

Autonomous Learner Model for the Gifted and Talented

Introduction Module

Autonomous Learner Model

The world is open to those who give . . .

Dear Learners!

Hi, welcome to the Autonomous Learner Model (ALM). I am glad you are working on the Spotlight for Technology Website and want to become life-long learners. This approach is developed for you, the students who want to become more independent and more responsible for their own learning. This is your opportunity to learn how to learn independently, to decide what you want to learn and produce and to be involved with your project until completion. The ALM was developed years ago at Arvada West High School in Arvada Colorado. The goal was to give students the opportunity to become independent, self-directed learners. What is exciting is that this model of education was not developed by teachers but by the students. These students came from two different groups; those who were not achieving and those who were achieving in high school. Two different groups but both with the same need – to make school meaningful and to be more involved in the development of what they were going to learn. The teachers were there not to direct them but to assist students in the process of becoming life-long learners.

Learners accept responsibility for their own learning and develop the skills, concepts and attitudes necessary for independent investigations. Instead of seeing students as students, we began to see them as learners and they began to see that we were not dispensers of knowledge but facilitators of the learning process.

A Message from George Betts



My name is George Betts and I am a Professor of Special Education in the Area of Gifted and Talented Studies at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, Colorado. I joined the university after six years of teaching and counseling at Arvada West High School in Jefferson County, Colorado. It was exciting to teach at this high school and to give students the opportunities to be in charge of their own education. I am very successful as an adult but I was not always successful in school. I struggled in high school, would not conform and did not realize that school could be important. I then attended Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma. My high school had 2500 students and Phillips had 800 for the entire university. I flourished. A professor saw my potential and gave me opportunities I had never had before. I responded and started to develop my abilities. They were there but I was not aware of them. I had learned my weaknesses. I see my life as a journey, with many starts and stops, and many detours but the goals have always been the same. I want to facilitate others in their growth and me, in mine. I want to belong. I want to love and be loved. I want to discover and develop my strengths. I seek to make this world a better place to live in. In other words, I want to live every moment to the fullest and to learn new and exciting information. Part of my journey is to learn knowledge while another part is to experience fully the moments of today and to gain wisdom. *Knowledge without wisdom is incomplete.* To me, this is an extremely strong statement and one that could be

pondered. Ponder! I know that to ponder is to think, reflect and decide what is best. I will refer to pondering a great deal in this website.

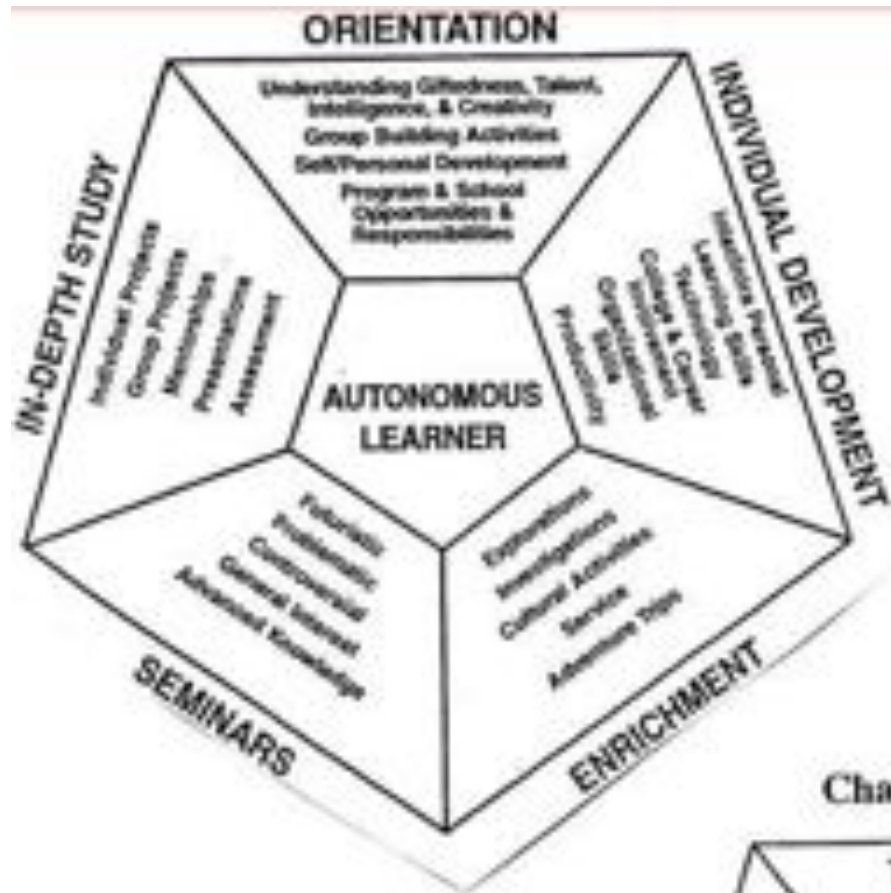
Basic Standards of the Autonomous Learner Model

The ALM Standards are different than those standards in the curriculum areas which are used in most schools and school districts. These standards are not related to skills within a content area, but to the “total” individual. These standards are applied to provide opportunities for students to become life-long learners:

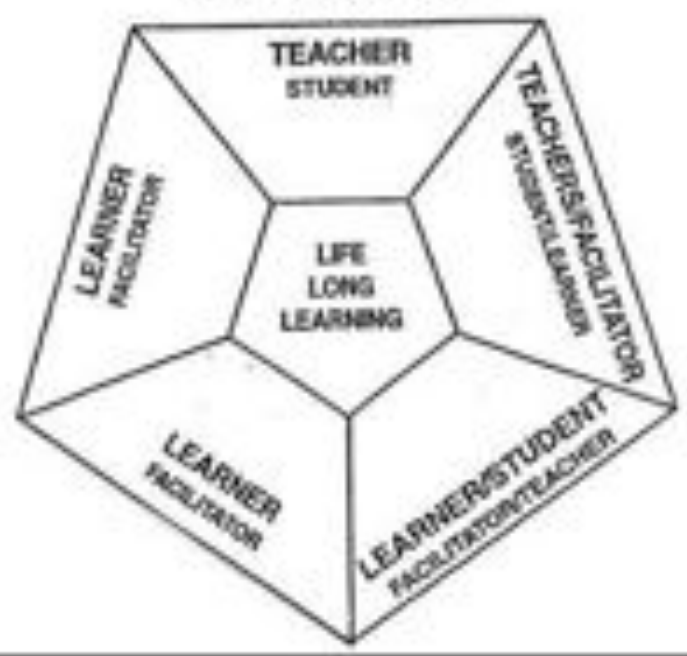
- Develop more positive self-concept & self-esteem
- Comprehend your own abilities in relationship to self & society
- Develop skills to interact effectively with peers, siblings, parents and other adult
- Increase knowledge in a variety of area
- Develop critical and creative thinking skills
- Develop decision-making and problem-solving skills
- Integrate activities that facilitate the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development of the individual
- Develop individual passion are(s) of learning
- Demonstrate responsibility for own learning, in and out of the school setting
- Ultimately become responsible, creative, independent, life-long learners

The Autonomous Learner Model for the Gifted & Talented

The Autonomous Learner Model is an approach for you to learn and to use. Some of it you already know. Reflect on those parts and move on. Take what is important for you and incorporate this information into your knowledge base. The Autonomous Learner Model (ALM) for the Gifted and Talented was developed specifically to meet the diversified cognitive, emotional, and social needs of learners. The model is currently implemented at all grade levels with the gifted and talented as well as all learners in the regular classroom. Emphasis is placed on meeting the individualized needs of learners through the use of activities in the five major Dimensions of the Model.



Changing Roles



The Five Dimensions

Dimension One: Orientation The Orientation Dimension of the Autonomous Learner Model provides learners, teachers, administrators, and parents the opportunities to develop a foundation of the concepts of giftedness, talent, intelligence, creativity and the development of potential. Learners discover more about themselves, their abilities, and what the ALM has to offer. Activities are presented to give learners an opportunity to work together as a group, to learn more about group process and interaction, and to learn more about the other people in the program.

Dimension Two: Individual Development The Individual Development Dimension of the model provides learners with the opportunities to develop the cognitive, emotional, social and physical skills, concepts, and attitudes necessary for life-long learning. In other words, learners become autonomous in their learning. Areas within the dimension include opportunities for the inter/intrapersonal development of the learners, the appropriate learning skills for life-long learning, and the area of technology. Also, the learners participate in college and career involvement, the development of organizational skills and the importance of productivity skills, which are used when information is presented in a variety of ways.

Dimension Three: Enrichment The Enrichment Dimension of the Autonomous Learner Model is developed to provide learners with opportunities to explore content and curriculum that is usually not part of the prescribed school curriculum. Learners to go beyond is now the opportunity for the learners to differentiate their own learning. Since most content and curriculum in the schools is prescribed, the ALM differentiated approach frees the learners to go beyond the usual content, which may be surface learning for the gifted and talented. The highest level of learning is manifested when learners have the freedom to select and to pursue content or curriculum in their own style. Curriculum

differentiation by the learners begins with *Explorations*, where the goal is to “find out” what is out there. Become an explorer yourself and find new and unique knowledge in a variety of methods. The second type of learner differentiation are *Investigations*. These are more in-depth than *Investigations* and require the learners to design, implement, complete and present a project with a mini-product. Learners are also involved in *Cultural Activities* that are designed so that they are involved in cultural events in the community. *Service* activities are essential and are non-negotiable. The humanitarian spirit is incorporated into the ALM. Through participation in the *Service* activities, the majority of the learners want to make this a better world of which we live in.

Dimension Four: Seminars The Seminar Dimension of the model is designed to give learners in groups of three to five opportunities to research a topic, present it as a seminar to the rest of the class and other interested people, and to assess it by criteria selected and developed by the learners. A seminar is essential because it provides learners the chance to move from the role of student to the role of learner. If students are to truly become learners, they must have the opportunities to experience guided independent group learning, by providing a structure that promotes the development of new knowledge.

Dimension Five: In-depth Studies The In-depth Study Dimension of the Autonomous Learner Model empowers learners to pursue long term in-depth studies in their passion areas. The learners determine what will be learned, how it will be learned, how it will be presented, what facilitation will be necessary by the teacher and mentor. These plans are then implemented and completed by the learners with presentations being made at appropriate times until the completion of the project. Final presentations and assessments are given to all who are involved and interested.

Begin your own journey of life-long learning . . .

Orientation Dimension Overview

Orientation, Dimension One of the Autonomous Learner Model, is the foundation of your journey of life-long learning. Begin by learning about yourself, the process of life-long learning, and possible directions for this project. In this dimension you will find a series of activities to complete that were designed specifically for you or were developed by me for other projects. You will see these activities as the foundation for your involvement in the Autonomous Learner Model. You will develop a Personalized Learner Portfolio while you work in each dimension of the model. The portfolio represents the results of your work in all activities in the five dimensions. You will present your portfolio to an appropriate audience at the end of your involvement in this journey. If you have questions, email me at george.betts@unco.edu. The results of your activities will be kept in your Personalized Learner Portfolio. I hope you enjoy these activities and thrive on your journey of life-long learning.

Selection of Support Team (Activity One)

The first task for Orientation is to build a support team for your involvement as an autonomous learner. These will be the people who will support you and facilitate your journey. Here are the people you will need and a brief statement of the roles they can fulfill for you. You may want to work on your own, but give this approach a try. It works, and you will understand why as you continue through this process!

Teacher/Facilitator

Please select a teacher to be your advisor, facilitator and teacher. This is a person with whom you relate well and have an established relationship. Tell this person about this opportunity you have for autonomous learning, and what you want to do. Share the entire website and explain what you will be using in the website. Ask this teacher if he/she will be willing to serve in this capacity. Your teacher may have many questions for which you will have to develop answers. Be creative

and expand your understanding of what you will be doing.

Technological Support

If you have outstanding technology skills, you will not need to select a person for technological support. However, if you will need some help in the future with your projects, please select someone to serve in this capacity. This person may be a friend, parent, or teacher. At this time, you may not need support for your involvement, but it is always possible to contact the Spotlight faculty to request assistance.

Peer Learners

You will need to decide as you travel in this journey whether you want to work alone or in a small group of peers that you select yourself. You may choose to have others participate with you on some activities and work alone on others. The choice is totally yours!

Family and Friend Involvement

It is important to have your family members and close friends involved in your journey. Do you want them to discuss your progress, give you feedback, be an audience for your finished projects? You decide how they can be supports for you.

Mentor

Start looking for a mentor. Who do you relate to? Who has the knowledge to guide you? Who shares the same passions you do? During the first three dimensions of the ALM please start defining what you want for a mentor and who that may be. A mentor is a facilitator, guide, knowledge giver, supporter, and a person who believes in you. This person may live in your town or may live somewhere else in the New Mexico.

You do not need the mentor now but it is essential to have a mentor for the Seminar and In-depth Study Dimensions of the ALM. At this time it is best to have one or two people who are willing to help you. These would be people who are content specialists in your topic area. It is not

their role to teach you directly but to provide you with information and direction.

Your Support Team

Now is the time to make your selections. Please make a list of your support people, their roles and some information about them. This information will be included in your Personalized Learner Portfolio.

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Personal Website (Activity Two)

Okay, this is it: your first big assignment in the Orientation Dimension

of the Autonomous Learner Model. Each learner who is involved in the Autonomous Learner Model is asked to develop a personal website. This website will be on-line and will be available to the other learners, teachers, parents and mentors. It is up to you to decide how to put your website together. Using Netscape or Microsoft Word and saving the documents as .htm or .html works great.

Your website can include (but is not limited to) the following areas:

Name and email	Personal information about you	Passions you are pursuing at this time (or want to pursue)
Attitudes toward learning	Attitudes toward school	Favorite quotes that influence your life
Adults that have made a positive difference in your life	Interests, hobbies	Activities, clubs, etc. in school
Priceless friendships	Family members and information	Dreams and goals for your life

Six Selves (Activity Three)

Rarely do we have the opportunity for reflection. We are too involved with our daily routines to look inward. When we do look within, we see that we do not have one aspect, but six different “selves” that make up the total person. Please complete the instrument on the “Six Selves” so that you gain information about yourself. When you have finished, calculate your scores. After determining what the scores mean to you, share this information with one or more members of you Support Team. For your Personalized Learner Portfolio,” write in the results of your “Six Selves” and what you want to do to continue your personal development.

Journey into Self(Activity Four)

After completing the “Six Selves,” there is one more activity to experience before the final activity of the Orientation Dimension of the ALM. The “Journey into Self” goes beyond self and gives you the opportunity to learn more about your lifestyle, your goals and dreams, your past and your future.

Share the “Journey into Self” with one or more members of your Support Team. Place your completed “Journey into Self” into your Personalized Learner Portfolio. At the end of the In-depth Study Dimension of the ALM, you will be asked to complete a second “Journey into Self” and to compare your results to gain a deeper insight into you and your experiences.

I Am Poem (Activity Five)

The “I Am Poem” is a synthesis activity. The “I Am Poem” provides you with an opportunity to see many different aspects of your life. Take a look at the I Am Poem and complete it when you are ready.

Please share it with one or more members of your Support Team and include it in your Personalized Learner Portfolio (PLP).

Personalized Learner Portfolio (Activity Six)

A Personalized Learner Portfolio (PLP) is a collection of materials, a place to compile all the important information that you gather, and your products from the five dimensions of the Autonomous Learner Model. It will become part of your Personal Web page, and is a place to keep the results and products of your journey. There is no right way to develop a portfolio. Use your creativity to develop yours.

Before I begin my journey, I must equip myself with the essentials . . .

Individual Development Dimension Overview

The major goal of the Individual Development Dimension of the ALM is for you to learn about the diversified skills you already have and the additional skills, concepts and attitudes necessary for life-long learning. Before beginning Explorations, Investigations, Seminars and In-depth Studies, it is essential to comprehend yourself as an active learner. These skills, concepts and attitudes will help make your journey of working independently smoother and more enjoyable.

Autonomous Learner Checklist (Activity One)

The “Autonomous Learner Checklist,” the “Strength Analyzer” and the “Open-Ended Statements” were developed for you to look closely at your own abilities according to criteria that support people becoming independent, self-directed learners. You are asked to complete this checklist, the “Strength Analyzer” and the “Open-ended Statements” now, and again at the completion of your In-depth Study (Dimension Five of the Autonomous Learner Model). Your responses will give you a deeper understanding of your strengths and areas you may want to work on.

Strength Analyzer (Activity Two)

Autonomous Learner Checklist	Strengths You Possess at This time	How You Will Use Your	Additional Strengths You Want to Develop	How You Will Use These Strengths in Your Project
Self Acceptance & Self Understanding				
Social Skills				
Creative Thinking				
Critical Thinking				
Independent Learning				
Evaluative Thinking				

Open-ended Statements (Activity Three)

After you review your responses to the “Autonomous Learner Checklist” and the “Strength Analyzer,” please complete the following statements:

I now understand that I . . .

My strengths for my participations are . . .

An autonomous learner is . . .

For my own development, I will . . .

Overall, I see myself as . . .

Personalized Learner Portfolio (Activity Four)

A Personalized Learner Portfolio (PLP) is a collection of materials, a place to gather all the important information that you develop and your products from the five dimensions of the Autonomous Learner Model. You began your PLP during Orientation, Dimension One of the model. Please add a section to your PLP that records current skills, concepts and attitudes you now possess and what you will need in the future. Be creative in your approach!

“Not only do I seek to understand existing knowledge, I want to develop and create through my own learning . . .”

Enrichment Dimension Overview

Let's review. Orientation is the foundation for independent self-directed learning while Individual Development had you identify the skills, concepts and attitudes you deem necessary for your independent, self-directed learning. Enrichment, the Third Dimension of the Autonomous Learner Model, is where you begin to discover the appropriate content for you as a learner. You do not have to learn and explore content of teachers or parents, but content of your own. Some of you will already know what area you want to learn and will Explore that area while others of you will have several areas to explore because you are not sure what areas you like best or are wanting to explore new and unique areas of learning.

Explorations (Activities 1 – 3)

Who are the explorers of the past and of today? We all have the potential of becoming explorers when we want to seek and understand the unknown. Explorers want to learn everything that is out there. They are never satisfied with the knowledge they possess. This stage provides opportunities for those who have a strong drive for learning and knowledge.

Begin the 9-Step Process of Exploration that is included here. Explorations provide the framework for developing basic information about topics of your choice.

<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Brainstorm at least five topics you want to explore. List them according to your preference in learning about them.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p>Select the top three topics from your list and find out basic information about each topic. Use three different sources for each topic and make a grid or a chart about what you learned about each topic.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Analyze what you did for Step 2. Are the topic related? How did you find the references? Did you use books, people, articles, internet, or other sources? Which of the sources are you most comfortable with?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p>Develop at least five questions about each of your three topics. Find basic answers for each of the questions for each topic. Include who, what, when, where, why, and begin developing a knowledge base.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Now that you have developed a basic knowledge base for each of your three topics, decide if these are your major topics or if you want to delete and add another topic.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">6</p> <p>If you delete a topic, be sure to add another topic for exploration. Complete step two for your new topic.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">7</p> <p>Add additional information by using additional sources or references for each of your topics. Go beyond the basic information of Step four and begin to look for additional information, new possibilities for learning and a way to begin synthesizing your information about each topic.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">8</p> <p>Develop a mini-project for each of your explorations. This could be a web, a collage of information, a basic Power Point, a summary paper, or a product of your choice. The product reflects what you have learned. Share these products with your Support Team.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">9</p> <p>Evaluate your participation in your first three explorations. Did you learn new information? Did you learn about the “process” of learning? Did you find appropriate sources and references? Was it un? Was it meaningful?</p> <p>Are you ready to begin an Investigation, or do you want to develop and complete additional Explorations?</p>

Investigations(Activity 4 & 5)

After we explore, we can investigate and go deeper into a topic. The more we learn the more we realize how much there is yet to be learned. An Investigation is a mini in-depth study. You will be asked to select two major topics (areas of study) and develop, implement and assess both investigations. Here is a form to use with your support team for each of the investigations. An investigation is more in-depth and will take more planning and more actual time on learning.

At this time it is extremely important to be involved with your Support Team, especially your Teacher/Facilitator. Your final activity for the Enrichment Dimension of the Autonomous Learner Model is the presentation of your two Investigations to your Support Team and additional people you want to include.

A major aspect
of learning
Is sharing your findings . . .

Seminar Dimension Overview

The first three Dimensions of the Autonomous Learner Model are designed to prepare learners for participation in the Seminar and In-depth Study Dimensions. The Seminar Dimension of the model is designed to allow you to work alone to research a topic, present it as a seminar to the rest of the class and other interested people, and to assess it by criteria selected and developed by the learners. A seminar is essential because it allows you to move from the role of student to that of learner. If you are to truly become a learner, you must experience guided independent learning, by developing a seminar in a structure that promotes new knowledge.

Included here are the different types of seminars from which to choose. Each is defined so that you can select the one you would like to pursue in your passion area of learning. Look them over and decide what would work best for you.

Content of Seminars

Futuristic

The first type of Seminar is called Futuristic. This is your opportunity to look at your passion area for a futures perspective. What will happen in the future with your passion area? What do you see yourself doing in ten years with your passion area? Who are the leaders in your passion area? What will they be doing in 10 years? Design your Seminar based on the future.

Problematic

Within your passion area, are there problems that impact you and other members of society? Are they worth exploring? Can you present these problems as a seminar that allows you and others to understand the

major components of the problem, and what can be accomplished to move in the direction of solving it? When you select this type of Seminar, you will explore problems and passions. This is a good combination for learning.

Controversial

Within a passion area of learning, there are often ideas and topics that are seen as controversial for some people but not for others. Interview a few people in your passion area to determine what might be an area of controversy and develop your seminar on this area. This approach will facilitate your understanding of the different aspects of your passion area.

General Interest

This seminar is designed for you to present aspects of your passion area that many people would enjoy. The participants do not need to have a knowledge-base about your passion; you will present basic information to create an awareness.

Advanced Knowledge

You may decide to develop a seminar for only a few people. They would possess an advanced knowledge-base in your passion area, and your seminar would be designed specifically for them. Select aspects of your passion area they will enjoy, and from which they would be able to further expand upon your area of knowledge.

Activities on Five Areas of Seminars

Here are some sample activities that you can select for your seminar. If none of these seem meaningful, create your own type of Seminar.

Topic	Futuristic	Problematic
Select one component of your passion area you have developed from your Explorations and Investigation. Present that topic as a major component of a Seminar.	Present one component of your passion area to a group of people from a futurist's point of view. Include techniques used today by futurists.	Define a major problem within your passion area and design a presentation that includes major problems and at least three solution scenarios.
Controversial	General Interest	Advanced Knowledge
Within your passion area, select information that is controversial to different groups of people at this time. Present a Seminar that describes many different points of view.	Select an area within your passion area, which would be relevant to many students and adults, and present to this appropriate audience.	Present your seminar to selected audience members that already have in-depth knowledge of your area of pursuit.

The 10 Steps of the Seminar

1. Review the types of Seminars available to you and decide which you want to complete. Begin your first draft of the three components of the Seminar.
2. Talk with your facilitator and share your ideas for your Seminar. Provide evidence of your completed explorations and investigations in your passion area.
3. Write the first draft of your Seminar and share it with your facilitator to receive feedback and support for your re-writes, if necessary.
4. Receive approval from your facilitator and mentor and begin your

Seminar.

5. Meet periodically with your facilitator as you progress through the development of your Seminar. Keep your reflective journal of your meetings and your progress.
6. Develop the appropriate product(s) for your final presentation.
7. Plan your Seminar place and time. Invite an appropriate audience that includes your facilitator, mentor, peers, educators and parents. Send invitations to those you invite.
8. Present your Seminar to your appropriate audience. Leave time for comments and questions.
9. Have audience members complete evaluation forms of your Seminar.
10. Meet with your facilitator to assess you as a learner, your involvement in the development of your Seminar, and your final Seminar presentation. Include your Reflections of your completed Seminar.

Components of the Seminar

As you develop your Seminar, there are three basic components to include in the actual seminar. They include:

- **Presentation of Factual Information:**

This means basic knowledge. What do you know about your passion area that you want to include into your seminar? This can be a handout, a PowerPoint, or an individual presentation. The main thing is to cover basic information that your audience members need to know to proceed to the next component of the seminar.

- **Group Activity** Develop an activity that your audience members can participate in. It can be a small group activity or a large group activity. In other words, get them involved in making a decision or solving a problem related to your seminar and your passion area of learning.

- **Closure** After the activity, bring the seminar to closure by asking the audience members the following questions: What did you learn?

What did you experience? And now what? How will you use this new information?

**Your journey will take you into the unknown,
Where knowledge and experiences await you . . .
Be open and experience life and learning
In a truly incredible way.**

In-depth Study Dimension Overview

Now it is time to pursue your passion in an in-depth format. Included here are the components of the In-depth Study.

Individual Projects

The majority of In-depth Studies are by individuals although there are rare times that learners want to work together. Working alone is considered important at this dimension because of individual passions and the fact that this In-depth Study will be developed and presented through the ALM on-line.

- **Mentor**

Your mentor works with you as much as possible during the In-depth Study. Ask your mentor for knowledge, direction and advice. Listen and include the ideas of your mentor into your In-depth Study. Your mentor is also involved in your assessment process.

- **Product**

What is your final product? Is it written, oral, visual or kinesthetic? It is the synthesis of your In-depth Study and includes what you have experienced and what you have learned. Both your facilitator and mentor can give you guidance in the development of an appropriate product for you.

- **Presentations**

How are you going to share your final product? Who do you want in the audience? Where will your presentation be held? How can you develop this into a festive event for you, your facilitator, mentor, and audience members? Use your creativity to make this exciting. A video tape of this event would be something you could keep to remind you of the journey you have completed!

- **Assessment**

In-depth Study Personal Evaluation

In-depth Study Project Rubric

The 12 Steps of the In-depth Study

- Talk with your facilitator and share your ideas for your In-depth Study. Provide evidence of your completed explorations, investigations and seminars.
- Select your mentor and receive permission to work with your mentor with your facilitator and your school administration.
- Write the first draft of your In-depth Study Proposal and share it with your facilitator and mentor to receive feedback and support for your re-writes, if necessary.
- Receive the okay from your facilitator and mentor and begin your in-depth study.
- Have a series of learning activities with your mentor through emails and the development of knowledge and products for your in-depth study.
- Meet periodically with your facilitator as you progress through your In-depth Study. Keep your reflective journal of your meetings and your progress.
- Develop the appropriate product(s) for your final presentation.
- Plan your presentation place and time. Invite an appropriate audience that includes your facilitator, mentor, peers, educators and parents. Send invitations to those you invite.
- Present your final products to your appropriate audience. Leave time for comments and questions.
- Have audience members complete evaluation forms for your products and presentation.
- Meet with you mentor and facilitator to assess you as a learner, your involvement in the Autonomous Learner Model, your final products and presentations.
- Write your Reflections of your completed In-depth Study.

Reflections are important components of the learning process.

They open the doors for the next journey. . .

Questions to Ponder for Closure in Your Participation in the Autonomous Learner Model

Complete a discussion with your mentor and facilitator about the following questions. The questions can be answered in person, as a phone conference or through a series of emails.

- Was this journey worthwhile?
- What did you learn about your passion area?
- What did you experience (emotionally) as a learner?
- What did you learn about the “processes” of the five dimensions of the Autonomous Learner Model?
- How have you changed as a learner?”
- Are you going to continue learning in this passion area?
- And now what?

Reflections

Write your final Reflections of your Journey as a Lifelong Learner and share with your facilitator, mentor and other appropriate people.

Personalized Learning Profile

Include all of your material from your involvement in the Autonomous Learner Model in your Personalized Learning Profile. You started this during the Orientation Dimension of the model.

Feedback to George Betts

Please email me at george.betts@unco.edu to share your results and your reflections of your journey as a lifelong learner.