Implementing the Levels of Service (LoS) Approach:
Level I—Services for All Students

This document describes one of the four principal components of the Levels of Service (LoS) approach to talent development. “Talent development” and “programming for talent development” refer to efficient ways of summarizing the full message: “all of the efforts made—at home, in a classroom, in a school, in a school district, and in a community—to recognize, nurture, and celebrate the many and varied strengths, talents, and sustained interests of all students.” The LoS approach involves four interrelated levels, each of which is a unique way of differentiating instruction and programming activities in response to students’ personal characteristics.

Level I Case Study

This case study illustrates the implementation of Level I of the LoS approach, focusing on ways that a teacher might address and manage the diversity of needs among students within a classroom. Level I services are for all students and are designed to provide an opportunity for all students to explore their personal strengths, talents, and interests in order to discover what emerges. Level I services also help all students to become more self-directed learners and high-level thinkers. Finally, Level I services increase the challenge and engagement for all students by emphasizing doing, applying, producing, and sharing.

Mr. Miller at Green Meadows Elementary School

My name is Joe Miller. I have been teaching fourth grade at Green Meadows Elementary School for the past five years. Please allow me to introduce my typical fourth grade class of 25 energetic boys and girls who bring an incredible variety of strengths, talents, and interests into our classroom everyday. Some of them are voracious readers who find it difficult to close their many books. Others enjoy drawing and doodling and still others seem to be in constant motion. Outside of school they are involved in a variety of activities including team sports, music, dance, and art classes. A few of them are very social and talkative while a few others are reflective and quiet. I recognize that my students have different interests, strengths, and talents and strive to bring out the best in every one of them.

I enjoy this diversity but it is challenging to address and manage it within our classroom. I consider myself accountable for the learning of all and hold positive expectations for even my most difficult students. I recognize my responsibility to create an appropriate and challenging program in which every student has an opportunity to discover his or her best potentials. Fortunately, I am not the only teacher here at Green Meadows Elementary School who feels that way; we are a positive, productive community of educators.
A couple of years ago while taking a course on gifted education I discovered the field of talent development. I realized that the process of talent development supported my desire to bring out the best in all of my students. As a result, in a school improvement team meeting I suggested that we should do a little research on talent development to see what we might learn about differentiating instruction. A few members of the team agreed to check it out and report back at our next meeting.

We did some online exploration and read a few articles from professional journals on talent development. I came across one approach to programming for talent development called Levels of Service or LoS that offers a framework for recognizing, nurturing, and celebrating the varied strengths, talents, and sustained interests of all students. Prior to our next school improvement team meeting I provided each member of the team with a copy of a brief article that explains LoS [note: several articles are available for download on this site]. After considerable discussion at the meeting, we reached a consensus that LoS seemed to provide what we were looking for as a way to ensure that all students receive an appropriate and challenging program everyday. We decided to purchase a copy of the book, *Enhancing and Expanding Gifted Programs: The Levels of Service Approach*, for each teacher at Green Meadows Elementary School and to hold weekly grade level discussion groups based on the book.

During our reading about and discussion of the LoS approach to talent development, my fourth grade colleagues and I were impressed with the flexibility and inclusiveness of the framework. We especially liked Level I services because they are designed to expand learning for all students every day. They give students the skills and tools to explore a variety of talent areas and to serve as a foundation for more independent learning experiences. We decided to focus our initial efforts on two of the book’s four “keys to success” in implementing Level I programming.

For **Key 1: Build the foundation and tools for thoughtful self-directed learning**, we incorporated specific guidelines and a few tools for focusing ideas into our exploratory activity lessons. For **Key 2: Offer a variety of activities to expose students to new interests and promote discovery**, we created opportunities for students to sample a variety of interest areas based on their own curiosity. Basing a series of Level I activities on these two keys allowed us to introduce all students to the practice of engaging in reflection and self-assessment. Also, the activities involved them in beginning to monitor and manage the documentation of their own personal talent profiles.

**Level I Activity: Focusing Tool Guidelines**

To become a thoughtful self-directed learner requires one to exercise his or her critical thinking ability. People use critical thinking to analyze ideas and to make decisions. Focusing tools enhance our critical thinking ability by helping us to compare ideas, refine ideas, and to identify the most promising ideas from a
variety of options. By following the following four Focusing Tool Guidelines we can become more positive and productive thinkers:

- **Practice Affirmative Judgment.** A skillful critical thinker is constructive, or “affirmative,” and looks at ideas thoroughly and carefully.
- **Be Deliberate.** Focusing tools support careful observation, attention to details and logic, reflection, and effective decision making.
- **Remember to Seek Novelty.** Productive thinkers seek to improve existing ideas, to examine new ideas, and to apply their critical thinking in ways that will help them move forward in their thinking and decision making.
- **Don’t Lose Sight of Your Objective.** Keep a clear, sharp focus on what you are trying to accomplish.

To help our students learn and practice applying these guidelines, we told our students about our new idea for a chocolate chess set and asked them to tell us what they thought about it. The first comments we heard were things like: “That will never work!” or “It would be too messy!” or “Sounds like a dumb idea.” As expected, without any guidelines, their initial reactions to our wild idea were negative. When faced with a unique or novel idea, people have a natural tendency to respond in ways that might be classified as, “idea killers.” Then, to help our students get over their natural tendency to criticize ideas rather than to examine ideas carefully, we introduced them to the four guidelines.

Then we asked them to follow the guidelines while telling us what they thought about our idea for a chocolate chess set. This time we heard comments like, “Sound delicious!” and “After taking your opponents pawn, you could eat it.” And “Yea, it could be called capture and eat!” Following the Focusing Guidelines helped them to think about the positives instead of killing the idea before even giving it a chance. Of course there are negative aspects of the idea but now they can be looked at as challenges to overcome rather than reasons not to give it another thought. After they were comfortable with these Focusing Tool Guidelines, we introduced them to a focusing tool called **Paired Comparison Analysis (PCA)** during the next Level I Activity.

**Level I Activity: Paired Comparison Analysis (PCA) Focusing Tool**

One of our goals for our Level I activities was to provide opportunities for our students to explore their personal interests and discover their strengths. But for such exploratory experiences to be appropriate, challenging, and developmental, it is important for them to include an opportunity for reflection and self-assessment. To help our students identify and prioritize a few areas of interest most important to them we introduced and practiced the Focusing Tool, Paired Comparison Analysis (PCA).

This tool involves examining and analyzing a small number of options carefully and in a systematic way in order to set priorities or rank choices. It can be very difficult to choose one option among several when all of the options look great. The PCA tool requires you to compare all of the ideas to each other by
evaluating them one pair at a time. We explained the tool and the steps for applying it, and then we put it to use in an activity that resulted in a prioritized list of six areas of interest most important to each student.

**Using the PCA Focusing Tool to Explore Interest Areas.** Recognizing and documenting all students’ strengths, talents, and sustained interests is a flexible, ongoing, and inclusive process, not a one-time event; this is one of the fundamental tenets of the LoS approach. Consequently in Level I, “one size does not fit all” so in this activity we helped our students discover their own interests and establish priorities for exploring them in more depth later through the use of a PCA based Interest Inventory. We introduced this activity by discussing the concepts of exploration and personal interests. Then we asked them to suggest topics of interest and listed them on chart paper for all to see. After generating a list of about 20 different topics, we instructed each student to choose six topics of most interest to him or her. Cognizant of individual differences among our students, we allowed them to add topics of their own to our group list. But, they each had to end up with a list of six topics that were of most personal interest for exploration.

Each student then entered his or her list of six topics at the top of the PCA form as options A through F. Then we had a class discussion about criteria that might be used to compare the options. In other words, what factors might influence one’s thinking about whether one option is “better” than or “preferable” to another? We asked each student to write down one or two reasons why they might like to explore one topic more than another topic. Then we asked them to share their ideas and captured the ideas on a group list. Because we wanted to tap into each student’s own unique curiosity, we instructed them to select two or three of the criteria most important to him or her. Then to keep those criteria clearly in mind while comparing the six topics listed on their PCA form. Finally, we had each student share his or her highest priority with the whole class and then formed exploratory groups based on that information. Based on the diversity in my class of 25 students, I ended up with eight different exploratory topics. There were two topics with only one person interested in each, one topic with eight students interested, three topics with four students, and one topic with three students. Most important, every student had chosen a topic to explore and all 25 were ready to move forward. Figure 1 is a sample of a student’s completed PCA form. (This form is a reproducible form from the CPS Kit; see the resource list in this Case Study.)

It was now time to locate a variety of resources for each topic. I contacted our media specialist and asked her to put together a collection of print and other media materials for each topic that we could use to set up exploratory interest centers in our classrooms. One of my fourth grade colleagues began an Internet search to locate appropriate websites for our students to explore. Another colleague reviewed our parent information data and community resource guide to identify people who might be available to speak with groups of students on specific topics or provide some additional resource materials. By the end of the week, we had gathered enough resources to set up interest centers and
scheduled time throughout the next few weeks for our students to explore their topics.

**Paired Comparison Analysis (PCA) Organizer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. List the options to be compared.

Options:  
A. Famous People  
B. Sports  
C. Science  
D. Inventing  
E. Geography  
F. Artists

2. Look at all the pairs.

For each pair below, choose the option you prefer. Circle it. Enter a number to indicate how strongly you feel about your choice (3=very strongly prefer, 2=moderate preference, 1=too close to call).

A  B  C  D  E  F
1  2  3  4  5  6
1  2  3  4  5  6
1  2  3  4  5  6
1  2  3  4  5  6
1  2  3  4  5  6
1  2  3  4  5  6

3. Use the results to rank or prioritize the options.

Total scores for: A: 4, B: 5, C: 2, D: 10, E: 6, F: 9

Rank or priority: My top choice was: D = Inventing
Second choice was: F = Artists
Third choice was: B = Sports
Fourth choice was: A = Famous People
Fifth choice was: C = Science
Sixth choice was: E = Geography

© 2006, Center for Creative Learning

Copyright ©2006, Center for Creative Learning, Inc. All rights reserved. This page may be downloaded or reproduced with permission for educational use.

48

**Level I Activity: ALoU Focusing Tool**

In keeping with our emphasis on *Key 1: Build the foundation and tools for thoughtful self-directed learning*, we decided to introduce our students to the ALoU Focusing tool and then to use it to evaluate their initial exploratory activities. ALoU helps one to examine critically an idea in order to refine and develop it for implementation. It forces the user to apply the principle of affirmative judgment by first focusing one’s thinking on the **Advantages** or specific strengths of the idea before considering any negative aspects. Next, the user identifies any **Limitations** or concerns and states them in a way that encourages improvements or ways to **overcome** them rather than to discard the idea altogether. Instead of saying, “It won’t work” limitations are stated as a question, using an open-ended phrase such as “In what ways might I…?” The third step in using ALoU is to record the **Unique** qualities of the idea or the features that make it particularly interesting to you. Finally, spend some time generating ideas for overcoming the
limitations you listed. (Forms for this tool are also available in the CPS Kit and in our Generating Tools and Focusing Tools Facilitator’s Guides, listed in the resources for this Case Study.) We instructed all of our students to complete an individual ALoU form about their initial exploratory experiences and the strength of their interest in that area. We asked them to discuss the completed ALoU forms within their exploratory groups in order to compare their thoughts about the activity.

**The Rest of the Story**

At this point, we decided it was important for us as teachers to complete a group ALoU of this initial exploratory experience in order to help us evaluate the results and to learn how to improve future Level I activities. (Figure 2 presents a sample of this completed form.) One thing we learned was that we needed to capture the data from our students in order to know where to go next. For example, did the exploratory experience result in a desire to explore this area in more depth? If so, continue with more exploration in the same area. If not, identify the next area of interest and begin a new exploratory experience in that area.
Also, we discovered that in keeping with the two Keys to Success, it is just as important for our students to record their personal data so that they better understand their personal strengths and interests. We decided to create individual Student Talent Profiles as the vehicle for recording data about each student’s personal characteristics. (Samples templates for student profile forms are available in the Talent Development Planning Handbook.)

We were encouraged by the enthusiasm of our students for this series of Level I activities. They now had identified specific areas of interest and mastered two focusing tools for us to build upon. We began to see how Level I services can lead all students toward more self-directed and more challenging learning activities. The tools and skills acquired in Level I empowered our students to be more independent and more productive thinkers.

**Time To Reflect and Respond**

Think about yourself as Joe Miller. In this role:

- How will you handle students who struggled with this Level I activity?
- What activities might you plan next to build upon skills and interests indicated by the assessment data?
- How might you communicate about LoS with parents?

Did your reflection on the case study and responses to the questions above lead you to consider any of the following elements of the LoS approach to talent development?

- Services for All (All students participate in activity)
- Talent Spotting (data gathering through interest inventory)
- Self-assessment and reflection (student tabulate, organize, and analyze results of interest inventory)
- Learn and use critical thinking tools (learn, practice, and apply PCA and A-Lo-U focusing tools for selecting and evaluating exploratory experiences)
- Self-assess and manage documentation of personal talent profile (complete A-Lo-U evaluation of experience and record on talent profile form)

**Resources**


Learning More About the LoS Approach

To learn more about the LoS approach, visit the Center for Creative Learning website (http://www.creativelearning.com). We offer PDF files that provide an overview of the model, a “Frequently Asked Questions” document, case studies of each level, and a variety of other electronic and print resources. The Center also offers workshops and consultation on new program development, restructuring existing programs, and program evaluation.

Center for Creative Learning
P. O. Box 53169
Sarasota, FL 34232
941.342.9928
www.creativelearning.com