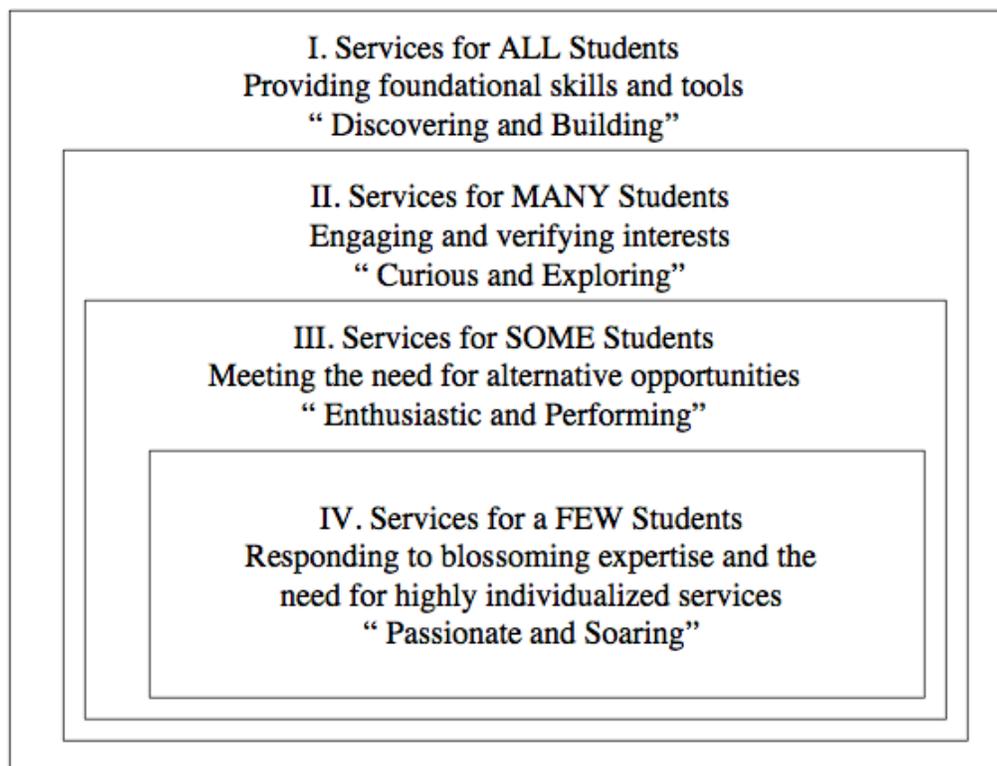


The Levels of Service (LoS) Approach to Programming for Talent Development: An Overview

The goals of the *Levels of Service (LoS)* approach to programming for talent development are to offer students opportunities to explore and gain an understanding of their own interests, talents, and strengths and to empower and enable them to become creatively productive individuals in those domains. Quality programming that meets the identified needs of each student stands at the heart of LoS. The approach is grounded in sound, contemporary instructional methods in the classroom, supplemented by enrichment that allows students to explore and pursue their own interests and passions in life, engagement in challenging learning activities at an appropriate pace, to build competence and expertise, and opportunities to build self-confidence, self-direction, and the skills of teamwork and collaboration. LoS offers many and varied opportunities to discover, develop, apply, and celebrate students' strengths, talents, and sustained interests and to affirm their lifelong importance.

LoS programming is *flexible, inclusive, responsive, proactive* and *unifying*. It is *flexible* in that it does not follow a fixed formula, curriculum, or set of services and activities for all students. Instead it involves many different kinds of activities, people and places, as appropriate for each student, based on his or her interests, level of need, and ability to benefit. *Inclusive* programming spans a broad range of talents and interests. It is *proactive, responding* to the positive, emerging, and expanding needs of students, acting as a guide for planning and modifying instruction. It challenges teachers, schools, districts, parents and the community to take deliberate, constructive action for talent development. And, it provides a *unifying* structure and terminology for communicating effectively about talent development among many constituents. LoS involves programming at four levels: Level I (programming for *all* students), Level II (programming for *many* students), Level III (programming for *some* students), and Level IV (programming for a *few* students).



Level I: Programming for All Students

Level I of the LoS approach involves instructional activities aimed at all students. Level I activities are often short in duration (e.g., a single event, lesson, or unit). The objective is to build a foundation of experience, through which students discover and begin to pursue their personal interests and strengths. Level I activities might take place in any teacher's classroom, as services for students in several classrooms at a grade level, or in activities for an entire student body, (e.g., class trips or school-wide assemblies). High quality classroom instruction is a key factor at this level, based in best practice, and differentiated to meet the needs of individual students. Teachers and parents act as talent spotters and as designers and deliverers of varied learning activities. As students participate in Level I activities, they may exhibit strong interest and talent potential. Upon observing a learner's strengths, teachers and parents encourage him or her to follow-up with more in-depth and demanding involvement in a particular area of interest. Level I activities also provide a foundation for students to become aware of their personal learning style preferences, to learn and apply creative and critical thinking tools and independent learning skills, and to begin managing and directing their own learning.

Level II: Programming for Many Students

Level II programming invites students to build on their initial curiosity about or interest in particular subjects or talent areas and to explore them in more depth. All students *might* participate in any Level II activity; however, not every student *will* become involved in all activities. While others might direct or encourage students to become involved, voluntary participation is a key element of this level, building students' ownership in and responsibility for talent development. Their interest in the subject or activity has reached a point at which they are ready to invest their time and effort in its pursuit.

Level II activities may vary in scope and duration, but generally have fixed points at which students can decide whether to continue or move on to other interests. They often involve creating some product or taking part in a public performance or presentation. During their work on Level II activities, students practice and apply their knowledge and their self-directed learning skills, with adult oversight, in a relatively low-risk environment. As teachers discover talents, even if no existing school service is available, they search for or create ways to respond, nurturing and celebrating many talents and abilities. Students who excel in something feel affirmed and encouraged to achieve excellence when others recognize, respond to, and celebrate their accomplishments. Students learn that their school and community is full of people who are on their side, who want to see them succeed.

Level II programming is flexible and designed to respond to the specific interests and strengths of students. It may include elective classes, self-selected in-class enrichment projects, open performance groups (such as a glee club, newspaper, or theater group), and other interest-based activities (such as a science club, computer group, or debate team) and programs (e.g., Future Problem Solving, Destination ImagiNation®). School-based offerings are often supplemented by community activities with open membership (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, sports groups, and scouting). These activities not only allow students to test their level of interest and commitment to a particular field, but allow supportive adults to work with them, to observe and record their accomplishments, and to urge students with potential to move on to more demanding and in-depth work.

For both Level III and IV student involvement depends on the student's demonstration of the skills, motivation, and passion required for success. Students demonstrate their interest and motivation to engage in instruction at a more demanding level by providing evidence of their ability and sustained interest in the specific domain.

Level III: Programming for Some Students

Level III programming offers services for students who are enthusiastic about the particular field of study or talent area and who aspire (and are expected) to perform at a consistently high level of

engagement and accomplishment. In Level III the focus shifts away from foundation-building or exploratory activities to differentiated responses to a student's maturing strengths and talents. Students sustain their participation in Level III activities (individually and/or in groups of talented peers) over an extended period of time, and devote a considerable amount of time on their own to study, practice, or prepare.

In a school setting, Level III opportunities might include auditioned musical, speech, and theatrical groups, extended science, social studies, or art projects (which may move to higher levels of competition or presentation), inventing or community service programs or competitions, creative writing for publication, individual study in any domain, or clubs and organizations with selected membership (e.g., mock trial and varsity sports teams). Opportunities outside the school might include private lessons or advanced tutoring, participation in auditioned community-based performing groups, or selection to play on a community sports team such as an all-star little league or traveling soccer team. Mentors, teachers, parents, and coaches continually challenge the students to stretch and move on to more demanding work, and a greater sense of accomplishment.

Level IV: Programming for a Few Students

Level IV programming recognizes and responds to the exceptional needs that may be demonstrated by a few students in any domain who have outstanding records of expertise, experience, dedication, passion, and ability to attain or approach a "professional" level of performance and accomplishment in that subject or talent area. Instructional goals for Level IV programming address four dimensions of talent development: content, process, affect, and product. Content is expected to be high-level, complex, and challenging. Students engage the content of the domain creatively, acting as a professional in the field would, following a professional process of inquiry and problem solving that deals with real-life issues. They engage the affective dimension through self-management and self-development. Students who receive Level IV services will often share the results of their work, including authentic products with others in their field and with the public. They may receive recognition and support for these products with advanced academic credit, publication, having their work patented, professional performance, and selection for highly competitive programs or groups.

The school's role involves helping to locate appropriate resources, providing the means for a student to take advantage of those resources, supporting the student's pursuit of appropriate opportunities, and enabling the student to document and earn credit for advanced work and accomplishments. School-based Level IV programming may include grade level acceleration, multiple grade advancement, independent work with teachers who have an in-depth understanding of the student's area of interest, or dual or part-time enrollment and participation in higher-level courses. In some talent areas, special (or "magnet") schools provide focused opportunities for high-level involvement in a certain talent domain. Students might take part in regional, national, and in some cases, international, competitions or attend special seminars, concerts, or workshops designed to bring them together with other students who are highly accomplished in their field of interest. Level IV services often also extend beyond the school setting, through connections with mentors who are successful in their field, internships, active involvement in professional organizations or societies, or advanced learning through web-based distance education courses or projects.

Implementing the LoS Approach

Implementing LoS in a classroom, school, or school district requires a systematic approach; it requires all stakeholders to be informed and involved. One person cannot do it alone. The LoS approach can serve as the foundation for new program development or for expanding and enhancing successful talent identification and development efforts that are already in place. LoS implementation usually follows a six-stage process: *Prepare; Clarify where you are now; Decide where to go next; Carry out programming; Seek talents and strengths;* and, *Ensure quality, innovation and continuous improvement.* To provide high quality programming that recognizes and responds effectively to students' strengths and

talents, an implementation plan must include a strategy for both formative and summative evaluation, leading to continuous improvement and effective innovation. The plan must also consider opportunities to document and publicize accomplishments and success in ways that promote support within the district and the community as a whole.

Conclusion

The LoS approach to programming for talent development challenges teachers, parents, administrators, community members, and students to work together to identify students' strengths, talents, and sustained interests and to provide effective programming at four levels. Through LoS, schools can respond to the unique needs of high-ability students and help all students move toward the fulfillment of their potential. LoS supports effective instructional practices for all students. It is an approach that is consistent with current research on human abilities and styles, as well as with contemporary views of curriculum. It focuses our attention on the future and what is important for students. This approach is based on a belief that in education, one size does *not* fit all. Learning takes place in different ways; if our goal is to enable individuals to become "all that they can be," then appropriate, challenging instruction must be designed individually and delivered effectively.

Recommended Resources

Selby, E. & Young, G. (2003). The levels of service approach to talent development: Parallels with existing programs. *Gifted Child Today*, 26, 4, 44-50,65.

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Treffinger, D., Young, G., Nassab, C., Selby, E. & Wittig, C. (2008) *Talent development planning handbook: Designing inclusive gifted programs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Treffinger, D., Young, G., Nassab, C., & Wittig, C. (2004). *Enhancing and Expanding Gifted Programs: The Levels of Service Approach*. Waco, TX, Prufrock Press, Inc.

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