Implementing the Levels of Service (LoS) Approach:
Level II—Services for Many 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 II Case Study

Providing appropriate and challenging learning opportunities for many students is the goal of Level II in the Levels of Service (LoS) model. Building on students’ natural curiosity and interest in exploration, Level II activities are invitational, diverse, and often voluntary or self-selecting; they offer students varied opportunities to try out or investigate new topics and skills. Expanding LoS programming services to include Level II incorporate identifying students’ unique learning styles, responding to individual differences, and skills of creative and critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making.

Level II at East Happy Valley Elementary School

Over the past five years East Happy Valley Elementary School (EHVE) has established and nurtured a strong learning community, emphasizing shared values and respectful dialogue. Recent business expansions and urban development have changed the rural environment and clientele of the past at EHVE, with concomitant changes in the challenges faced by the staff in building an effective, successful school. Last year the state adopted new standards and EHVE’s Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) has also grown and changed. Parents are invited to attend a number of informational meetings, through which a more informed parent support network has evolved. PTO members willingly volunteer their time and the input they provide is very helpful to faculty. Through effective leadership, professional development opportunities, and active discussion, the faculty, PTO members, and staff of EHVE have become a strong learning community who seek to enhance the performance of EHVE’s students.

My name is Cindy Vasquez and I have been an Instructional Coach at EHVE for the past three years. During this time I have learned to better understand the relationship classroom teachers establish with each student, and the value they each place on parental involvement. I meet regularly, both formally and informally, with classroom teachers and instructional support
personnel. Whether we meet as a grade level team or as a small informal group, student learning outcomes remain at the center of our attention. During one of the recent collaborative sessions with a grade level team, conversation focused on a teacher’s concern about a student who demonstrated great passion for reading complex, challenging material and high energy when working in small groups with classmates, the ability to adapt to new situations of learning, and eagerness to share her experiences with others in her class, but seldom displays the ability to apply her knowledge in creative ways. This led to a broader discussion of the extent to which students at EHVE were being challenged to develop and use higher-level thinking (including, for example, creative and critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making). Those discussions prompted subsequent conversations about the need for Level II services for many students at EHVE.

Our conversations led the group to ask what kinds and types of services were already being offered, and how well they were meeting the needs of many students, whether student interests can be met with our current resources, or if additional options would be needed. A classroom teacher asked whether any information documented in the schools curriculum mapping project (Jacobs, 1997, 2004) might be helpful in analyzing higher-level activities and the group decided that this might be a valuable way to examine the team’s expectations and use of available resources. I also reminded the team that Level II services do not necessarily occur within the classroom.

The team decided to focus on two of the five “keys to success” for implementing Level II programming options, as described in Expanding and Enhancing Gifted Programs (2004) and the Talent Development Planning Handbook (2008). The keys on which we focused initially were: Key 1: Guide students in discovering and clarifying their own strengths, interests, and areas of curiosity. They decided that this key would help them in determining students’ interest in various activities, noting that, in the past, many ideas seemed not to be successful due to lack of student interest in the offerings. As the strength of the learning community grew among faculty and staff of EHVE, so too did the willingness to share ideas and services. This became the “elephant in the room” that no one had previously wanted to recognize: faculty were planning and offering services they enjoyed rather than opportunities for students to explore creatively in their own ways. This key helped the group keep their focus on the students. The second key was, Key 4: Create and maintain a stimulating classroom environment. This key helped the team to assess the extent of parent and community support for learning activities and also to take stock of the classroom environment for higher-level learning. EHVE has been enriched by growing parent and community support, and (sometimes to the surprise of faculty and staff), the parents overwhelmingly accepted invitations and clarity about how best to support and assist the school.

The team decided to explore current classroom practices and identify possible learning opportunities for students to explore and develop creative problem solving abilities. The team also used the LoS Planning Guide to map current enrichment activities and compare them to their general curriculum
maps, hoping to clarify their current practices and identify new opportunities. I believed that this would enable the team to discover additional uses for current resources as well as to find new activities to develop.

A Planning Guide for Level II

My role as an Instructional Coach is to offer ideas and suggestions to support curricular planning and decision-making and facilitate staff-initiated curriculum planning. To assist with these efforts, we found that *Expanding and Enhancing Gifted Programs: The Levels of Service Approach* (2004) and *The Talent Development Handbook* (2008) include a template for a Planning Guide for cataloging Level II activities in a classroom, school, or district. We modified the categories from the original version of the Planning Guide to better align with EHVE school improvement goals and vision statements. We also discussed ways that student interest inventories and surveys might help the team to ensure that activities were designed around student interest and not just activities favored by staff. Community resource survey data, information about school clubs and other co-curricular or extra-curricular activities, contests, and competitions were also relevant to consider in the team’s analysis. Table 1 summarizes some of the activities and resources that were identified by the team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area/Category</th>
<th>Current Reality</th>
<th>Areas to Consider</th>
<th>Areas for Possible “Outsourcing”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EHVE Clubs</td>
<td>• Spanish</td>
<td>• Math</td>
<td>? Potential for Science outsource or support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Chess</td>
<td>• Poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lego-Inventor</td>
<td>• Science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHVE Sports</td>
<td>• Soccer</td>
<td>• Karate</td>
<td>• Karate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Basketball</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Football</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Volleyball</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Dance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizations (Boys and Girls Club)</td>
<td>All community resources are hosted within their own location sites – no on-site services are provided</td>
<td>? Could community resources be offered during the lunch hour for students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contests/Competitions</td>
<td>• Young Authors</td>
<td>• Inventor or Science</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Chess</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content-theme Projects</td>
<td>• Civil War Projects</td>
<td>? Could the use of Project-Based Learning provide more experiences for students to plan for learning based on their own interests</td>
<td>? Could local universities offer weekend camps or assist with services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• State history projects</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The team quickly noticed how narrow the options were under “Current Realities.” I recommended that we all reflect one more time to make sure we had
not missed any critical components, since I have found that faculty often overlook familiar activities that may actually be important elements of successful instructional enrichment.

As an Instructional Coach, my role is to support and guide the staff in being more effective in their own efforts. As I continued to work with them on this project, the team’s next step was to evaluate current realities and offerings for each of the activities in Table 1 and to guide them in seeking additional Level II opportunities that might already be taking place or that might be interesting and valuable for students.

**Student Interest Inventories and Survey**

The team’s task also included considering ways to gather and use data that would lead to a stronger alignment between student interests and activities being developed. During a previous professional development session, the school’s staff constructed lists of hobbies or crafts that staff members enjoyed and their interest in and availability to share their passion with others, either before or after school. After gathering data from a similar survey of parents, the staff also determined that lunch-time sessions might also be needed to accommodate a

Initially the Principal was elated with so many options to present to the students, but the staff quickly discovered that quantity does not outweigh quality when you are expanding programming options. The abundance of offerings and smattering of attendee became frustrating for adults. As a result, we worked together to refocus the efforts to maintain and ensure academic growth and ensure challenging opportunities.

In an open-forum faculty meeting, after some discussion I recommended a Skills-Trade Day where students could explore and share skills they gained as they also learned new ways to apply them by sharing with others. My intention was to provide an option for students to learn from each other, thus using teachers as facilitators for investigative and inquiry-based learning opportunities for the students, serving the goal of Level II services to provide for creativity and exploration. The faculty loved the idea and our PTO representative offered to form a committee to support planning for the event.

We also recognized the need to consider student interests and determine if the needs of students would be met within the Skills-Trade Day or if additional options were needed. We wanted to be clear about the difference between an enjoyable event and finding ways to embed challenging learning opportunities into activities. It was apparent through the excitement and enthusiasm of the plan for a Skills-Trade Day that the staff was committed to the learning experiences of the students they serve. As a group, we decided to administer student surveys and interest inventories and guide us in designing these and future activities. I offered to compile these results and share the findings with the group so we could begin to plan for learning options generated by the students, for the students.
The Rest of the Story

The outcomes of this project were, in the words of one teacher whose reaction was shared by many others, “wonderful!” Even though our group agreed that we have much to learn and many more areas to discuss and consider, the team discovered many activities, tools, and resources within the building that represented Level II services. They also discovered activities that could be used differently, better, or more often, and they identified a number of exciting new possibilities as well.

As part of the EHVE student data-gathering, the team also created a plan to locate and review several student interest inventories, and formed a small group to work on that task. To get started, however, we decided that we could do some “interest discovery” activities to help find student interests. As we worked on the Planning Guide (for the team, and as several individuals completed their own) we realized that it would help all faculty and support staff see where personal talents and hobbies may be used effectively to support classroom instruction. I suggested that the team consider a guest speaker series for students during the lunch hour to share their skills and hobbies with students, for which students could sign up to attend (to build our focus on student interests and choices). These presentations might “spark” student interests in learning more about various activities after the initial presentations. One teacher who is an enthusiast of board games that require multiple layers of strategy agreed to share his interests during the guest speaker series and also to visit any classroom on the team. The group felt that this was a great way to extend Level II services and I offered to teach for Mr. Hughes to enable him to accommodate his colleagues. I hope others realize the benefit of co-teaching and consider sharing their own gifts in similar ways in the future.

We agreed that each faculty member feels better equipped to try and use resources differently, and we set an agenda for our next meeting to include self-reflections of instruction and realities of student engagement and work comparisons. As an Instructional Coach I feel very excited about the prospects these outcomes and future collaboration sessions may give to the services of support I can offer. To show my willingness to support the faculty, I offered to assist in reviewing curriculum maps and finding ideas to integrate into the current curriculum.

The team also decided to investigate adding an assessment of students’ learning style preferences to the set of data we gather about our students, and a group of teachers who were familiar with the work of Dunn and Dunn and the International Learning Style Network (see: http://www.learnmgstyles.net) volunteered to gather additional information to share with the entire team. The results of a style assessment could provide teachers with valuable information to guide instructional grouping and clustering of students for future projects, as well as helping students understand how to be at their best as learners.
Questions for Reflection and Additional Resources

Today’s classroom educators are busy juggling many tools, practices, methods, and resources as they constantly seek the best combination to meet the needs of their students. Sometimes it is difficult to remember all of the options available and/or think of new ways to use them. As you review this case study, consider these questions:

• How did Ms. Vasquez, the Instructional Coach at EHVE, work with the team to support and guide their planning and preparation for Level II services? How did the staff take ownership for action?
• What Level II services are already in place in your school? How might your staff work together to survey what’s already in place, and to work collaboratively on strengthening and expanding opportunities?
• Why was it important for this team to balance an emphasis on curriculum relevance with their concern for recognizing and responding to the students’ interests?
• How did the team make effective use of parent and community resources? What other strategies might have helped them to expand those efforts?

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

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