

When students are in the Pit, learning feels hard and our instinct is often to rescue. This Spotlight looks at 3 Trusted Techniques and suggests (habit forming) phrases that help us support students without stealing their thinking. The key habits we are trying to form are ~ that we don't remove difficulty, we guide students through it, with belief, clarity, and encouragement. The small language choices we make have a huge impact on thinking, learning, and behaviour. What are your "go to" phrases?

1. Cold Call with Thinking Time: Everyone thinks. Everyone is supported.

- **Before asking:**

"The question I'm going to ask everyone is..." "I'm going to give everyone 20 seconds to think."
"This isn't a quick answer — take your time."

- **When naming a student:**

"I'll come back to you — it doesn't need to be perfect." "Have a go — we'll build it together."

- **What this does in the Learning Pit:**

- Makes thinking the expectation, not volunteering
- Reduces anxiety by removing speed pressure
- Keeps all students mentally present



2. Purposeful Think–Pair–Share / Turn & Talk Talk that strengthens thinking, not replaces it.

Set it up clearly:

"Think first — then explain your thinking to your partner....." "You're talking about how you're thinking, not just the answer."

During talk:

"Talk it through — it doesn't need to be polished....." "Where did you get stuck?" "What helped you move forward?"

Bring it back:

"Be ready to build on your partner's idea....." "What did your partner say that helped you?"

- **What this does in the Learning Pit:**

- Normalises uncertainty
- Improves the quality of answers when we return to cold call
- Gives talk a clear purpose, supporting behaviour for learning



3. Probing Follow-Ups & No Opt Out: Reposition thinking instead of rescuing

- **After a partial or hesitant answer:**

"What makes you think that.....?" "Can you say a bit more.....?" "Which part are you confident about?"
"That's a good start — let's build on it."

- **If a student is stuck:**

"Listen to this answer — now have another go....." "What's one word or idea you're sure about?"

- **The message we send when students are in the Learning Pit:**

- Not: "You must know."
- But: "You're not done thinking yet — and I believe you can get there."

