

On the threshold with students

Threshold Concepts in Practice– University of Durham – July 2014

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Heuristics “help us think more clearly about what we’re doing, and they afford us language through which we can exchange ideas and dilemmas.”

“They are powerful in these ways as long as we don’t take them too seriously.”

Shulman, 2002



<http://fahrneganzz.blogspot.co.uk/2012/11/appreciate-multiple-one-of-core.html>

How might student understandings of threshold concepts differ from those of academic staff?

“threshold concepts is a useful framework
for reflecting on your own learning”

“likely to be transformative”

“probably irreversible”

“can only integrate so much”

“possibly... bounded”

“potentially (though not necessarily)
troublesome”

Meyer & Land, 2005



troublesome affect

troublesome knowledge

conceptually difficult

counter-intuitive

alien

inert

tacit

ritual

incoherent

Encountering a threshold

“stressful”

“debilitating”

“frustrating”

“intensely emotional”

**25.5% of history
bottlenecks are
“affective issues”**

Shopkow, 2010

“shocked”

“upset”

“utterly hopeless”

“very anxious”

“Knowledge may be emotionally neutral. There is no obvious emotion content to the concept of chemical bonding, for example. However, the manner in which an individual interacts with knowledge is emotionally charged.”

Blackie et al, 2010

liminal spaces

playing with race, class, and gender

“School militates against uncertainty”

“The primary obstacle to such transfer is not that students are *unable* to recognize situations outside [the classroom] in which those skills can be used, but that students *do not look for* situations because they believe that skills learned [in the classroom] have no value in any other setting.”

Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007

threshold confidence

“One thing that I have noticed is that threshold concepts are not just about knowledge, they also are about confidence.”

Mindsets (Dweck, 2006)

Learning power: a complex set of dispositions, lived experiences, social relations, values and attitudes that combine to influence how an individual engages with particular learning opportunities (Deakin Crick et al, 2004)

“Self-stories of learners” influence their learning power (Deakin Crick, 2014)

Prof Laura McGrane: Are we really reliably able to discern the difference between faking and authentic making?

Ryan Rebel: Sometimes we can. But sometimes one man's faking is more authentic than another man's making. This binary is further problematized by our discussions on threshold concepts.... I've often felt like I've been faking a certain discipline until that mysterious ethereal retrospective moment when I realize I have crossed the threshold and am actually doing it.

But is there any threshold after all? Is there only a continuous scale of less and less and less faking until you're the person in the world who is faking the least and so nobody can call you on it anymore?

That's kind of depressing. Or liberating, maybe.

disciplining thresholds

“It is so frustrating how limiting it is that you can only cross the threshold when you're in the classroom and in the mindset of that discipline.... I feel like that doesn't take into account how different factors that aren't necessarily academic push one over to crossing that threshold so I've been dying to redefine what threshold concepts are. I think it just so happens that they occur in the discipline or the classroom but they are not limited to it.”

Do threshold concepts exist outside of individual disciplines?

Can you cross a disciplinary threshold by learning outside of that discipline?

Is disciplinary discourse necessary to cross a threshold?

“I used to think thresholds were about making connections to disciplines but now I think they are about making connections to yourself and your position within the topic you are studying.”

“If faculty are being paid to change us, where is our agency to resist? To unlearn? Or conversely, to make [a threshold concept] over as our own?”



liminality

discipline



confidence

affect

What are the implications of these student perspectives for how we teach or research threshold concepts?

anticipate affective trouble,
and help students work through it

encourage intellectual play
linked to authentic contexts

cultivate confidence
through student story telling

look for opportunities outside of
the discipline and the classroom
to support crossing thresholds

partner with students to explore
threshold concepts

“I think some faculty ... are so focused on getting stuff done that they don't pay attention to their students, who I think are the most valuable resources in the classroom.”

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