

## The Learning Pit in your school newsletter

You are welcome to copy and paste any of the information below into your school newsletter. If you do, then please be sure to include this note: For more information and an introductory video by its creator, James Nottingham, go to [www.learningpit.org/guide/at-home](http://www.learningpit.org/guide/at-home)

### In the Learning Pit!

Your child might have mentioned that they've been "in the Learning Pit". This is not as painful as it sounds! In fact, we positively encourage our young people to go through the Learning Pit because this can help them develop problem solving strategies; communicate effectively about their learning; and make connections that are stronger and longer lasting.

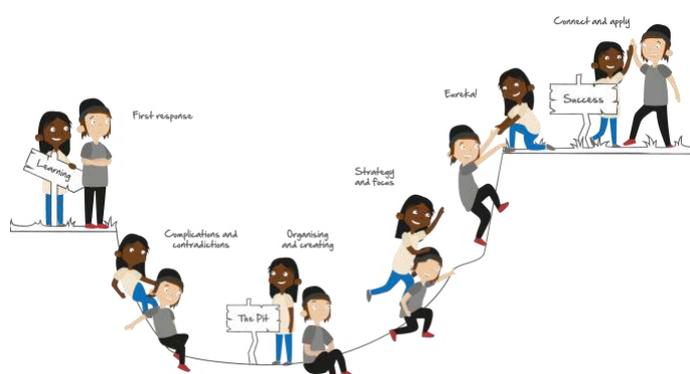
The Learning Pit is certainly popular. Do a search online and you'll be presented with millions of results. The first of its kind was created by James Nottingham in the late 90s. As a teacher, he noticed that many of his pupils avoided challenging tasks, preferring instead to take the 'easy route'. These quick wins can have their merits, particularly when time is short, but they also lead to *less* learning – which is something we want to avoid in school bearing in mind our main purpose is to help young people learn *more!*

The benefits of setting challenging tasks are well proven by educational research, for example ...

"If students do not have to work hard to make sense of what they are learning, then they are less likely to remember it in six weeks' time." (Dylan Wiliam, professor of educational assessment at the University College, London)

"When learners do well on a learning task, they are likely to forget things more quickly than if they do badly on the learning task. Desirable difficulties enhance learning." (Elizabeth & Robert Bjork, professors of educational psychology at University College, Los Angeles)

The Learning Pit is one way to help bring these theories alive in our classrooms.



If you prefer a different version of the pit, for example one with younger-looking characters, then you can select from the 'Option 1 images' on the same webpage that you found this document.

Our full range is available at [www.learningpit.org/resources/graphics](http://www.learningpit.org/resources/graphics)  
A conference code allows you to download the whole set for free.

When we introduced the Learning Pit to our young people, we shared the following sentiments: Have you noticed that when we learn something new, we sometimes get worse before we get better? Things start off well – for example, we discover 'this' or 'that' is the answer – but then we realise there are lots of ways in which 'this' and 'that' don't work. A similar situation occurs when we're quite successful with a new strategy or technique when someone is guiding us but then, when we have a go by ourselves, things don't seem to work out quite so well.

This can be frustrating. Some of us even begin to question our own abilities, thinking that we're the only one struggling.

The truth of the matter is that struggling is a *normal* part of learning! Finding the first bit of information can be quite easy. But understanding how that information is important; how it connects to other things we know; whether or not it is reliable information; and deciding when (or even if) to use it, is much more complex. It requires a lot more thinking!

It's the same when trying a technique for the first time. Typically, we begin by copying someone else. They guide and we follow. However, when they leave us to try it alone, it all goes a bit pear shaped! We forget something important, or we muddle up the order in which we should do things. We put more effort into the wrong thing, which causes us to tense-up and before we know it, we feel as if our first attempts must have been 'beginner's luck'.

Even though it is a normal part of learning, many people think it's a weakness not to be able to do it first time! They see others being successful and assume everyone else can do it *apart from them* – they think they're the only ones struggling! But you know what? Floundering is so normal, there's even a model to show how common it is. It's called the Learning Pit.



Feel free to choose any of the images from Option 2 on the same webpage that you found this document. This is one of our bilingual versions (of which there are an increasing number). If your preferred language isn't available, then send us the translations and we'll be happy to create a new image for you.

As part of this introduction, we also played this video for our young people: [\(a new animated video will be available soon- check back to see an updated newsletter\)](#)

There are two introductions available. The one above plus this one that is more suitable for older students (secondary / high school): [\(a new video will be available for secondary students soon- check back to see an updated newsletter\)](#)

If you would like to read more about the Learning Pit, then we recommend visiting [www.learningpit.org/guide/at-home](http://www.learningpit.org/guide/at-home). On there, you'll find an introductory video by its creator, James Nottingham, together with features appearing in the New York Times, on Radio Four, and in the Financial Times, amongst others.

In the meantime, when your child tells you about being in the Learning Pit, let them into a secret: we all go through the Learning Pit again and again – and even though it feels uncomfortable at the time, we always benefit from it in the long-run! It's rather like gymnastics for the mind: the more we work at it, the harder we train, the stronger and fitter we become.

Finally – we aim to post additional resources periodically to encourage school-home connections. So check back in a few months to see what else you can find!