

# Autonomous Learner Model

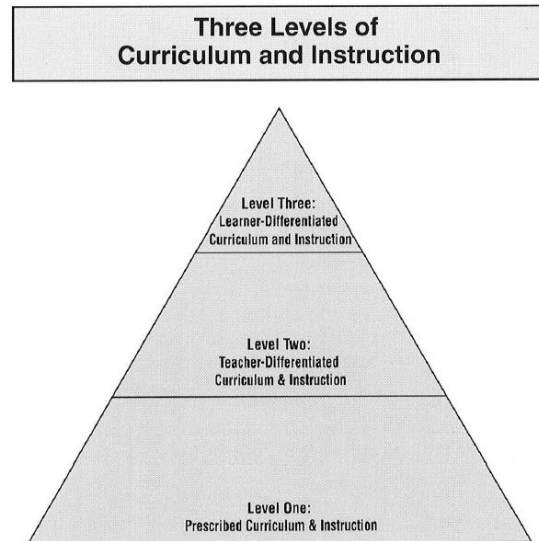
## George Betts and Jolene Kercher

### *What is the Autonomous Learner Model?*

The Autonomous Learner Model (ALM) is a curriculum model that focuses on three levels of differentiation, and “promote[s] self-directed learning in gifted and talented students. The major goal of the model is to facilitate the growth of students as independent, self-directed learners, with the development of skills, concepts and positive attitudes within the cognitive, emotional and social domains” (Washington Department of Education, 2010). ALM is *not* an independent study model.

### *What are the three levels of differentiation?*

According to Betts (2004), there are three levels of differentiation for the gifted learner (these levels are not to be confused with the tiers of Response to Intervention (RtI)). The three levels of differentiation are: a) Level One: Prescribed Curriculum and Instruction (this is the “regular” curriculum that is delivered to all students in a class regardless of students’ designation as “gifted”)—children are categorized as “students” in this level; (b) Level Two: Teacher-Differentiated Curriculum and Instruction (this is curriculum that is highly differentiated for the needs of the gifted students. The majority of the students’ learning time should be spent in this level. While there is more room for choice and autonomy for the student, students are not learning on their own through self-direction)—children are categorized as “students/learners” in this level; (c) Level Three: Learner-Differentiated Curriculum and Instruction (approximately 10% of the students’ time should be spent at this level, where students choose high-interest topics and become “producers of knowledge”—this is *not* a model for independent study)—children at this level are categorized as “learners.”



(Betts, 2004)

### *What are the three components of Level Three of ALM?*

Within Level Three of ALM, there are three components of study and growth that the student can take: explorations, investigations, and in-depth studies. Explorations are projects that students can undertake in order to explore areas of interest and to identify possible questions, problems themes or ideas about the topic. Students can explore several topics at a time, and can also engage in on-going explorations with opportunities to share out what they have learned, and to collaborate with partners or small groups. Investigations are more in-depth than explorations, but draw upon the successful completion of the exploration tasks. Investigations are reserved for high-interest topics, and lend themselves well to learning contracts, multiple modes for sharing and disseminating findings, etc. The goal of the ALM is to be working on the third component of Level Three: in-depth studies. By the time that students are participating in in-depth studies, they have clearly found a passion area that they have both explored and investigated, and now they are going

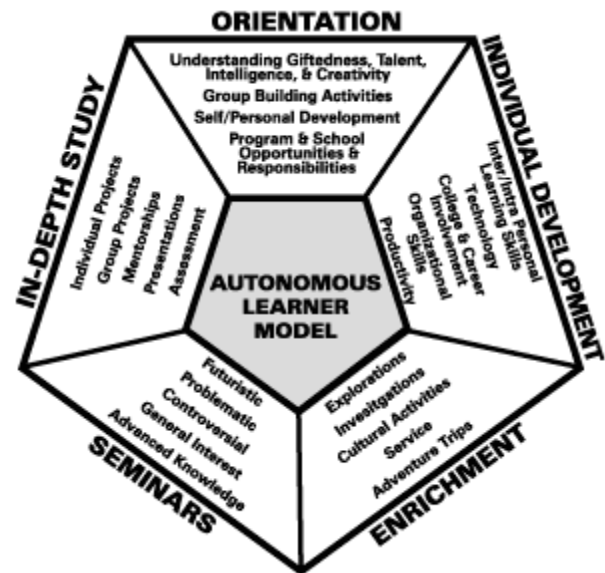
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even further. In an ideal world, students would be working with a mentor on their in-depth topic, and applying the affective, cognitive and organizational skills that they have learned along the way. This is the highest level of ALM because it supports the active pursuit of being a lifelong learner (Betts, 2004).

### *What are the five major dimensions of ALM?*

There are five major dimensions of learning within ALM: 1) orientation, (2) individual development, (3) enrichment, (4) seminars, and (5) in-depth study. Orientation refers to the students' orientation with themselves, their group and their affective development (i.e.: team building activities, self-reflection, learning about characteristics of giftedness, etc.). Individual development refers to the skills needed to get to the highest levels of ALM (i.e.: inter- and intrapersonal skills, study and learning skills and habits, how to use different types of technology, application to career and college readiness, etc.). Enrichment refers to the actual work of Level Three (i.e.: explorations and investigations, excursions, cultural activities and alignment, etc.). Seminars are small group presentations and/or problem solving sessions on general interest topics or areas of intense interest (similar to Socratic Seminar). Finally, the in-depth study refers to the products that stem from Level Three work with mentors, groups, etc. (Washington Department of Education, 2010).



(ALPS, 1999)

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