Independent Study

What is independent study for gifted learners?

Independent study is a part of the **Autonomous Learner Model**[1] by Betts in 1985, which is to develop independent, self-directed learners, with the development of skills, concepts and positive attitude. It is important to gifted learners because their needs are not always fulfilled or they often feel not being challenged in the regular classroom.

To quench their thirst for knowledge, gifted students tend to persevere and pursue in-depth study on things and topics that interest them. Independent study is a student-centred learning approach that caters for the learning needs of the gifted. When designing learning and teaching activities, teachers may refer to ***Type III (Individual and Group Investigation of Real Problems)*** of **Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Curriculum (1977)** and other related teaching models such as **Betts' Autonomous Learner Model** or **Problem-based Learning approach**. Teachers may make use of those models flexibly in accordance with students' learning abilities, areas of interest and preferred learning styles, thus helping students identify their areas of study interest and formulate appropriate study plans. With diversified learning strategies and relevant skills development, independent study allows an in-depth learning of a self-selected topic within the area of study. (Education Bureau, 2003)

Why do we need independent study?

The standards of the Autonomous Learner Model (Betts, 2003) are fundamental to the programme and underlie the basic principles for optimising ability. The aim is to:

- develop positive self-esteem and self-concept
- increase knowledge in a variety of areas/ and develop individual passion area(s) of learning
- develop critical, creative thinking and problem-solving skills
- comprehend one's abilities in relation to self and society
- develop skills to interact effectively with peers, siblings, parents, and other adults
- integrate activities which leverage cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development
- ultimately become responsible, creative, independent, life-long learners

T: (852) 3940 0101 F: (852) 3940 0201 E: academy@hkage.org.hk W: www.hkage.org.hk

How can we conduct independent study?

Teachers may use **grouping strategies**, such as “flexible grouping”, to place students with similar needs, abilities and interests in the same class and allow them to select topics of common interest for group projects or creative activities.

Teachers may refer to the following three examples of “independent study” (Education Bureau, 2003), which are appropriate for differentiated instructions:

(1) ***Thematic study***: an exploratory study that aims at widening students’ horizons and/ or an exploratory study based on personal interests.

(2) ***Creative and innovative study***: aims to provide students with opportunities to develop and show their creativity.

(3) ***Investigation of real life problems***: an in-depth study of real life problems and their solutions. While this kind of study requires rigorous steps and methods, it provides gifted students with a challenging learning opportunity.

Suggested procedures for independent study:

1. Identify / choose a topic, issue, problem
2. Plan the independent study *(with timeframe, initial resources, hints)*
3. Uncover the information: the research
4. Put it together: the findings and the product *(giving choices of report format)*
5. Present the independent study *(giving choices of presentation ways)*
6. Evaluate the independent study

When guiding students to conduct individual/group projects, teachers need to remind themselves that they are facilitators rather than instructors and their role is to *guide students to play a more active role in learning.*

Student choice of learning outcome

Editorial	Survey	Individual/ Small group presentation		Drama
Web Page	Podcast	Sculpture	Written report	Poetry
Song	Poster	Leaflet	A set of bookmarks	

many others ……

T: (852) 3940 0101 F: (852) 3940 0201 E: academy@hkage.org.hk W: www.hkage.org.hk

References

Betts, G. T. (1985). *Autonomous Learner Model for the gifted and talented*. Greeley, Colorado: Autonomous Learning Publications and Specialists.

Betts, G. T. (2003). The Autonomous learner model for high school programming. *Gifted Education Communicator,* Fall/Winter 2003, California Association of the Gifted.

Renzulli, J. (1977). *The Enrichment triad model: A guide for developing defensible programmes for the gifted.* Mansfield Centre, CT: Creative Learning Press, Inc.

Education Bureau. (2003). *Teacher training package in gifted education on project learning.* Hong Kong: Education Bureau, Hong Kong.

Notes:

[1]***Betts' Autonomous Learner Model*** has **five dimensions**, including:

- Orientation
- Individual development
- Enrichment
- Seminars
- In-depth study

T: (852) 3940 0101 F: (852) 3940 0201 E: academy@hkage.org.hk W: www.hkage.org.hk

Example

General Studies (Primary) / Liberal Studies (Junior Secondary)

Topic: ***Endangered animals***
Duration: 1 double period

Objectives:
Knowledge: To understand the causes of animal extinction
Skills: Study skills: ask inquiry questions and comprehend information;
Collaboration skills;
Communication skills; and
Critical thinking skills
Values and attitude: To treasure animals particularly the species at risk.

Time	Learning activities
(no more than 5 mins)	1. Introduction: show different pictures of endangered animals and ask students to name the group of animals shown "endangered animals"
(5 mins)	2. Ask students to formulate their inquiry questions, if they are going to study a particular species of endangered animals.
(5 mins)	3. Agree on inquiry questions, for example: - What habitat does it live in? - What happens to its population? - Why does it face extinction? - How well does the government and citizens help its survival?
(15 mins +)	4. Jigsaw reading – 7 groups work on different endangered animals: American crocodile, black-faced spoonbill, blue whale, black rhino, giant panda, Polar bear and Chinese white dolphin 5-minute reading + 10-minute discussion (This part may be extended according to students' abilities)

T: (852) 3940 0101 F: (852) 3940 0201 E: academy@hkage.org.hk W: www.hkage.org.hk

Independent Study →	***Differentiation for the exceptionally gifted:*** an ***independent study*** on "overhunting / overfishing" is conducted.
(6 mins)	5. Envoy exchange 2 identical rounds: the envoy of each group will go to next group for presentation and answering inquiries
(5 mins)	6. After having ideas on 3 endangered species (listened to 2 groups + the group's discussion), students are asked to construct a mind map to show the reasons for extinction.
(5 mins)	7. Classroom assessment: "student-generated test questions" Students are given A-5 paper and asked to write down at least one question and its answer for his / her classmates about the most challenging and meaningful thing they learnt during the lesson. The question-answer paper will be put into a box for (1) knowing what they have learnt (2) to start the following lesson with the "lucky draw" in order to recap key learning points and motivate students for further inquiry.
	8. Extended activities: continue the information search about the endangered animals assigned in order to have deep learning on 1 particular species. At the end of the unit, students are expected to write a proposal for protecting the species after evaluating current practices.
	Epilogue: presentation of the independent study of the gifted child(ren).

T: (852) 3940 0101 F: (852) 3940 0201 E: academy@hkage.org.hk W: www.hkage.org.hk