



Citipointe Christian College
THE CHRISTIAN OUTREACH COLLEGE BRISBANE

Learning Extension in the Secondary School

Talent Development Program: Extension Studies and Gifted Education

Citipointe Christian College aims to provide the best possible learning opportunities for all students in an environment in which they feel safe, secure and valued. Such a learning environment needs to be rigorous, challenging, deep and rich in content for students who have a high cognitive ability. The Talent Development Program at Citipointe secondary aims to meet the needs of high ability students and enable them to pursue excellence and develop a passion for lifelong learning.

The Talent Development Program is a developmentally appropriate curriculum presented in a socially optimal context, which includes interaction with like-ability peers. It consists of:

- Ability grouping
 - Extension classes in core subjects (Years 7 – 10)
 - Differentiation within ability groups identified through pretesting
- XP – The provision of a class for gifted students called XP (Extra Program), which is optional and replaces an elective in Years 7 to 10
- Acceleration – subject or whole year level
- Timetable modification
- Early Entrance to University courses allows senior students access to university courses while still at school

The extension classes in core subjects allow for high achieving students to work at an accelerated pace, compacting the curriculum so as to facilitate time to engage in deep and challenging content within the subject area. This has included differentiated teaching, exposure to additional excursions as well as access to lectures given by university researchers.

Our belief is that students in the secondary school need to take ownership of their own academic talent development and therefore XP classes are voluntary. The class is not graded because the aim is to focus on learning rather than assessment. It is specifically designed to accommodate the learning needs of gifted students and includes gifted underachievers as well as twice exceptional learners.

To facilitate a multi-faceted, flexible and rigorous curriculum, XP classes embarked on a variety of new initiatives in 2014. The Year 9 and 10 students were given the opportunity to enrol in courses (from MIT, Harvard, Berkeley, UT and many other universities) through EdX, which offers interactive online classes and MOOCs¹ from the world's best universities. This proved engaging as the students interacted with a wide variety of highly challenging course material with great success. Running concurrently, all XP students were able to complete an independent research project to encourage independent learning and research through a self-initiated project. Students explored their own specialist areas of interest within any field, whilst working across a range of media formats in order to produce an individual project that encompassed research, documentation and the resolution of a sophisticated practical outcome. Through creative and critical thinking, philosophy and leadership development, XP students developed critical skills required in a global, ever changing world.

Creative thinking involved students in learning to generate and apply new ideas in specific contexts, seeing existing situations in a new way, identifying alternative explanations, and seeing or making new links that generated a positive outcome. Year 7s completed a creative writing module while Year 8s explored the theme of "Light and Colour: Science and Art collide", Year 9s "Mystery and Mayhem: Forensic Investigations" and Year 10s: "Future Currencies: Innovation – the key to 21st century success". These themes formed the basis for developing creative thinking through the production of a variety of cross discipline products. Activities that integrated reason, logic, imagination and innovation were undertaken.

¹ Massive Open Online Courses

Communication is integral to each of the thinking processes. By sharing thinking, visualisation and innovation, and by giving and receiving effective feedback, students learned to value the diversity of learning and communication styles. A notable inclusion in all XP year levels is the integration of social and emotional development of the student so as to address and develop strategies on how to grow up being gifted. This allowed for a freedom to discuss personal issues and identify ways to address these.

The XP students were afforded the opportunity to present their work at “XP on Show” and listened to the renowned specialist in the area of gifted education, Michele Juratowitch on the topic of *Finding Flow: A mission impossible or a fascinating challenge?* The evening was hugely successful and students showcased their first semester achievements to a large parent audience.

A vertical learning course was initiated in the latter part of the year whereby students in Years 7 – 10 worked in multi-aged groups to develop an action plan to invoke a response to a global issue related to the rights of a child. The top groups presented their work in the second XP on Show evening at the end of Term 4.

Throughout the year the following thought by Thomas Jefferson has been in the forefront of my mind when making critical decisions regarding the provisions of our high ability and high achieving students: “There is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequal individuals.” At each stage in the development and implementation of the Talent Development Program the individual needs of each student are deliberated on, considered and enacted on where possible within the constraints of the school setting.

I believe that this program is at the forefront of gifted education in Australia. This has been validated on numerous occasions as secondary Director of Teaching & Learning, Mrs Colleen Mills, and I have shared our vision and provision for gifted students with other educators around the country. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work in an area of education that is developing globally. I once heard that “to hasten slowly” is the key to success. So each year, as the program develops, morphs and improves, our vision remains: That high ability students would recognise their academic ability as God given, to be exercised and developed through learning, and used in becoming young men and women of integrity and influence.

Mrs Michelle Fouché
Extension Program Coordinator