

Threshold Concepts in Learning Activism

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This paper presents findings on threshold concepts encountered by students in a third-year Liberal Education course on the topic “Activism.” The course is part of an elective program in an Arts and Science faculty emphasizing a philosophy of liberal education. One of the central aims of liberal education is to guide students to grow into active contributing members of their communities, people who, as Martha Nussbaum (2010) suggests, will be sensitive and alert citizens of the world. Despite some indications that today’s students are eager to make their world a better place, a higher priority for many is to pay for their education and to achieve their goal of attaining a good job (Mitchell 2003). Although they may recognize and support broad social change, many are equally anxious not to be disruptive or even to become involved with other active change makers. This paper will report on a qualitative research project which examined troublesome threshold concepts and experiences the students described as they studied a range of interdisciplinary activist projects and methods. Three key thresholds were identified in their learning: activism does not equal anarchy, one person can make a difference, and activism requires actual action.

References

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