



Jackson Elementary gifted-education teacher Deanna Butherus speaks to a group of 15 visiting educators from three university lab schools in Bangkok, Thailand. The guests spent most of their time at the University of Northern Colorado to learn how to launch gifted programs back home. They toured several area schools to see examples in action.

## Greeley's Gifted Programs Shine a Light All the Way to Thailand, Attract Interest

**June 2, 2009** – The District 6 gifted education program was featured this spring when 15 educators from Bangkok, Thailand, toured local schools as part of a fact-finding and education mission organized by the University of Northern Colorado.

Dr. Daranee Uthairatanakit, principal of Kasertsart Laboratory School in Bangkok, led the Thai delegation as part of a plan to introduce gifted education in her school, which has 3,000 students from first grade to high school and has a staff of 300 teachers. Educators from two other university lab schools were represented on the delegation, as well.

Thai schools have strong special education programs but have not established programs for gifted, talented and highly creative students, said Supattra Andrade, a former student at Kasertsart who happens to be working on her doctorate in special education at UNC and who worked at Jackson Elementary's preschool program this past year. She said she was surprised and thrilled to learn she would get to see some familiar faces halfway around the world.

The visiting Thai educators spent about two weeks with faculty and students from UNC's Center for the Education and Study of Gifted, Talented, Creative Learners, one of the most highly esteemed programs in the western U.S. Most days the educators spent as many as six hours in seminars, learning concepts, strategies and even a new set of educational jargon. But they also took a few days to visit schools in Denver as well as Greeley West High School, Brentwood Middle School and Jackson Elementary.



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At Jackson, the main feature was the Renzulli Learning System and its implementation not only among gifted and talented students but across the entire student body. The Renzulli system is a groundbreaking online education portal through which students take assessments and inventories which are used to create an individualized learning profile. That profile is used to generate unique experiences tailored to a student's specific aptitudes. The system is named for its creator, Joseph Renzulli, a 40-year professor and lead researcher in the realm of gifted education at the University of Connecticut. The university has developed its own research and development company, which sells access to and supports the Renzulli Learning System. Currently a handful of District 6 sites have schoolwide access to the system, which costs \$5,000 a year per site – costs which are funded through grants.

Jackson's gifted-education teacher Deanna Butherus has been one of the district's pioneers in using and finding new ways to harness Renzulli. Jackson has had the system for two years, supplementing GT students' regular course work. She is working on a plan to give every student in the school access to the tools.



Dr. Daranee Uthairatanakit, principal of Kasertsart Laboratory School in Bangkok, presents a gift to District 6 gifted education coordinator Linda Johnson after a visit to Jackson Elementary.

Butherus uses the district's common assessment tests to help her match students, standards and resources accessed through Renzulli. That augments the system's extensive interest and aptitude inventories, with which students' profiles are developed, and hundreds of resources are accessed to match students to options that would best help them learn. Renzulli divides these into 12 categories: virtual field trips, real field trips, creativity training, critical thinking, projects and independent study, contests and competitions, websites, books (fiction, non-fiction, and how-to), online activities and classes, research sites, and videos and DVDs. Butherus said only a small portion of these resources would be accessible through a standard Google search, and even then they are not catalogued and matched to students' learning styles, or verified as safe for children, the way they are through Renzulli. Butherus said students at Jackson have regular access to Renzulli both in the classroom and in the school's computer lab. Additionally, they can log on from home and continue exploring, while teachers can access students' profiles, manage assignments, and provide assistance directly through the system's portal.

"It's used very creatively by Deanna," said Linda Johnson, the district's gifted and talented coordinator. "The students can all work at their own pace. She has one student who had a perfect score on her fourth-grade math CSAP and now goes to fifth-grade math class, but doing so cuts into time for science and social studies. So she used Renzulli for independently directed learning. And I think she may be ahead of where she would have been with her fourth-grade class."



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Stuart Omdal, professor of gifted education at UNC and host to the Thai educators, said Butherus and Johnson are examples of the “very, very high quality range of gifted education in District 6 ... they and the district have opened their arms and have been very accommodating with tours and demonstrations.”

And the ties to the Renzulli system are not merely as surface-level service users. Omdal studied under Joseph Renzulli at UConn, and both Johnson and Butherus earned their master’s degrees under Omdal. Thus their understanding of gifted education theory and practice is rooted in the same ground. Each of them extends a branch to students with consistency and an understanding of why and how the Renzulli system works.

Omdal said the amount of staffing the district does for gifted education is well above much of the rest of the state, noting that the state has some of the nation’s highest requirements for gifted teachers.

“Greeley has been one of the leaders in the state for decades,” he said. “Other districts are jealous of that.” Last year, board of education president Dr. Bruce Broderius and assistant superintendent Dr. Dana Selzer each received top awards from the Colorado Association of Gifted and Talented. Omdal noted that both attended other school visits made by the delegation from Thailand.

Over the years, District 6 has had many gifted, talented and creative students participate in UNC’s Summer Enrichment Program, which attracts students from all over the world to attend a special “camp” on the campus to learn with exceptional peers.

For more information about that program, visit <http://www.unco.edu/cebs/sep/>.

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