners

Assisting Underachieving Gifted Learners

Underachievement in gifted learners manifests itself in various ways. Students may fail to achieve academically, they may avoid work that is challenging, and they may make extreme choices such as dropping out of school or dropping out of life. Examples of underachieving behaviors observed at The Center include a child who at two years of age "forgets" the names of colors when asked to display her knowledge to relatives; disruptive conduct by a student, age eight, who has declared that the class activities are "boring" when he is dismayed with his self-perception of incompetence; and an apathetic, disengaged demeanor of a student who at the age of twelve years has given up on school.

Instructional practices and specific language can be used to promote the well-being of all learners and cultivate respect for and joy in learning. Practices that assist learners to take risks, ask questions, accept errors as part of the human condition, and recognize the worth of each individual can and should be employed by teachers.

Gifted learners possess characteristics that both drive them to learn and set them up to underachieve in school: perfectionism and a strong inner locus of control. Perfectionism in gifted learners stems from an early ability to reason abstractly and to conceive of ideas and plans that they are not equipped to carry out. An inner locus of control drives these learners to guard their intellectual power and to resist learning tasks imposed on them by others. Each of these traits can either propel the learner toward a positive learning experience or raise conflict that paralyzes learning. Neither trait can be disregarded without consequence when examining a school culture for gifted learners.

Gifted learners need a rich and challenging curriculum and relationships with teachers who are dedicated to guiding their learning. They need encouragement and instruction in self-governance, practice with self-efficacy, and authentic opportunities for service.

Students who participate in programs for gifted learners should learn with teachers who function as role models, guides, and trusted allies in the learning process. At The Center, teachers examine their responsibilities carefully as they prepare for each (continued on page 3)
Developing Dimensions, The Center’s school adjunct program, is gearing up for the **2012 Summer Session**, *Illumination*. Under this theme, students will work within one of four exciting and varied language arts groups. *Life During The Renaissance* will explore daily life in the Renaissance Period including culture, etiquette, art, scientific advancements, and literature. *The Light of New Lands* will focus on ways information has been obtained in the past and today. The group will examine the benefits and limitations of modern technology as well as innovations from the past and present. *The Eyes Have It* will give students the opportunity to experiment with lenses and refraction as they examine the workings of each part of the eye. *Bright Ideas* will explore the creativity that fire and its effects have kindled throughout history.

*Illumination* will be held from **July 9 - July 27, 2012**. Students 5-12 years of age will meet from 8:30 a.m.-12:00 noon, Mondays through Fridays. In addition to using language arts skills, students will explore mathematics, Latin, music, art, physical education, informal drama, and technology as it relates to their group topic. **First Step Trek** is offered for students ages 2-4 and meets two mornings per week from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. These students will explore *Night and Day* as they discover and uncover their understanding of opposites using shapes, shadows, puppets, stories, and songs.

Although there are numerous types of summer programs for families to choose from, the Developing Dimensions session is specifically designed to serve gifted learners. The curriculum, areas of study, and opportunities for social interaction and leadership benefit gifted learners as they use their curiosity and explore interests with like-minded peers. The staff consists of teachers and mentors who have experience teaching gifted learners and who understand their complexities and their need to learn.

Fall Saturday Seminars are planned for October through December 2012. Possible topics for these sessions include the art of chess, the study of myths and mazes, and an introduction to cartography. Topic suggestions from students are always welcome.

If you know of a learner who would benefit from any of the Developing Dimensions programs, please contact The Center for further information.

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**Magellan Day School, EPL: Come to Learn**

Magellan Day School enrolls students throughout the school year. When a family moves to the area during the school year, or when parents recognize that a change in learning environment is necessary, they are not required to wait until a set date to apply for enrollment. Upon completion of the application process, the candidate for enrollment visits and participates with the other learners for a day or two. Once he or she is invited to enroll, it is often the case that a student begins attending the school regardless of how the particular date aligns with the school calendar. This school year, students enrolled in January and in May. The opportunity for students to come to Magellan at a time that suits their needs is an asset for gifted learners.

Ongoing enrollment benefits not only the student seeking enrollment, but also, the students and teachers already present at Magellan. Learning takes place as an existing group of learners welcomes a new student. There are eager greetings and spontaneous introductions as learners of all ages spot a new face. Individuals affirm a common sentiment that Magellan is a treasured environment, and they want others to experience and appreciate it with them.

The 2011-2012 school year has concluded and plans are underway for new and returning students. We will come to learn together beginning on Orientation Evening in August.
Assisting Underachieving Gifted Learners (continued from first page)

session of a program, and they meet daily during each session to assure cohesion in instruction and practices. Students who attend traditional schools will benefit if they have at least one teacher with whom they can enjoy a collegial learning relationship, and, to the extent that it is feasible, a school culture in which teachers model respect for one another and for students.

Instructional strategies for gifted learners require teachers to refrain from imposing their own goals on learners and rather, to serve as resources who can allow the internal motivation of the learner to embrace subject matter and own their learning challenges. Teachers who work with students as colleagues invested in learning together will model enthusiasm for the subject matter, assist students to locate pertinent information, guide students in problem finding and problem solving, and offer choices for accomplishing learning goals.

Service opportunities allow students to feel competent and worthy of respect. Young children respond positively when they are entrusted with a genuine responsibility such as setting out napkins and cups for morning snack or presenting the flag at an assembly. Serving as greeters who welcome students and parents at arrival time presents students as valued, contributing members of a school community. Teaching games, leading warmups, or setting up equipment for physical education allows students to serve others and receive affirmation of their own value. Whether in a Center program or in another school setting, students gain respect from carrying out responsibilities that are a part of functioning within the school community rather than standing apart from others.

An atmosphere that celebrates learning and personal growth will support achievement by every constituent. Underachievement by gifted learners undermines their learning and personal growth. Adequate nurturing of gifted learners requires teachers and parents to recognize and address underachievement. In addition to programs for children from the age of 2 ½ years through teens, The Center offers print resources, graduate level courses, private consultation, and a Parent Support Council, all of which may be of assistance to those who interact with gifted learners.

The garden at The Center in May with tulips in bloom that were planted in Sharon's memory.

The Value of Summer Programs at The Wisconsin Center for Gifted Learners

The following is adapted from a document created by The Center's founder, Sharon K. Gerleman, elaborating upon the value of the summer program at The Wisconsin Center for Gifted Learners.

- Challenging academic work
- Self testing of abilities
- Self-paced learning
- Social and intellectual peer interaction
- Learning without penalties
- Encouragement of risk taking
- Development of independent management skills

- Exposure to positive role models and mentors
- Opportunity for self-insight
- Extra-curricular activity
- Social networking
- Continuous progress within an area of strength
- Intellectual flexibility validation
- Confirmation of true self

If you know someone who could benefit from participating, please refer them to The Center.
### WCGL and Marian University Get Together Once Again to Offer Graduate Level Coursework on Gifted Learners

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<tr>
<th>Course</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Identification of Gifted Learners</td>
<td>August 1 - 3, 2012</td>
<td>held at WCGL</td>
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<tr>
<td>At-Risk Gifted Students</td>
<td>August 7 - 9, 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designing Problem-based Learning Curriculum for Gifted Learners</td>
<td>August 8 - 10, 2012</td>
<td>at Marian University in Fond du Lac, WI</td>
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Each course earns one graduate credit. Please call The Center for registration materials at (414) 351 – 4441.

### Developing Dimensions

#### Summer Session 2012

**Illumination**

Summer 2012 will feature this all-new theme in which to enjoy explorations in math, science, the Latin language, physical education, visual art, music, language arts, and informal drama.

Join us as we learn with teachers, mentors, and old and new friends from

**July 9 through July 27, 2012**

**Ages 5 – 12, five mornings per week.**

**First Step Trek, ages 2 1/2 to 4, two mornings per week.**

There are spaces still available. Please call The Center at 414-351-4441 for more information.

Registration closes July 3, 2012.