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# The Key Players

Matthew Boyle's work with both learners and teachers has been constantly underpinned by his deeply held conviction that all children can achieve given the right circumstances. In *The Learning File*, pupils will find a refreshing message: 'You are clever and you can do this.' This message, backed up by learning techniques and challenges to self-esteem, has been an invaluable starting point for many children who, to paraphrase the Elton report, 'have stopped playing a game which they see as unwinnable'.

Matthew's simple and practical approaches to breaking the dangerous cycle of expectation and belief have made him much in demand as a presenter to teachers and learners alike. This pack has grown out of Matthew's practical experience of the sort of friendly resources that teachers and pupils can use to refocus on core learning issues.

The HCD Education and General Charitable Trust was set up by Richard Timberlake, who recognised the potential of *The Learning File* to help young people develop the skills needed by industry, commerce and higher education. HCD and The Prince's Trust jointly funded Matthew to further develop the file at the Quality in Education Centre, University of Strathclyde under the direction of Professor John MacBeath, now Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Cambridge, who remains a consultant to the Trust.

HCD stands for 'Highest Common Denominator'. The Trustees seek a sharing of the values of independent learning, flexibility and self-confidence for all young people. They see *The Learning File* as a tool for empowering young people, enabling them to gain new learning perspectives which will enhance their lives and increase their opportunities.

## Preface

*The Learning File* is about effective learning. Its purpose is to help young people to think about how they think, how they remember, how they structure and reproduce what they have studied and how they can use what they have been taught. It is when young people are on their own, doing their homework or study, that these learning skills are most useful. Without them, learning is often tedious, time-consuming and inefficient. Armed with these skills, learning becomes enjoyable, efficient and fun.

Schools are for learning and yet hundreds of years after schools were first invented our knowledge of what learning is and how it works is still in its infancy. Major scientific breakthroughs are occurring every year. The following are just some of these:

- the different functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain
- the relationship of self-esteem to the ability to learn
- individual differences in learning styles
- emotional and social intelligence
- the effects of music on concentration and brain wave activity
- theory of multiple intelligences
- how memory works and how its powers can be dramatically improved.

There is a rich seam of research literature on learning which Matthew Boyle has mined to create a practical classroom resource for teachers and a unique course for students of all ages and abilities. *The Learning File* is also easily accessible to parents looking for ways to motivate and support their children's learning. Unless there is a bridge between how children learn at home and how they learn in the classroom, pupils will fall back on time-consuming practices which are not just inefficient but actually inhibit learning. They inhibit learning because they lower motivation and interest and thereby remove the driving motor of the intellect. There needs to be constant reinforcement and practice of learning skills – in all subjects. Teachers need to be convinced of the value of techniques and use them for themselves. They need to provide examples in their own subject teaching and help young people to develop expertise progressively and consistently over time.

This is a rich resource, which can be put to good effect both in mainstream education and in study support. By using the overhead transparencies or *PowerPoint* presentation in combination with the Teacher's Guide and Learning Skills worksheets, educators can help students strengthen their study skills and develop confidence in their ability to learn. Many teachers, viewing the materials for the first time, have recognised that they meet an urgent need for disenfranchised young people struggling to come to terms with their homework and with independent study.

# Course Overview

## Introduction

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The course is intended to address the lack of learning confidence and self-esteem shown by so many of our young learners. It is my firm conviction that raising educational standards will not be facilitated by the hard work of teachers alone. The students must be encouraged to see themselves as capable learners who will take an active part in gaining the education that will probably be the key to their future success or failure. The course is built upon the incredible body of evidence that the so-called 'intelligence quotient' of a child is not a fixed, or given, quantity, but instead, is a variable quantity, dependent more upon the self-esteem of the learner than any predetermined biological limitation.

I would ask that presenters of the course delve into the literature on the subject as much as time allows. While always challenging the student's assumptions about themselves and encouraging them to see themselves in a new light, we must be willing to look afresh at our own attitudes as teachers. Consider the model of education as a giant 'filing cabinet', in which the pupils are placed in top, middle or bottom drawers early in their schooling, and then, alarmingly, themselves collude with us in this early judgement. There are far too many cases of people leaving school as failures and ending up as university graduates simply because they have had a shift of self-esteem, often after breaking free from the limitations of peers and expectations.

Finally, I hope that anyone enterprising enough to tackle the presentation of this course will enjoy teaching such a worthwhile message to our learners and where possible, enjoy learning with them. Have fun!

## Approach

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Learners must not only want to learn, but must have some idea of the techniques available to help them to make learning simpler and more fun. So the approach is twofold:

1. Teach methods to help memory, optimise retention and aid understanding.
2. Teach learners to believe in themselves and therefore make them want to learn.

In addition, the course is in a deliberately bright and colourful format, to capture young learners' interest and to appeal as widely as possible. This is also necessary to effectively put across techniques such as mind mapping. The course is broadly modular in design. This is so that new and interesting sections of work can be 'slotted in' as required. This will also allow a more adaptable course for special applications such as study support or learning support.

## Tools

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### Mind Mapping

This is a powerful technique developed by Tony Buzan that is of enormous value in schools as a note-taking method. It can be used for whole-class summaries as well as individual learning. It deliberately uses many more aspects of memory than traditional linear notes. Long and short term memory are addressed in this context.

### Basic Brain Models

Two standard models of the brain are covered in a child-friendly and useful way: the triune brain model and

# Course Overview

the left and right brain model. Both models are related through exercises to classroom and individual learning experiences.

### **Mnemonics**

Simple memory methods are introduced to help students memorise lists of words, facts and numbers. Although simple mnemonics are frequently used already, there doesn't seem to be sufficient use made of the learners' own mnemonics as opposed to ones that 'worked for their teacher'. This skill should get better with practice.

### **Studying**

Planning of study sessions should ideally be built upon knowledge of how your memory retains a session of learning. This section of work not only explains study session duration, but also encourages the active planning of study time to optimise its effect.

### **Set and Belief**

Humans fall into mind-sets very easily. This means that we become tuned to particular signals such as success or failure and these systems of belief become our realities. Pupils need to be taught about the dangers of the self-fulfilling prophecy. This section challenges those beliefs through games and self-exploration with a peer group. Another reason why pupils struggle with self-belief is because they often have an 'entity' view of ability, which tells them that they are clever or not clever. The multiple intelligences section will advance pupils' thinking about their raw ability by positively challenging their simple views of intelligence.

### **Brainstorming**

Pupils often need to gather ideas, perhaps to plan an essay. Unfortunately, the blank page is often too big a hurdle for some unconfident learners. Here, the association of words and ideas is exploited to 'unclog' the brain and to fill up a plan on a 'one word at a time' basis.

### **Confidence**

Once pupils have started to feel a little more open to learning, they must learn how to use their personal resources more effectively to set personal goals and then achieve them. The people around the learner are critical to this and a technique for considering the effectiveness of your peer and family learning team is used. Breaking down tasks into manageable chunks to create 'learning ladders' is taught.

### **Speed Reading**

Getting words off the page faster and processing the key ideas of a text are combined in the standard speed reading method.

### **Thinking Skills**

The belief that we have a population of 'good thinkers' and 'bad thinkers' is still too commonly accepted. Basic techniques in discursive, logical and creative thought can give learners a new confidence in their thinking power. These must be backed up by opportunities to practise thinking in an atmosphere of mutual respect and expectation.

### **Learning Styles**

Individual learning preferences are introduced in Studying 2. The Dunn and Dunn model, which is highly practical, is used. Pupils are encouraged to use a study diary as a review tool to track such simple preferences as: When do you learn well? Where? With whom? In silence, or with music?

### **Target Setting**

Again, Studying 2 covers the necessity for long and short term goals in studying. The use of rewards is suggested for success in short term goals. The study diary is used as the vehicle for this. Sheets are supplied to provide pupils with the blank pages of a diary if they wish to use them.

# Introduction

## Overview

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This is simply a discussion framework to open the course. It mentions many of the chief objections that young people raise when asked what studying and school mean to them. It should mean opportunity, but to some it means problems, difficulties and distress.

## Suggestions

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The introduction can be simply read through together, stopping to raise points of interest, or it can be used to set the scene for a discussion on what the students' expectations of their studies actually are. A fair starting statement for such a discussion would be, 'In a recent study, around 90 per cent of 11- and 12-year-old students said that doing well at school was extremely important to them'. Remembering that peer pressure is often not to admit to such desires, a scene-setting class discussion could follow from this sort of statement. A variation may well be to ask the class to have a 'secret ballot' on whether it is important to them and see whether it is the same as an open, 'hands up' type vote.

If a notepad or a workbook is available, you could involve the class by asking them to write down any of the possible benefits identified in the introduction which they feel are important to them as individuals.

Alternatively, a class exercise to put the list of benefits in order of importance could stimulate some good discussion and possibly be the vehicle for some small-group work.

If time is pressing, then it could clearly be omitted.

## Relevant Reading

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*How We Feel* by Jacki Gordon and Gillian Grant

# Introduction

## So Why Learning Skills?

Your brain is the most powerful computer in the known universe. It contains 1,000,000,000,000 brain cells. This makes the brain capable of **1 with 800 zeroes after it** ways of connecting itself. The most powerful super-computer is billions of times less powerful.

**And yet!** People still say things like this:

- I'm not very clever!
- I don't know how to take notes!
- I can't do my homework!
- I don't like studying!
- I don't like schools!
- I don't have a good memory!
- I don't remember the notes I'm given!
- It's too hard for someone like me!
- Why bother learning?
- Reading's too much like bother!

**If any of these are like you,  
then you need this course!**