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The Learning Pit: Fostering a Growth Mindset

By [Peter DeWitt](#) on May 26, 2015 7:05 AM



Have you ever felt stuck? Maybe you were working on something for a class and had to read, reread, and reread the information again but it's still wasn't necessarily coming to you. Perhaps you were working on your classic car and couldn't figure out how to put a part back together. Do you look at it as an opportunity to grow...after you get passed the frustration stage?

After all, we learn a lot about ourselves when learning doesn't come easy, which is why there was a Harvard study a few years ago about [the Ikea Effect](#).

If you have ever found the inner-strength to build a piece of furniture from Ikea to deal with small parts and multiple pieces, you know a bit about resilience. Resilience is something we all need to get through those tough moments in life. Without resilience we are more at risk of shutting down and giving up. Of course we understand that many children learn resilience just from living their daily lives.

Although there are always common themes in learning, we know that not all students are the same, and we understand that some students approach learning with a fervor that others do not. Perhaps it's due to the parental support at home, a great teacher that inspires students from the moment they walk in the door, or a natural disposition to learning.

Regardless of whether students are easily engaged or not, learning is not always easy if it is done correctly. John Hattie, someone I work with as a Visible Learning trainer, talks, researched and writes that learning should be a challenge at times. He says that learning is hard work.

We need to find ways, even in this day and age of high accountability, to make sure that children (as well as adults) understand that learning is supposed to be a challenge from time to time. Yes, it's supposed to be fun and inspiring, but challenge is important as well.

One of the best methods of talking with students about challenge comes from [James Nottingham](#). It's called the *Learning Pit*.

If you haven't heard the analogy about the Learning Pit you should [check out this blog by Nottingham](#). In the blog, Nottingham writes,

One of the frameworks I regularly share with teachers is that of the Learning Pit, a model that explains how and why challenge is necessary for learning. Having first heard Dr. John Edwards in 2001 using a "pit" to explain how organisational growth more often than not involves getting worse before getting better, I thought that the metaphor was an ideal way to explain to my students why I was consistently making things more difficult for them.

If done correctly, the Learning Pit can really help foster a growth mindset in classrooms and schools.

Students Readily Jump Into the Pit

In order to really jump into the learning pit analogy, the classroom climate has to be right. Classroom climate is equally as important as school climate. Teachers feel they can take risks in the classroom when they have a supportive school climate, and the same can be said for students who have a supportive classroom climate. I have had the opportunity to hear students talk about "*The Pit*," and they look at learning as an opportunity to grow.

I've heard younger students say they jump into the pit and get dirty, try to claw their way out without the help of the teacher, and when they succeed it feels good. They understood that they took control over their own learning, even when it was hard. Just like the Ikea Effect, they found resilience and didn't shut down, so getting to the other side of the pit was gratifying.

The reason why using the Learning Pit analogy is so important is that it gives students control over their own learning. They are not victims sitting at their desks waiting for teachers to give them the next lesson of "*sit and get*," or [Death By Ditto](#). It's not about the script or the time

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on task. It's about moving forward and knowing where to go to next (Hattie). Learning, when done with the pit analogy involved, puts students in the driver's seat.

Nottingham says, "*It helps students to persevere, inquire, collaborate, and achieve a learning eureka!*" Of course he says it in his best English accent. To learn more about the Learning Pit, and what Nottingham calls Cognitive Conflict, view this Vimeo below.



The Learning Challenge with James Nottingham

from **Challenging Learning** PRO

11:30 |



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