Academic Resiliency Through The Learning Pit

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How might applying the Learning Pit model affect academic resilience in Year 6 boys?

Further Information
This poster and further information is available at http://www.theibsc.org/
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"I've learned that not all challenges are easy to face and not every challenge you can figure out by yourself. Sometimes you're going to need help."

VISION

Each boy has every opportunity to excel.

WELLESLEY COLLEGE

MISSION

We bring out the best in each boy: body, mind and spirit.

"At first I feel nervous and annoyed [when I face a challenge] but then soon after I use the Learning Pit, and I get a different perspective or point of view."

Introduction

Over a period of ten weeks, nineteen Year 6 boys aged between 10 and 11 from Wellesley College, New Zealand, utilized James Nottingham's model for learning, the *Learning Pit*. I wondered if explicitly teaching a learning model that guided boys through the challenges associated with academic tasks could enable them to bounce back from rejection, failure, mistakes or setbacks in their learning and help them accept academic challenges and manage their emotions when faced with demanding learning situations. As a result, my action research project was focussed on answering the question: *How might applying the Learning Pit model affect academic resilience in Year 6 boys?*

Research Context and Participants

Wellesley College is an independent Anglican day school located in Days Bay, Wellington, New Zealand. Wellesley College caters to the educational needs of boys from New Entrants to Year 8. The participants in my action research project were a mixed-ability group of 19, Year 6, 10 to 11 year-old boys. I taught this group of boys every day.

The Research Action

I split the project's action phase into two stages. Stage One was four weeks in length and involved unpacking the *Learning Pit* concept. The second stage of the unit was six weeks in length and involved applying the *Learning Pit* model to challenging concepts and academic tasks.

Data Collection

During each stage of the project, I utilized an array of qualitative data collection methods. This was done to gather an accurate representation of boys' perspectives on academic resiliency, to document progress, and to provide regular opportunities for the boys to make sense of their positioning in relation to academic resiliency. Data were collected through: direct observations, field notes, student drawings, written reflections, work submissions, videos, photographs, interviews, and questionnaires.

Data Analysis

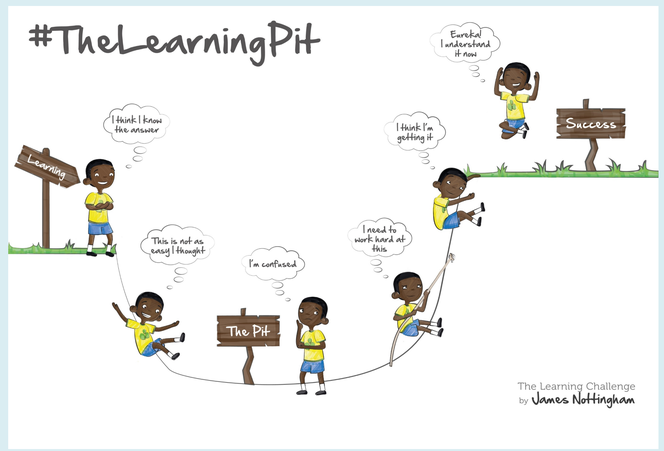
I collated all codes, categories, and themes from the project data into one document. The data were then cross-checked with the boys to ensure that a clear picture of their experiences had been recorded. All data methods and analysis processes were then rechecked twice to evaluate the trustworthiness of the collected data. I analysed the results to ascertain changes and development in the boys' perspectives on academic resiliency and to discern the success of the project.

Key Readings

Dweck, C. (2008). *Mindset: The new psychology of success.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Martin, A. J., & Marsh, H. W. (2003). *Academic resilience and the four Cs: Confidence, control, composure, and commitment.* Self-concept Enhancement and Learning Facilitation Research Centre. University of Western Sydney, Australia. Paper presented at NZARE AARE, Auckland, New Zealand November 2003.

Nottingham, J. (2017). *James Nottingham's the learning challenge: The Learning Pit*. Retrieved from: http://jamesnottingham.co.uk



Key Outcomes

After analysing, coding, and categorising the data, three themes emerged that showcased how the project action affected the boys' academic resiliency. These themes were:

- Motivation to utilize strategies to overcome academic challenges
- Reduction in stress and anxiety related to academic challenges
- Increased self-efficacy through reflection

Conclusions

The success of this project has future implications for the way adaptability is addressed at Wellesley College. My intention is to review the various frameworks for learning that teachers currently reference and begin the process of developing a learning model specific for boys in our unique school context. I found Stringer's (2014) action research model of *look, think, act* powerful in ensuring that lessons were intentional, purposeful and based on qualitative evidence.

I taught the stages of the *Learning Pit* through video, drama, stop-motion animation, plays, art and discussion.

The boys shared their learning progress on their *SeeSaw* digital portfolios and through written journals.

Boys created their own versions of the *Learning Pit*. A wall display of the *Learning Pit* was created that contained strategies for moving through each stage.

The boys applied the *Learning Pit* model and associated strategies to challenging concepts such as fairness, fake news, and culture, and to short academic tasks that involved writing, reading and maths.

The boys applied the *Learning Pit* to lengthy, meatier academic tasks that spanned several weeks, such as Genius Hour projects and the creation and delivery of speeches.

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International Boys' Schools Coalition Action Research Program 2017 – 2018:

Adaptability in a Changing World