

Bringing together threshold concepts, curriculum and student learning: A model for focusing the studies of a discipline

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Threshold concepts have attracted interest from a wide range of discipline groups within the higher education sector (see Flanagan's website <http://www.ee.ucl.ac.uk/~mflanaga/thresholds.html>). Additionally, they have been embraced by both new and experienced educationalists (Cousin, 2009; McLean, 2009). This has led to a growing amount of diverse literature. Much of the discourse focuses on threshold concepts as being a particular conceptual gateway through which the learner moves. The emphasis on identification of threshold concepts is aligned with this agenda.

Whilst the literature is moving its attention to curriculum (Rodger, Turpin et al. 2013), student learning (Ward and Meyer 2010) and research (Quinlan, Male et al. 2013) the discussion remains somewhat disjointed and in its infancy. Additionally for the first time reader of the threshold concepts literature, concepts are often presented but not contextually situated. The overall useability of the ideas for a discipline focussed academic interested in curriculum development is limited.

From the perspective of trying to use threshold concepts and related educational ideas in curriculum development, the authors have sought to bring together the main elements of the threshold concepts conversation. We introduce a conceptual model which is holistic and integrative in nature and includes threshold concepts, student learning and curriculum (Barradell and Kennedy-Jones 2013). Significantly, we have also included ways of thinking and practising, meaningful learning, liminality, and meta-learning as related central ideas which increase the utility of the threshold concepts framework. Primarily, the model is used to inform curriculum development including discussions about teaching and learning approaches. Research questions are also discovered if the relationships between the elements of the model are interrogated.

In the presentation, we describe the model and draw on our own experiences as health professional educators to show how the model has encouraged us to think differently about our role as educators and what we might most usefully offer to students and the future of our professions.

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