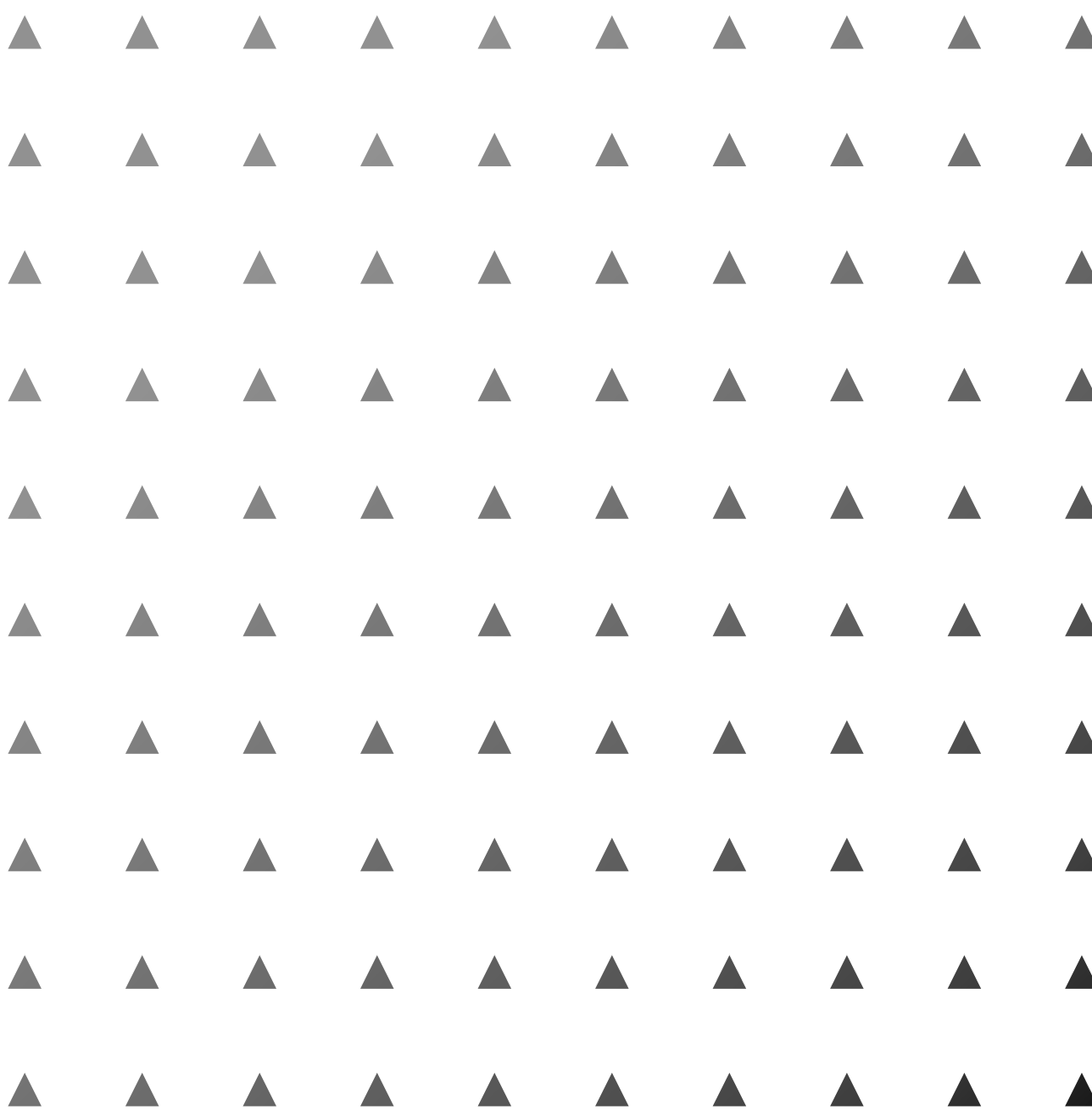


100 Activities for Teaching Study Skills

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100 Activities for Teaching Study Skills

Catherine Dawson



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Activity level index

This index helps tutors to find activities that are aimed at the right level for the courses they are teaching. It is not ideal: some may be uncomfortable with the terms (in particular, the term 'elementary', which was felt to be preferable to 'beginner'). Others may feel that it is impossible to categorise learners in this way or that the categories do not translate to a higher education context. However, this simple categorisation is necessary to help tutors to find the right activities for their particular student cohort. It is important to note, also, that these categories are only included in tutor's notes and, therefore, will not be seen by, or discussed with, students.

DEFINITION OF CATEGORIES

- Elementary level: this level includes students who need help with their study skills and learner development so that they feel comfortable with, and progress on, their course. It can include, for example, students at further education level, students in their first year of an undergraduate degree, adult returners, access course students, some Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students and some international students who may be unfamiliar with study requirements and teaching methods in the United Kingdom.
- Intermediate level: this level includes students who are progressing with their course but need further help with specific study skills and learner development. This can include students in their first or second year of an undergraduate course, for example.
- Advanced level: this level includes students who are progressing with their course but need help with specific skills and personal development so that they can complete their course and progress on successfully. This can include help with research and enquiry skills, or data analysis skills, for example. They tend to be students in the third year of an undergraduate course. However, it can also include postgraduate students in cases where they have had some time away from education before returning to their studies and they need a recap (or methods of teaching and learning have evolved since they have been away).

Some activities presented in this book are suitable for all three levels outlined above. In these cases the complexity of activity, exercise or discussion will reflect the level of study. The majority of activities, however, are presented at elementary level as this is when students tend to need most help with study skills and learner development.

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Activity type index

(in alphabetical order)

This index helps tutors to choose the type of activity that most suits their students, course, subject area and teaching and learning preferences. Some activities are listed in more than one category: this is because these activities can be run in more than one way. Alternatives are provided so that tutors can choose a different activity if the main activity type is inappropriate for a particular course, subject or student cohort.

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Introduction

This book is a collection of 100 pre-prepared, easy-to-use activities for lecturers, tutors and support staff (referred to as 'tutors' from now on) who facilitate learner development or teach study skills. It is a sourcebook of games, scenarios, role plays, self-guided individual exercises and group exercises that encourage interactive, experiential and reflective learning to help motivate and engage students. These activities can be used by both early-career tutors and more experienced tutors to complement existing course materials and teaching strategies, help with the design of new courses and add to existing learner development and study skills programmes.

Many of the activities presented in the book are relevant to, or can be connected with, course content, enabling students to learn through subject teaching. They are inclusive and are intended for the whole student cohort. Others are standalone activities that can be used where students feel that they need additional help with specific study skills or learner development. In these cases, tutors are advised to spend a little time ensuring that those students who could benefit most are invited to attend. Some activities run throughout the length of a course or module and follow course content, whereas others take only 50 minutes to one hour of contact time to help with specific skills and development. Individual, pairs, group and whole-class activities are offered: some are student-centred or student-developed, whereas others are tutor-led or tutor-developed.

There are a wide variety of activities presented in the book, including collaborative dialogue, reflective journals, brainstorming, storytelling, group presentations, digital resource development, scenario development, one-to-one support sessions, workshops, vlogs and blogs and podcast production. Some activities present a problem for students to work through, reflect and act upon; others place students in the position of educator, asking them to teach about the topic; some encourage collaboration, sharing of ideas and learning from experiences. Tutor and/or peer feedback, support and encouragement are central to most activities.

The activities are aimed at three levels of study, providing continuous learning opportunities throughout an undergraduate course and for some postgraduate courses. This enables students to develop their learning progressively and helps to encourage the development and understanding of transferable and lifelong skills, which will be of benefit to their studies and to their personal and professional lives when their course has finished. The levels of activity are elementary, intermediate and advanced, and these are discussed in detail in the 'activity level' index (this categorisation may be controversial for some: a justification for its use is given in the index). Tutors can use the index to choose the activities that are most suited to the level at which their students are studying. Some activities are suitable for all three levels and when this occurs the level of study will be reflected in the complexity of discussion or exercise and in the topics covered.

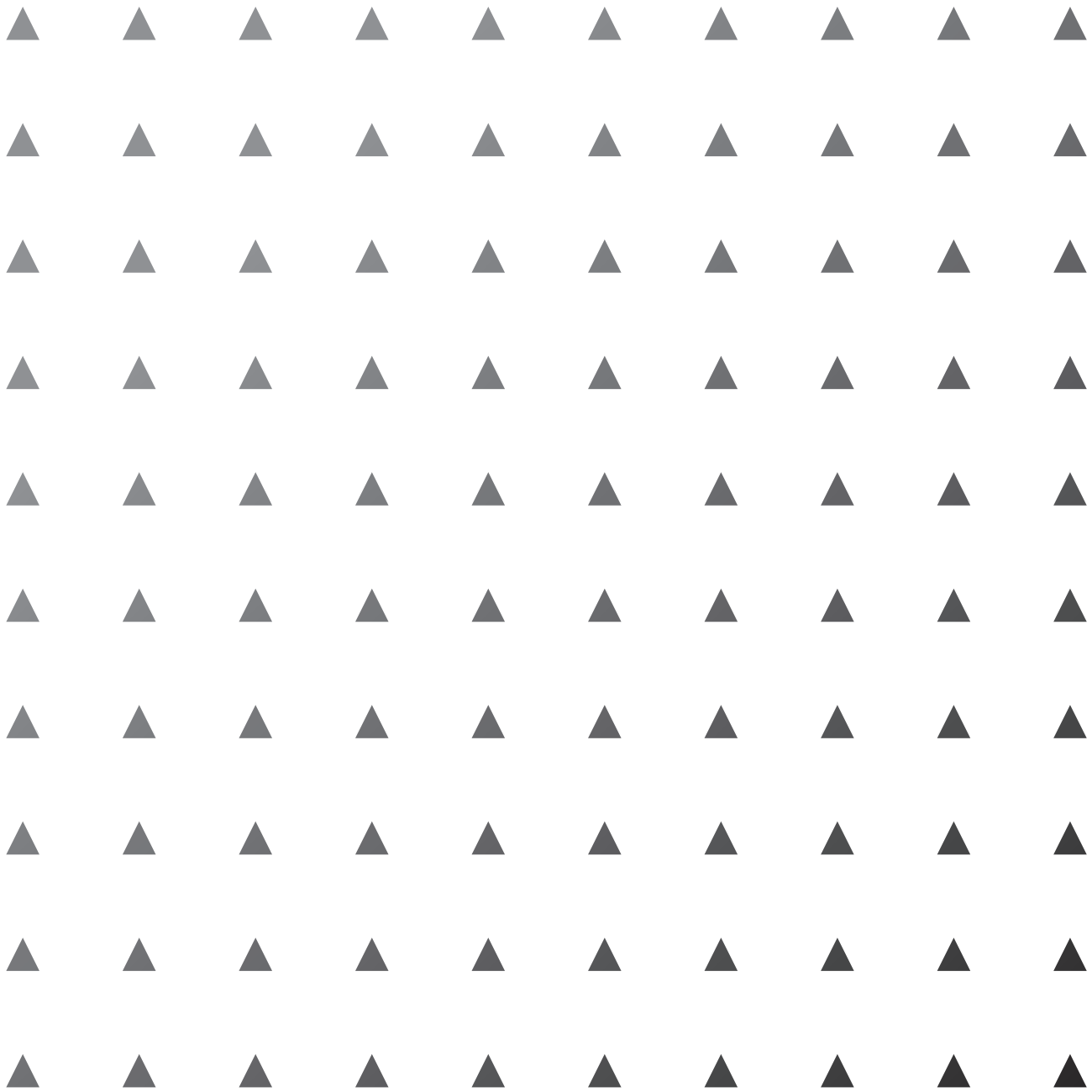
An 'activity type' index is also included so that tutors can choose the type of activity that most suits their students, course and subject area. An 'alternative type' is provided, where possible, if tutors are interested in a particular topic but do not think that the activity type would be suitable for their students. It is also possible for tutors to mix and match type of activity with topic (in cases where an activity is of interest, but the specific topic is not relevant, for example).

The activities have been divided into 13 sections for ease of navigation. Tutors can skim and scan the contents to find relevant activities quickly, or choose to use the activity or type index. It is intended that the book should be used as a flexible 'pick and mix' resource: tutors can skip within and between the sections to draw together the activities that are useful and relevant to their particular student cohort (with pointers given to related activities). The flexible nature of this sourcebook enables tutors to use the most relevant and useful activities in the order that they deem most appropriate.

Each activity is divided into tutor's notes and student handouts and includes the following categories:

- purpose;
- type;
- alternative type(s);
- level;
- duration;
- equipment/materials;
- learning outcome;
- description;
- key issues;
- preparatory reading;
- further reading.

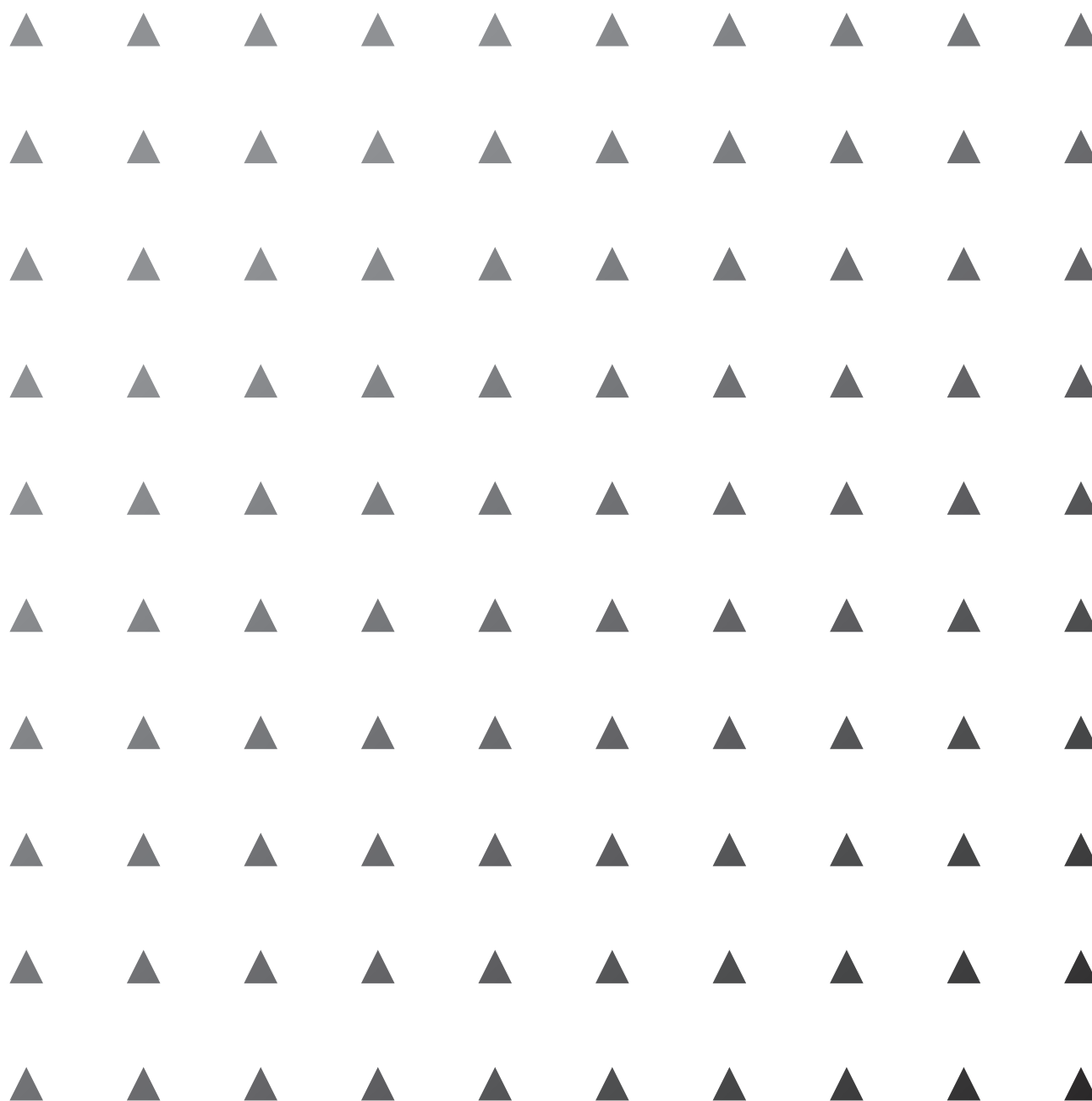
These categories enable tutors to choose the most relevant activities for their student cohort and level of study, follow them with related activities and access further information (books, journals and online resources) quickly and efficiently.



Part 1

Tutor Notes





Section 1

Study
preparation



Activity → 1

Bringing learning to life

TUTOR NOTES

Purpose: This activity brings learning to life for students by asking them to think about, and reflect on, the benefits, improvements and personal development that can be gained from learning. It provides structured guidance by asking them to read a couple of paragraphs that describe what can be said about learning, and then answer a series of related questions about their personal learning. It is a personal exercise that does not take up contact time and can be used at the start of your course.

Type: Student worksheet.

Alternative type(s): Workshop.

Level: Elementary.

Duration: Up to one hour during independent study or 50 minutes to one hour of contact time, if the workshop option is chosen.

Equipment/materials: None required.

Learning outcome: By the end of this activity students will have an increased understanding of the benefits, improvements and personal development that can be gained from learning, and be able to relate this understanding to their past, present and future learning on their course and in their personal and professional lives.

Student
handout
page 289

The activity

Ask your students to undertake the exercise contained in the Student Handout. This requests them to read a couple of paragraphs that describe the positive benefits of learning and then work through a series of exercises and questions that relate this to their own past, present and future learning. Although this activity tends to work best as an individual exercise during independent study, it is possible to run it in a workshop, if this suits your student cohort (if they are happy, willing and able to share personal experiences with group members, for example).

Key issues

Some students are quite surprised by the content of the two paragraphs, having never thought about their learning in this way. These students see themselves as empty vessels to be filled with information given by their tutors, which they can then use to gain qualifications and, hopefully, obtain a good job in the future. This activity helps them to think more deeply about learning and encourages them to see the relevance of their learning not just in instrumental and/or economic terms, but in whole-life terms. Those students who take time with this activity often report feeling more motivated, enthusiastic and interested in their studies because they have a deeper understanding of the relevance of learning. They report that it 'brings learning to life', which provides a useful title for this activity.

→ Cautionary note

When this activity was first run a list of questions was produced for students to work their way through. However, this was ineffective because many of the students were unable to move beyond the instrumental motivation described above. Once the two descriptive paragraphs were added the exercise worked much better, encouraging students to think more deeply about their learning.

You may find, however, that some students do not agree with the sentiments expressed in the paragraphs and find it difficult to answer the questions. Some have had negative learning experiences, where their self-worth has been damaged, family relationships have suffered or expectations have been raised but not met, for example. In these cases it is useful to discuss the issues with the student, perhaps on a one-to-one basis if time permits. In most cases, with further advice and guidance, they begin to see that learning may have potential, even if their personal experiences, so far, suggest otherwise.

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→ Related activities

Activity 2: Becoming a reflective learner

Activity 3: Learning to learn

Activity 4: Developing metacognition

Activity 8: Becoming part of a learning community

Activity 58: Reflecting, thinking and making connections

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→ Preparatory reading

Reiff, M. and Ballin, A. (2016) 'Adult graduate student voices: good and bad learning experiences', *Adult Learning*, 27 (2): 76-83, published online before print 23 February 2016, <http://doi.org/10.1177/1045159516629927>. This paper provides interesting preparatory reading for tutors.

Schuller, T. (2004) *The Benefits of Learning: The Impact of Education on Health, Family Life and Social Capital*. London: Routledge. In its entirety this provides useful preparatory reading for tutors (if time is short, part C provides a useful summary).

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→ Further reading

All three books listed below provide relevant reading for tutors and for students who wish to follow up some of the issues raised in this activity.

Feinstein, L., Budge, D., Vorhaus, J. and Duckworth, K. (eds) (2008) *The Social and Personal Benefits of Learning: a Summary of Key Research Findings*. London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education.

McMahon, W. (2009) *Higher Learning, Greater Good: The Private and Social Benefits of Higher Education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Schuller, T. (2004) *The Benefits of Learning: The Impact of Education on Health, Family Life and Social Capital*. London: Routledge.

Activity 1

Activity → 1

Bringing learning to life

STUDENT HANDOUT

Please read the following two paragraphs:

Learning is concerned with the whole person and can include our physical, mental, emotional and psychological development. Learning helps us to think about our identity, who we are, what we do (or want to do) and helps us to find our place in the world. It helps us to think about our past, present and future lives and reflect on how this is interconnected with our past, present and future learning.

Learning helps us to think about, develop and express our attitudes, values and ideals. It helps us to overcome problems, succeed in times of crisis and manage long-term difficulties. It can provide support, encouragement, companionship and increase independence, self-esteem and confidence. New skills are learnt and developed, helping us to work, socialise, improve relationships, improve health and well-being, and develop hobbies. What we learn can be captivating, tantalising and fascinating. Learning involves passion, intrigue and excitement and takes place throughout our lives.

Once you have read these two paragraphs, complete the following exercise:

1. Provide some examples of how learning has helped you to develop. Try to include your 'physical, mental, emotional and psychological' development.
2. Give examples of how learning has helped you to overcome a problem, deal with a crisis and/or manage long-term difficulties.
3. How can learning provide 'support, encouragement and companionship'?
4. How can learning increase 'independence, self-esteem and confidence'?
5. Provide examples of instances where your personal learning has been 'captivating, tantalising and fascinating'. Think about formal learning that has taken place in the classroom, and informal learning that has taken place in your life, perhaps over many years and in many different situations.
6. Provide examples of instances where your personal learning has involved 'passion, intrigue and excitement'. Again, consider both formal and informal learning.

Complete this exercise as fully and honestly as possible. Thinking about your learning in this way will help you to get more from your studies, help you to stay motivated, remain enthusiastic and enjoy your learning. This exercise is for your personal benefit: it will not be assessed or seen by your tutor or peers, unless you wish to discuss the issues that have been raised with someone after you have completed the exercise.

Learning outcome: By the end of this activity you will have an increased understanding of the benefits, improvements and personal development that can be gained from learning, and be able to relate this understanding to your past, present and future learning on your course and in your personal and professional lives.