

*Some people have the ability
to create excitement in their lives.*

*They are the ones who strive,
who grow,
who give and share,
They are the ones who love...*

*They possess passion...
For themselves, others,
Nature and experiences.*

*They have the ability
to see beyond today,
to rise above the hectic pace,
to strive for their own perfection...*

*And they are gentle,
For they love themselves,
and they love others...*

*Through their living
they create peace and contentment.*

*At the same time
they create excitement,
for there is always another mountain,
a deeper joy,
a new dawn...*

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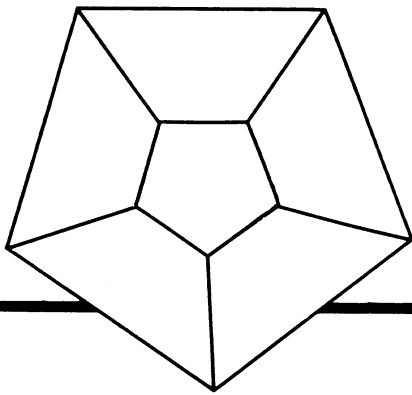
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Introduction to the Autonomous Learner Model

It is generally accepted that intellectually gifted, creatively gifted and talented children are all in need of special help in developing their gifted potential (Feldhusen and Treffinger, 1980). For many years these ideas have been ignored and programs for the gifted and talented have not been developed.

The major goals of gifted programs are to help gifted and talented students realize their full career potential and to experience a sense of personal fulfillment or self-actualization in maturity (Feldhusen and Treffinger, 1980). Clark (1983) states that gifted youngsters learn very early that their ideas and interests are quite different from their age mates. Once they are able to be together, they will begin to develop their potentials for self-actualization.

Gallagher (1975) defines giftedness in the following manner: "The ability to manipulate internally learned symbol systems is perhaps the sine qua non of giftedness. It allows the gifted student to learn on his own, to imagine and create new forms and products, without waiting for a teacher or his environment. Such symbol systems thus give the learner autonomy" (p. 10-11).

The Autonomous Learner Model for the Gifted and Talented (K-12) was developed to meet the diversified cognitive, emotional and social needs of gifted and talented students (Betts and Knapp, 1980). As the needs of the gifted are being met, they will develop into autonomous learners with the abilities to be responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of their own learning.

When students are involved in gifted programs, they should have an opportunity to pursue their own interests to whatever depth they want (Renzulli, 1977). Becoming an autonomous learner is a difficult task, one which requires new orientations to learning, new development for skills, concepts and attitudes which will be necessary for continued learning.

After developing the appropriate skills, concepts and attitudes, students participating in the Autonomous Learner Model (Figure #1) become involved in their own learning with the idea that through this involvement they can become independent, self-directed learners.

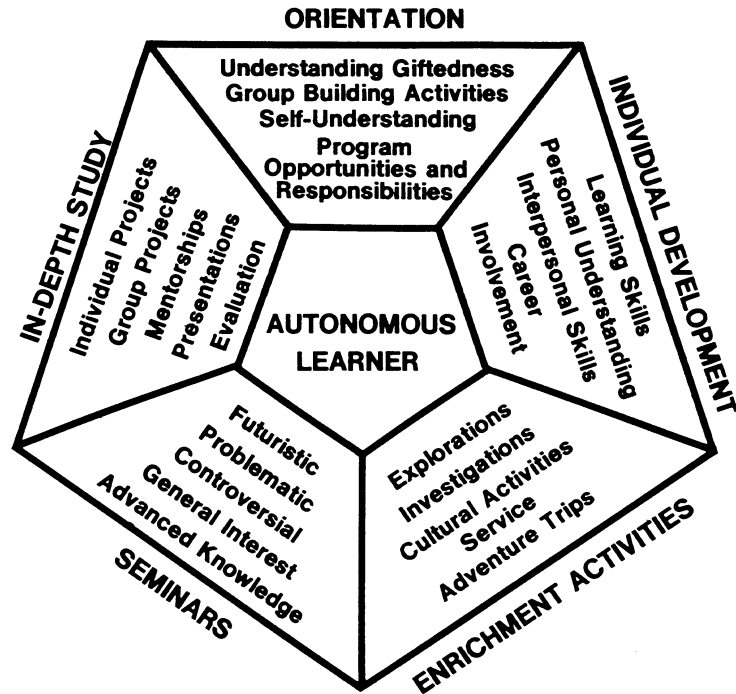


Figure #1.
The Autonomous Learner Model

Rogers (1983) writes about facilitative conditions for learning, feeling free to learn, finding new ways of personal growth, and about what needs to be done to humanize the school. He states:

"We are, in my view, faced with an entirely new situation in education where the goal of education, if we are to survive, is the facilitation of change and learning. The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security; Changingness, a reliance on process rather than upon static knowledge, is the only thing that makes any sense as a goal for education in the modern world." (p. 120).

Treffinger (1978) defines self-directed learning as responsible autonomy. The concern with this definition is that educators must be concerned with facilitating students to learn to make their own decisions, plan their own learning units, participate, and evaluate them at the end of the study.

Students are not placed into programs for the gifted and automatically become autonomous learners within the first two to three months. The process is difficult and requires a long period of time and a dedication of the adults involved. The Autonomous Learner Model was developed for high school