

This Spotlight looks at what happens when we reflect on our own Learning Pit experiences. The Learning Pit shows that confusion is not failure but the gateway to deep learning. By drawing on our own experiences, explicitly or implicitly, we model empathy and resilience for our students. It also returns to some of the key Learning Pit ideas from the INSET

1. Use your own Learning Pit stories

Telling students about a time you struggled helps normalise wobble and models persistence. (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

“When I first learned to code, I hit so many dead ends — but debugging taught me to think like a computer scientist.”

2. The power of stories and empathy

Use stories to frame key ideas, normalise struggle, and make concepts memorable — but keep them lean and purposeful. Avoid “seductive details” that entertain but don’t teach. (Willingham, 2004; Harp & Mayer, 1998)

Instead of distraction, think: “The story is the bridge, not the destination.”

3. Key Learning Pit ideas from the INSET

- See struggle as positive → “I’m learning, I’m struggling, but I will get there.”
- Change the language → Struggle is not failure, it’s progress.
- Don’t show them too much → Suggest rather than tell, so they believe they can do it themselves.
- Ask more questions → Use a greater range of easier and harder problems.
- Reframe challenge → Help students see it as opportunity, not threat.
- Desirable difficulties → Productive struggle makes learning stick.
- Don’t praise speed → Praise persistence and depth, not just getting things right quickly.
- Pedagogical pedometer → Build more steps into thinking so learning is deeper.
- Train hard so you can play easy → Lessons should be hard so that the exams feel easy.
- Students should live on the edge of their ability → Stretch and challenge are essential for growth.



With thanks to Claire Spinks

Reflection Questions

- How can I use my own experiences, explicitly through stories or implicitly through empathy, to support students?
- Have I revisited some of the key ideas from the INSET?
- Have I spoken to colleagues about how they are using the Learning Pit in their teaching?

