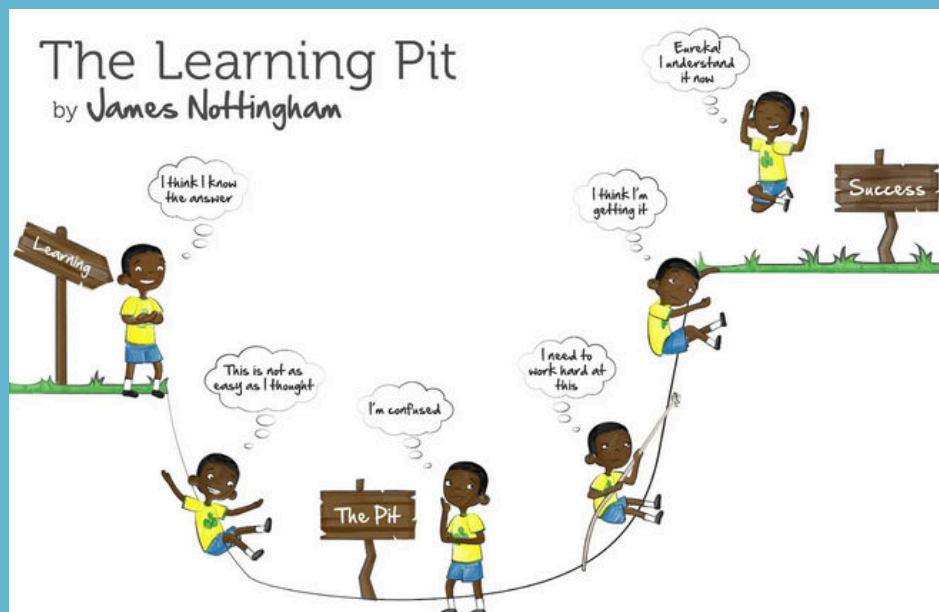


HOW DOES THE LEARNING PIT SUPPORT TEACHING TO THE TOP?

9~ 24/25

The Learning Pit aligns closely with our focus on Teaching to the Top. It supports us to consistently teach the most challenging concepts and make them accessible to all students. Research shows that deep, meaningful learning happens when students are appropriately challenged. Megan Mansworth's Teaching to the Top emphasises that effective teaching stretches students to engage with high-level concepts. The Learning Pit provides a structure that encourages students to embrace difficulty, persist through struggle, and ultimately achieve mastery of challenging content.



1. Concept (Comfort Zone) Students start with a basic or surface-level understanding of a topic. They feel confident but are not yet challenged to think deeply.

How it supports Teaching to the Top:

- Provides a safe starting point before pushing students beyond their comfort zone.
- Builds students' confidence to take on more challenging material.

Trusted Techniques:

- Diagnostic questioning: Identify misconceptions and prior knowledge gaps to tailor the challenge.

Research Link:

Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction emphasise the importance of activating prior knowledge before introducing complexity.

2. Conflict (Descent into the Pit) Students encounter challenging ideas that contradict their prior knowledge, creating cognitive conflict. This stage can feel uncomfortable but is crucial for growth.

How it supports Teaching to the Top:

- Encourages cognitive dissonance, which drives deeper questioning and understanding.
- Provides an opportunity for students to confront high-level misconceptions.

Trusted Techniques

- "Productive struggle": Normalise challenge by framing struggle as a necessary step in learning.

Research Link:

Bjork's concept of "desirable difficulties" suggests that struggle enhances long-term retention.

3. Struggle (Depth of the Pit). Students experience confusion, frustration, and doubt. However, perseverance through this struggle leads to meaningful learning.

How it supports Teaching to the Top:

- Develops resilience and independent problem-solving skills.
- Encourages critical thinking and deeper engagement with complex concepts.

Trusted Techniques

- "Not yet" mindset: Use language such as "You haven't mastered this yet" to promote perseverance.

Research Link:

Dweck's growth mindset theory highlights the role of persistence in learning.



4. Insight (Climbing Out of the Pit): Through reflection and effort, students begin to make connections and gain clarity. Concepts start to make sense and confidence builds.

How it supports Teaching to the Top:

- Reinforces high expectations and supports mastery of complex ideas.
- Helps students articulate their understanding with precision.

Trusted Techniques

- Metacognitive reflection: Encourage students to articulate their thought processes and how they overcame obstacles.

Research Link:

The Sutton Trust identifies metacognition as a high-impact teaching strategy.



5. Application (On Solid Ground): Students apply their refined understanding to new contexts, demonstrating their mastery and embedding knowledge deeply.

How it supports Teaching to the Top:

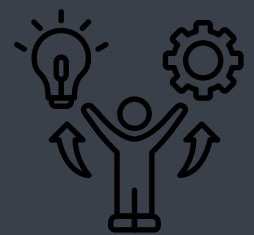
- Ensures transfer of high-level knowledge to unfamiliar situations.
- Builds academic resilience and self-efficacy.

Trusted Techniques

- Interleaving practice: Reinforce learning by revisiting concepts in different contexts.

Research Link:

Willingham's work on retrieval practice shows that repeated application strengthens long-term retention.



To foster a culture where students embrace challenge and high expectations, we must:

- Encourage students to see struggle as a necessary and valuable part of learning.
- Use the Learning Pit to help students understand their own learning journey.
- Implement trusted techniques that make challenges both achievable and rewarding.

Reflection questions:

- How can I use the Learning Pit to help students embrace challenging content?
- Which trusted techniques could I embed in my teaching to support students in each stage of the Learning Pit?

