

ISEE-Integrated Setting for Enrichment Education 4/5 Project
AISI Cycle III
2006/2007-2008/2009

Introduction

Parental feedback and teacher observations during the implementation of CAPE's Gifted/Talented Program suggest that younger talented, totally or partially gifted students might benefit from a similar Program. The number of students described as talented, totally or partially gifted, or that did not fit the gifted stereotype as described in multiple resources has increased so that almost half of the grades four and five students fall into this category. Their program requirements have indicated the need for a different instructional methodology and learning environment.

Background & Strategies

Identified gifted & talented students in grade 4 & 5 are grouped together in a cross-grade class. This allows for students of different ages, but similar abilities/talents, to interact among themselves during core time, while also allowing them to interact with their age peers during the afternoon project time. Students accepted into this program are offered a fully enriched/expanded, cross-grade and cross-disciplinary integrated program of studies in the four core subjects. This program also involves group work, individual and/or group projects, and special projects. Units are integrate language arts, social studies, science and mathematics activities into a holistic learning style. Reading lists are extended to include a wide variety of genres. Writing, along with mechanics, is taught in applied contexts. Mathematics is delivered with a focus on theory and the applications thereof. For language arts and mathematics, objectives are often taught above grade level as students require higher level thinking. Concepts taught to the whole group may be the same, but are taught at varying levels of complexity as dictated by the needs of the students. This program is not compacted. Curricula are not covered in an compressed manner. Rather curricula are taught at an appropriate pace year-long. Concepts are pre-tested, taught and enriched according to student needs, interests and abilities. As a result, certain topics which may not be curriculum-specific (at or above grade level) are introduced and used to create an interesting and challenging learning environment. The inclusion of technology allows students to have access to personal computers, Internet, e-mail and other technologies. Furthermore, counselling and group work on problem solving, decision making and anger management provide the students with an environment in which they can find stimulation and support, in which they can explore areas of interest, work with equally capable peers, and challenge each other as they so wish. This program aims to increase the participants' academic achievement in all areas, particularly language, mathematics, social studies, and science, as well as their social/ personal skills such as group interaction, problem solving, self-direction, independence and organization.

The teacher monitors daily activities and assesses which strategies (both teaching and evaluative) are working well, and which ones need to be adapted, amended, or deleted. For example, should the teacher find that long-term projects are difficult for the group because of the need for time-management and organizational skills, the teacher can put supports in place for the students. In this way, there are immediate interventions to help increase student success. The teacher also maintains close communication with the parents of students within this enrichment program. Feedback from parents is taken into consideration when addressing ongoing needs and concerns. For example, instead of assigning homework by amount, it is assigned by time limit. This has proven effective in addressing the great difference in working speeds among the students.

Evaluation

- standardized test
- satisfaction surveys

Results

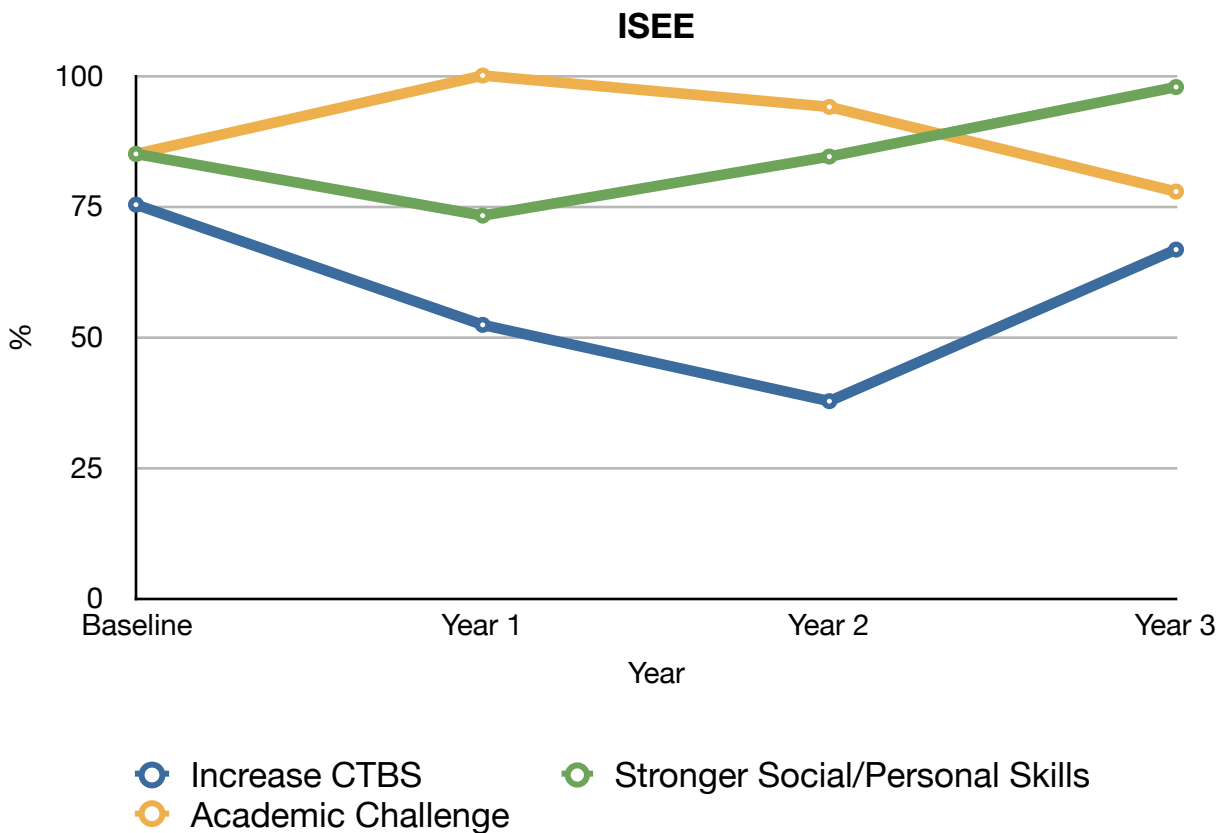


Figure 1. This figure shows an increase in social/personal skills over the three years of the project. CTBS results do not seem to indicate a significant increase in academic achievement.

Anecdotal Records/Discussion

One of the greatest successes of the program has been the increase in personal and social skills among the student population. Problem solving skills are developed through guided thinking, and practice. Students are made aware of personal needs through the IPPs and conferences associated with these. Independence has increased as students have learned strategies that serve their personal learning styles and needs. Some of this is due to CAPE's general program. However, as the I.S.E.E. program is employing strategies specific to the needs of this group, it is clear

that the I.S.E.E. program is serving students well in developing into sociable and productive citizens.

The students' gains in organizational and study skills were outstanding. Social and emotional stability is an area that needs more work. It became quite clear that the evaluative tool chosen to evaluate academic achievement is unsuitable for the task. The CTBS is a viable tool but is normed according to American standards, and is a timed test, a severe negative factor for a student group that is affected by ADD, ADHD, Asperger's, etc. These students require alternative assessment tools that take their particular needs into account.

One unexpected finding is the realization that staff assignment is crucial. The assignment of individuals that are interested in gifted education, are comfortable with an integrated expanded program, and are flexible and creative is key to the success of the program. Lack of physical space limited and hindered. Emotional and behavioural issues have proven much more difficult to address than expected and have hindered student progress.

Effective Practices

- *having one teacher in the class for the full morning so that structure and routine are maintained
- *weekly reflection time for students to assess work and make plans to address issues
- *planning and packing homework together and reviewing of the morning activities
- *having student materials organized by color and stored in bins away from work spaces
- *daily and weekly organizational time as a group
- *individual organizational assistance on a by-need basis
- *social or science themed units that structure the program, where language arts and mathematics are taught in applied activities
- * frequent parent involvement and communication encourages changes and growth
- *open discussions and teacher modeling are promoting student risk-taking
- * the use of organizational strategies and repetition are helping students build the skill base needed to support the students vast knowledge
- *the elimination of consumables has drastically reduced boredom, inflated markbook scores, and the inability to apply concepts in other contexts

Future Direction

Effective practices and lessons learned from this research project have informed CAPE's work with the gifted/ talented group of students we serve but also those that learn in very unique ways and present with unique challenges. This grade 4/5 program now includes students that, though not gifted or talented, definitely are better served by this program than our regular program.

Bibliography

Alberta Learning. (2000) *Teaching students who are gifted and talented*. Edmonton, AB: Author.

Abstract: This resource offers guidelines to help with identification of gifted students. Typical characteristics of various types of giftedness are outlined. Strategies for designing and implementing instruction and pertinent evaluation information such as check lists, etc. is included to assist teachers in using appropriate tools for differentiated learning.

Galbraith, J. & Delisle, J. (1996) *The Gifted kids survival guide*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Abstract: This resource helps provide insight into the mind and learning styles of the gifted student. It identifies the "typical" learning styles and areas of need (pacing, time management, study skills).

Porter, L. (2005) *Gifted young children: A guide for teachers and parents*. Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Abstract: This resource encompasses a variety of key areas which we considered when extending our gifted education program. Included in these are the difficulties in identifying a young gifted child, recognizing the social and emotional needs of gifted children, and the role of self-esteem within gifted students. This source also discusses subgroups within the gifted population as we have seen; gifted disabled and gifted-disadvantaged.

Webb, J. T., Mechstroth, E. A., & Tolan, S. S. (1982) *Guiding the gifted child: A practical source for parents and teachers*. Columbus, OH: Psychology Press.

Abstract: A practical guide and source of information for parents and teachers of gifted students. This source describes different types of giftedness, as well as the social and emotional difficulties the gifted face. It discusses the gifted child's need for peer interaction but also stresses the obvious need to learn social skills that will allow him/her to integrate in to society.