

Autonomous Learner Model Resource Book

George T. Betts, Ed.D., Robin J. Carey, Ph.D.,
& Blanche M. Kapushion, Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTION

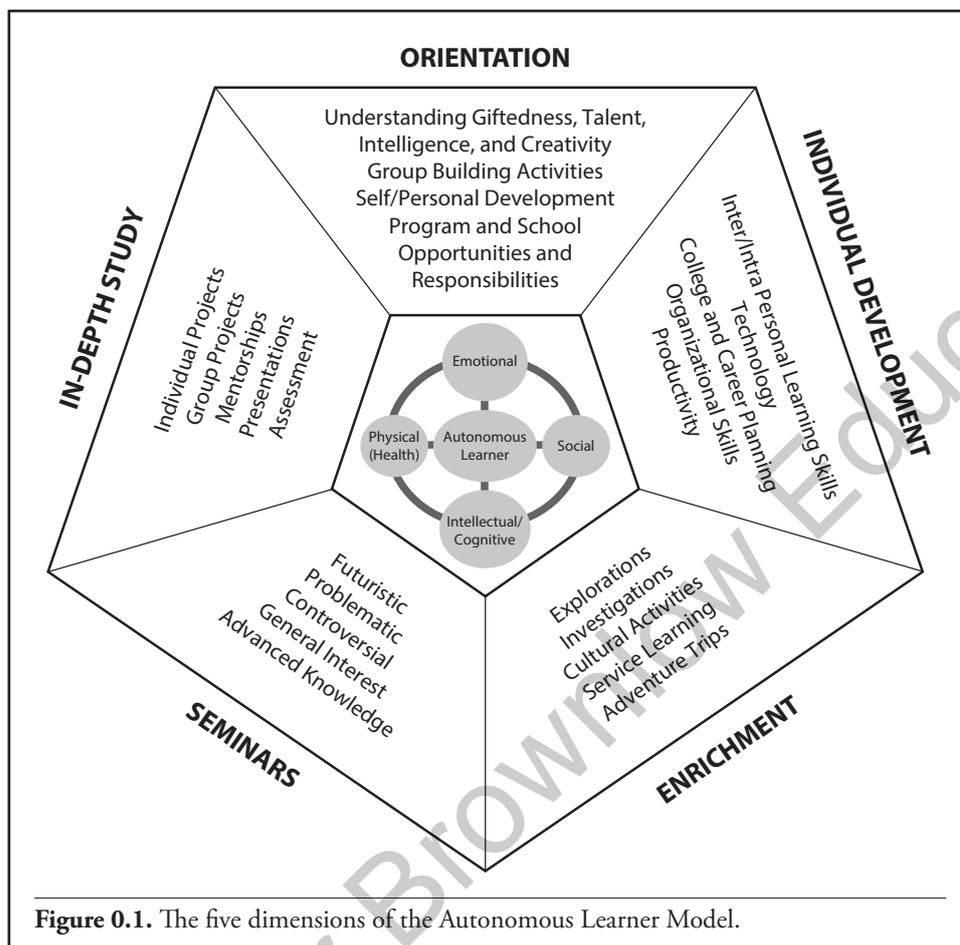
If a child is to become a self-directed, lifelong learner, the learner must become the center of the learning and living process.—George Betts

SO MANY LEADERS, organizations, districts, and schools have searched for the solutions to address increasingly negative opinions regarding public schools and the rise in popularity of charter and homeschooling options, but none of the efforts seem to be truly successful. The reason may be extremely simple, hard to understand, and even more difficult to implement. We still live in a world where we choose to deliver education “to children and youth,” rather than “with children and youth.”

The Autonomous Learner Model (ALM) is the first model in the education of the gifted and talented that focuses on the *whole child*. This includes the social, emotional, intellectual/cognitive, and physical (health) domains. Most approaches in gifted education are developed for teachers and counselors to deliver curriculum “to” gifted and high-potential learners. Curriculum developed by educators will never provide a learning and living environment for the gifted and talented. Children and youth are gifted 24/7 and need a complete approach to learning and living in the school setting, at home, and in the community.

The ALM was conceived in 1976 by students who were given complete control as they developed an appropriate approach for their learning. Some of the students were successful in school while others were dropping out or had dropped out. A daily one-hour course was scheduled and two teachers were selected to “facilitate” this new journey. No one knew exactly what would be developed and that was what made this so exciting. Learning without a specific curriculum and without boundaries was not heard of. We continue to need a system that is student-based, instead of one that is led by educators without direction and input from students. Learners, given the opportunity, will discover the skills, concepts, attitudes, and abilities necessary for lifelong, autonomous learning. Through this process, definitions of autonomous learners are developed, modified, and applied throughout the years. The ALM remains a viable model for gifted and talented learners today.

The ALM presented here (Figure 0.1) is the latest of three major modifications. Although the affective domain was a major component of the model, it was not until



this third modification that it was included with the intellectual/cognitive domain. It is also becoming more evident in our society that emphasis needs to be placed on the physical (health) domain of learning and living. This modification connects the four domains within the five dimensions of the ALM, focusing on the growth and development of the whole child. The following definition is now embedded into the five major dimensions of the ALM.

Autonomous Learner Definition

Autonomous learners perceive learning and living as two main components of their ongoing development of potential in the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical domains. Their motivation comes from within, they internalize skills, and passion learning is their

driving force. Autonomous learners are never satisfied, for they perceive their needs for a nourishing life, as well as the greater needs of society.

The Autonomous Learner Model began in the school setting with the concept of lifelong learning, but has now been expanded to the home and community with the concept of lifelong living. The authors now see the school, home, and community as necessary for lifelong learning *and* living.

The Five Dimensions of the Autonomous Learner Model

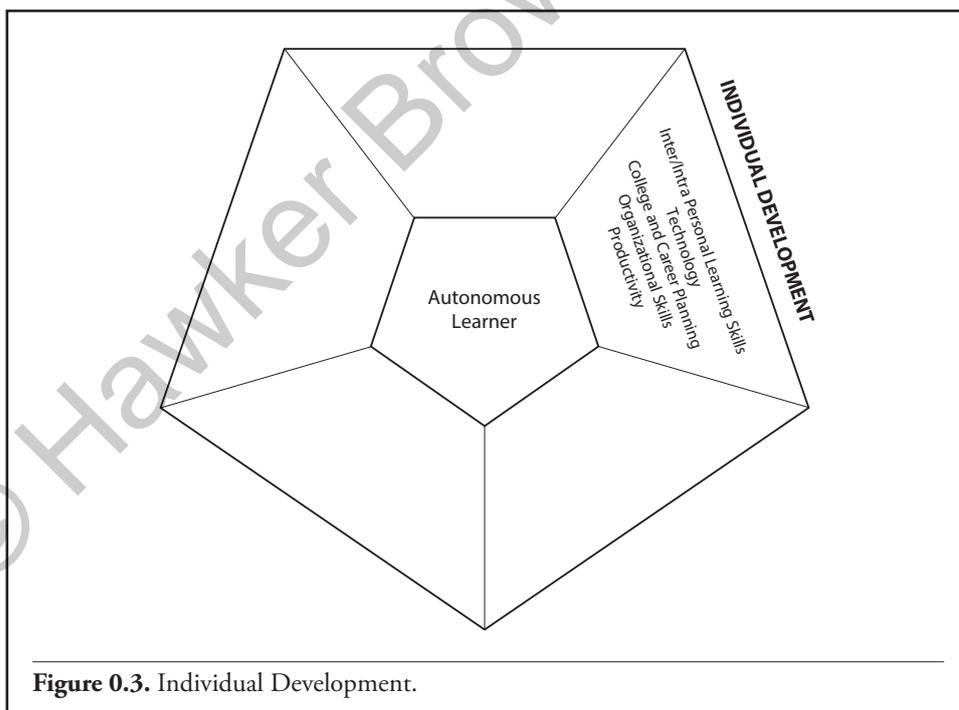
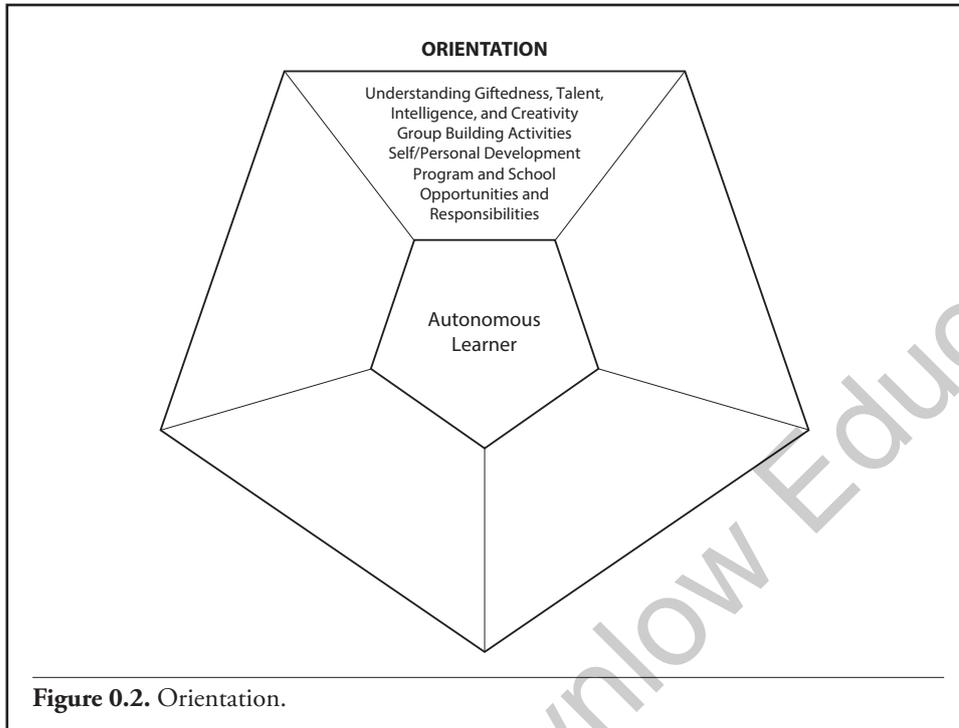
Orientation Dimension

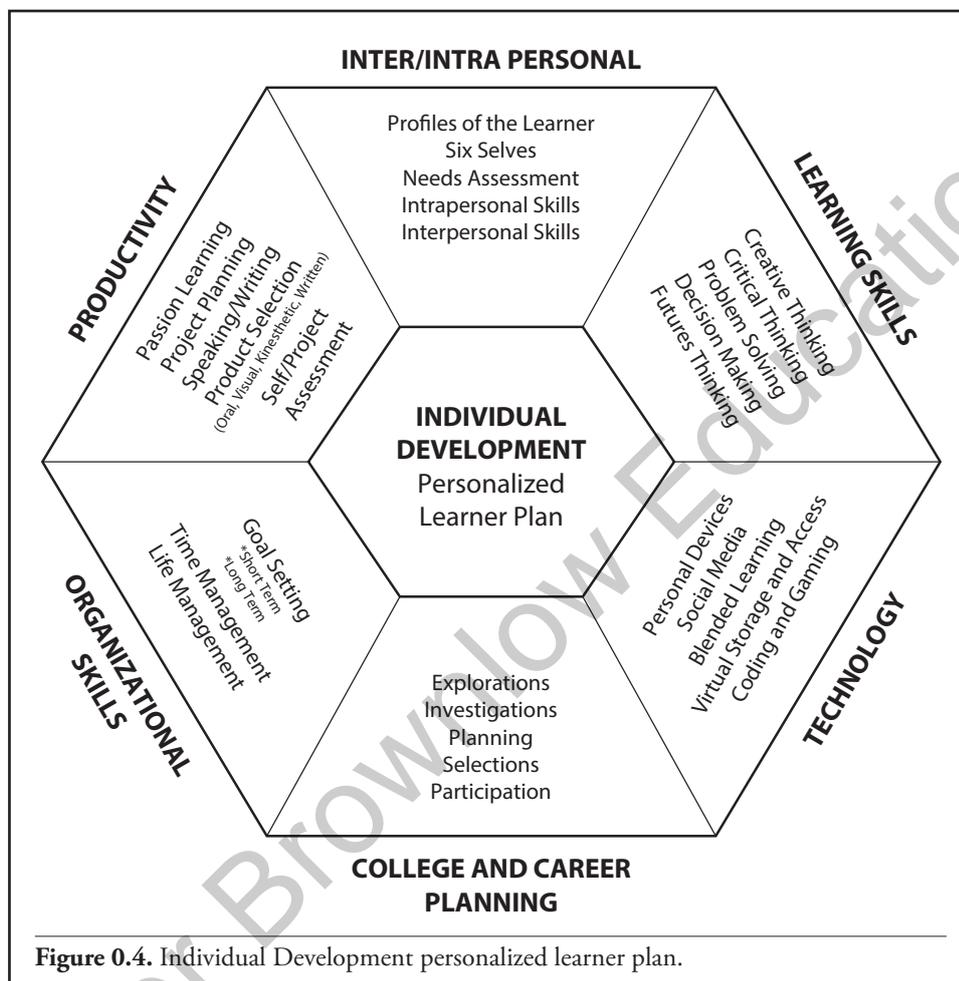
Orientation, the first dimension, is the *foundation* of the Autonomous Learner Model (see Figure 0.2). This dimension provides students, educators, and parents the opportunities to develop an understanding of giftedness, talent, intelligence, creativity, and the development of potential. Potential may be seen before the ALM, but definitely can be seen and developed in this environment. Students learn more about themselves and others through formal activities and informal belonging. Learning to work as a group is essential for the 21st century and opportunities to develop this skill exist in the Orientation Dimension.

At the close of the Orientation Dimension, a presentation detailing the ALM is made by the teachers to build foundational understanding of the model. It is presented to students, other school staff, interested parents, and community members. As students become more autonomous, they will be taking the lead and presenting this information. Professionals from the community are invited to share their lifelong journeys. Emphasis is placed on experiences and future opportunities, based on the abilities and passions of the members of the group. Seeds are now planted for future Investigations, Seminars, and In-Depth Studies.

Individual Development Dimension

Dimension Two of the ALM is Individual Development (see Figure 0.3), which provides students with many activities and strategies to develop the emotional, social, intellectual/cognitive, and physical (health) domains through the skills, concepts, and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning and living. Areas within this dimension include, as do all of the dimensions, opportunities for formal and informal learning. Formal involvement is completed within an activity while informal learning happens after class, in the hallways, through texting and social media, as well as through peer relationships. Informal involvement may be more important than formal involvement.





It happens with the first hello, the first smiles, the first handshake, and the ongoing verbal and nonverbal communication that continues every time there is an exchange in a facilitative environment.

Also of high importance in this dimension are the areas of career and college opportunities, organizational development, and the importance of coming to closure through a project according to individual and/or group styles. Besides college challenges, the area of ongoing career opportunities, based on the abilities and passions of learners, is included. Our society today is not just one of college degrees, but one that includes many opportunities and paths of involvement. Many successful people begin with the development of entrepreneurial skills that lead to new ideas and solutions outside traditional boundaries of career success.

The Individual Development Dimension includes six areas that are integral to moving forward to the ultimate goal of autonomous learning (see Figure 0.4). The

six areas are complex and in-depth; teachers will determine which areas to delve into, based on the needs of the learners in their community.

Not all learners are organized and able to be successful. Instead of presenting one style of organization, the teacher/facilitators present several styles. It is up to the learners to discover and develop the style that works best for them. This discovery happens over time and may experience multiple changes throughout the learner's lifetime.

The learners will also discover and develop the appropriate product and project formats that enhance their learning and provide the opportunities to complete their work using appropriate products. Product and project choices cannot be made by the teachers; they are related to the learning and living styles of the learners and provide more excitement for self-directed learning.

Enrichment Dimension

Students are now becoming *learners* and teachers are becoming *facilitators*. As learners, with their own styles, they are responsible for the development of their own Explorations, Investigations, Cultural Activities, Service Learning, and Adventure Trips (see Figure 0.5). Involvement in this dimension provides learners the opportunity to select and complete activities in five different areas that foster their independent learning. The highest level of learning is manifested when learners have the freedom to select, pursue, and engage fully in their passions.

Changing roles of students/learners and teachers/facilitators. Figure 0.6 shows the transition of teacher/facilitator to facilitator/teacher and students/learners to learners/students. As teachers implement the ALM, they evolve from teachers to facilitators of learning. As learners experience the model, they become independent, self-directed, lifelong learners.

In the Enrichment Dimension of the ALM, emphasis is placed on using skills to interact effectively with peers, educators, parents, and community members by beginning the process of learning through Explorations. Explorations are short-term activities that enhance the learner's ability to seek out new and unique information from a variety of sources. These include different areas they may someday want to learn more in-depth through Investigations, which provide learners the opportunities to participate in a longer time commitment with a few topics. Once again, learners select their own topics, find appropriate resources, learn about the topics, and share their findings in an informal setting. They complete this process for at least four or five Investigations. Through Explorations and Investigations, learners are building a foundation of skills, concepts, attitudes, and passions in order to be fully successful participants in the ALM.

Examples of Cultural Activities include attending plays, dance recitals, exhibits at museums, sporting events, lectures, or tours of new and exciting industry in their areas of interest. These are completed so that the learners have a better understanding

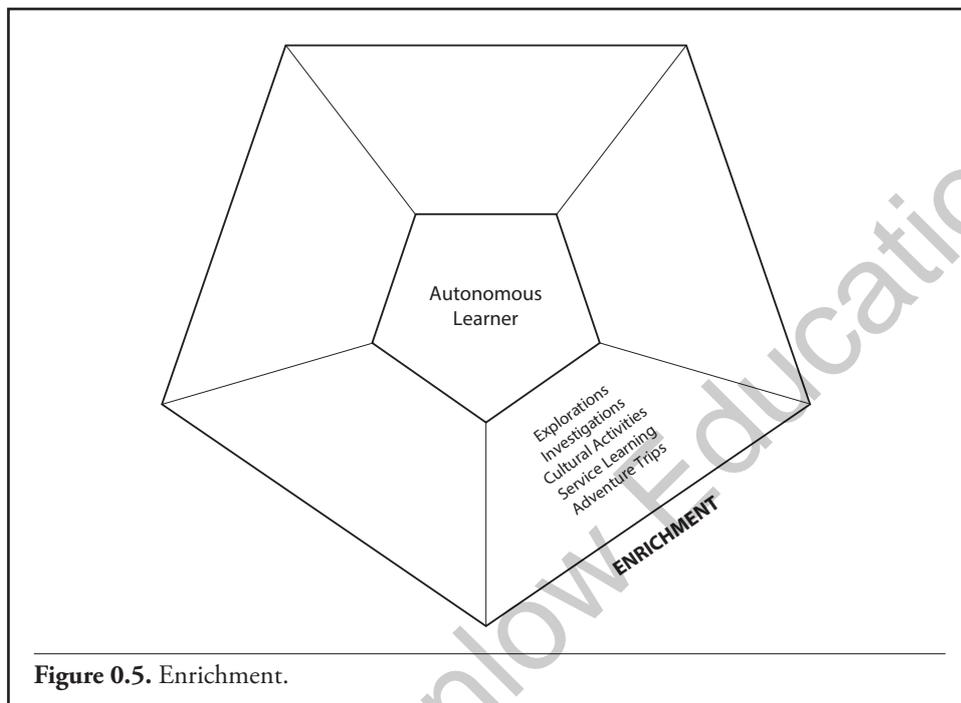


Figure 0.5. Enrichment.

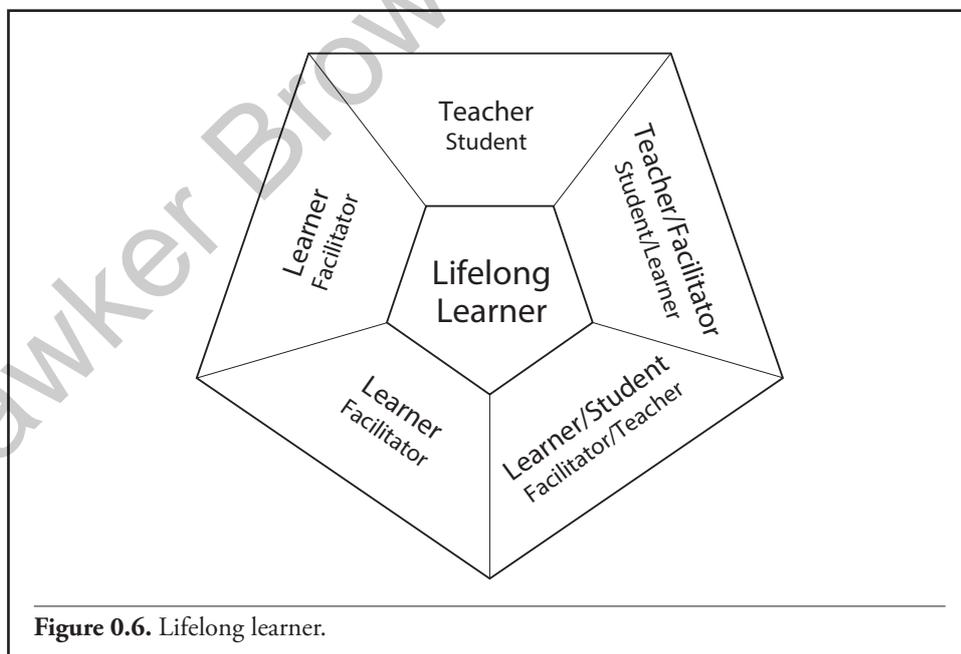


Figure 0.6. Lifelong learner.