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**CAPE Action Research
Culture-Based Second Language Project
(AISI Cycle III)
2006/2007-2008-2009**

CAPE believes that the acquisition of a second language enhances students' global awareness, appreciation of another culture, respect of themselves and others, interpersonal skills, and communication skills. The making of linguistic connections between English and a second language also increases competency in English. Furthermore, the learning of a second language also supports cognitive development.

The purpose of learning a second language is, ideally, to develop skills to communicate within a certain cultural setting. The language one learns is a tool used to interact within a group; a group with its own set of customs, its own history, its own celebrations, and much more. Because of these beliefs, CAPE has offered two mandatory second languages in the lower elementary grades since its inception in 1994. To date, as students move into the higher grades, they choose to study one of the two offered. About 60% of the students choose French with the rest opting for Spanish. Both programs have had a strong focus on grammar and vocabulary. Observations indicate strong academic achievement, but little to no fluency (students know the vocabulary but cannot use it in context) and not much interest. Students, especially in the higher grades, have often engaged staff in discussions about the reason for the mandatory second language, the value of a 'forced' second language, and have argued for exemption. Students have been certainly unaware of the culture within which the language evolved.

For students to learn a language in isolation, completely unaware of cultural factors, seems counterproductive. To support students' efforts in the acquisition of functional second language skills and delight in cultural immersion, CAPE developed and promoted a second language program that supports fluency in French and/or Spanish while increasing knowledge and appreciation of French and/or Spanish culture.

The second language program has been restructured into what can best be described as culture-based second language. It intertwines vocabulary and grammar with cultural elements of the various peoples across the globe that speak the language. For example, students enrolled in French studies would learn about French Canadian culture as well as European French culture, and the culture of other French-speaking countries throughout the world. The study of culture includes geography, history, holidays and customs, fine arts, famous peoples, foods, and more. While studying a culture and its language, students will also interact with french or spanish speaking community members and learn from them. Educational experiences are designed to be more interactive, varied, and also more meaningful as students engage in:

* project-based components with oral presentations, drama, music, and art with student

- decision-making such as the Montreal Metro system and the art within it or the Montreal bus system and museums or the history of Quebec City;
- * electronic resources such as videos;
 - * Educational assistant support;
 - * conversation, especially in the lower elementary grades, in which little to no English spoken;
 - * blend of oral and written, experiences in the higher grades;
 - * interactions with consultants from the Francophone and Spanish communities in the area;
 - * group projects stressing communication in the second language;
 - * and in the acquisition of functional language skills such ordering at a restaurant, asking for directions, or registering at a hotel.

Evaluative methods include oral exams, teacher observations, project assessments and parent/student satisfaction surveys.

There has been a definite increase in fluency among all CAPE students with both second languages. Appreciation of the French or Spanish culture did not seem to increase as much.

Though all students have demonstrated increased fluency in the second language, the greatest noted increase was among the older students. Some increase in satisfaction survey results is also to be noted.

In the grades 4-9 second language classes, the use of computer resources has been a great asset. When students engaged in completing tasks on the computer, their retention was much higher. The regular use of Internet resources and CD-ROM programs in the classroom made the greatest difference among students who previously had little to no interest in the second language. Computer tools have also been used for student presentations. Some students have developed PowerPoint presentations to share with the class. Older students attempted to write songs in the language of study.

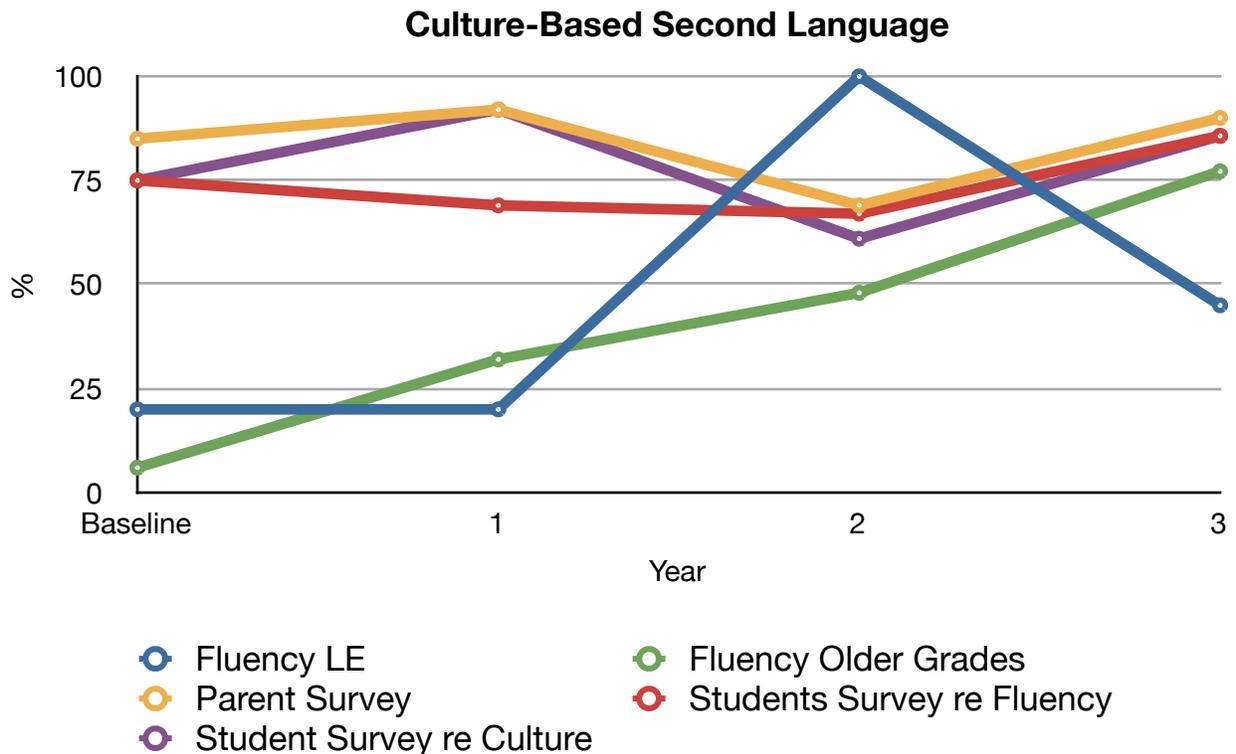
The inclusion of modern cultural aspects, the comparing/contrasting of the students' experiences with those of students of different cultural backgrounds, and the acknowledgement of individual identity and cultural influences has fostered a responsiveness to the learning of a second language which was barely present before.

The addition of the educational assistant to the program resulted in increased student-adult interaction and support. The strengths of the two adults in the second language program were complementary, allowing students to receive effective and efficient support in the area(s) required. The presence of the educational assistant within the class also allowed for greater oral work one-on-one or within very small groups. Successful practices have been retained and continue to be a part of the current CAPE language program. However, it must be noted that there has been a slight decline in the cultural component, a factor that CAPE is planning to address in the near future.

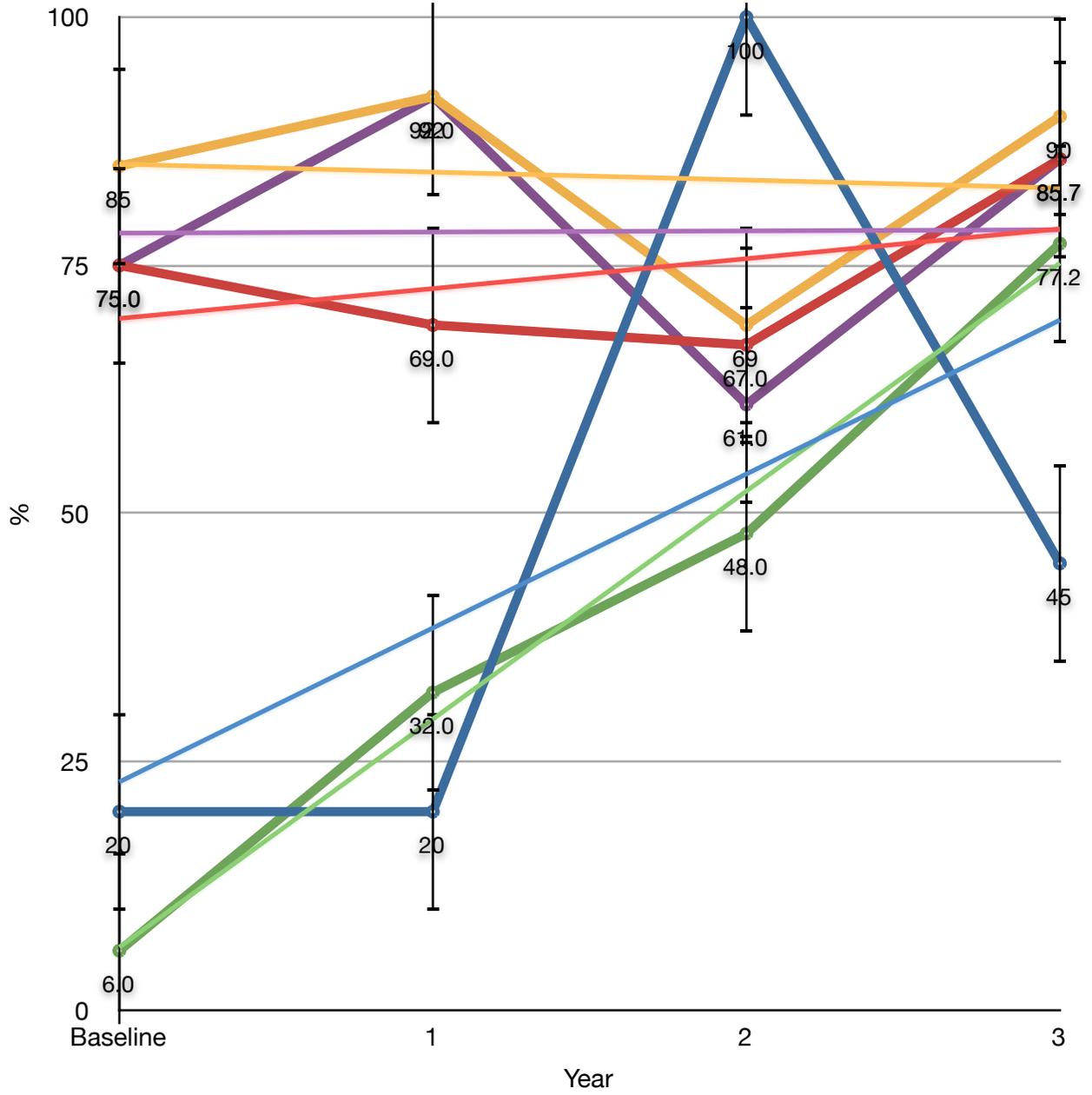
Measures and data:

Measure	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Overall Change
Percentage of French and Spanish students in grades 1 through 3 that achieve 80% or higher on the year-end teacher-developed oral fluency exam.	20	20	100	45	25
Percentage of Introductory French and Spanish students in grades 4 through 9 that achieve 80% or higher on the year-end teacher-developed oral fluency exam.	6	32	48	77.2	71.2
Percentage of parents that believe that the culture-based second language program has increased their student's appreciation of French or Spanish culture.	85	92	69	90	5
Percentage of students that believe that the culture-based second language program has increased their fluency in French or Spanish.	75	69	67	85.7	10.7
Percentage of students that believe that the culture-based second language program has increased their appreciation of French or Spanish culture.	75	92	61	85.7	10.7

Note: The baseline was derived from year-end oral exams data from the June prior to the start of the project and from five year of parent/student survey data.



Culture-Based Second Language



- Fluency LE
- Parent Survey
- Student Survey re Culture
- Fluency Older Grades
- Students Survey re Fluency

Bibliography:

1. Kerper Mora , Jill (2002). Second-Language Teaching Methods: Principles and Procedures.

Synopsis: This article identifies the widely accepted approaches to teaching a second language. Our program however, is attempting to go further than the accepted standards and try to teach students about culture as well as the language, thereby providing them with a context in which to use the skills acquired.

2. Collier, Virginia P. (1995). Acquiring a Second Language for School.

Synopsis: While this article speaks primarily about American ESL students, the model for teaching a language pinpoints four areas of study which must be addressed for the student to gain functional use of the language and fluency.

3. Kohonen, Viljo; Jaatinen, Riitta; Kaikkonen, Pauli; Lehtovaara, Jorma. (2001). Experiential Learning in Foreign Language Education. Applied Linguistics and Language Study.

Synopsis: This resource identifies the goal of foreign language education needs to shift from communicative competence towards "an intercultural action competence". It stresses the need envelop experiential learning in order for students to apply the language within the correct context of understanding.

4. University of South Florida (2006). International Experiential Learning.

Synopsis: While this resource is not a research article or book, it provides proof outside of the primary school example that there is a need to experience the cultural contexts and interactions to be successful in a language. This university is offering courses abroad and stress that a student's language proficiency is an issue. We are trying to recognize this and address fluency issues with our program.

5. Primary National Strategy (2006). EAL principles, pedagogy and practice: first language as a tool for learning.

Synopsis: This journal and online resources identifies a number of key considerations in the development of bi-lingual students. It differentiates between basic interpersonal communicative skills, which our students currently have, and cognitive and academic language proficiency, which is the goal for our students. Strategies for teaching and evaluating students are included.