Threshold Concepts

What do our students find hard? Why? How can we best help?

http://neillthew.typepad.com/pgcert/
Term 3 plan

Let’s remind ourselves that the title of this module is *Linking Theory and Practice in Post-Compulsory Education*

Last term, we encountered a body of ideas - this term we revisit them to explore and operationalise them.

Our two main questions are:

- How do we use these ideas to help ourselves develop as *expert* teachers (cf. Hattie)?
- How do we use them to teach our our own specific subjects to our own specific students (cf. subject pedagogy)?
- And all this with a focus on our own development.

Thursday, 29 April 2010
Main ideas we have covered:

- Learning styles
- Constructive curriculum alignment
- Learning outcomes
- Roles & boundaries & laws
- Mental constructs
- Active learning
- Assessment
- Feedback
- Professional values
- QAE - intro
- Critical reading
- Reflective practice
- SOTL
- Phenomenography
- Deep & Surface learning
- Deep & Surface assessment
- Constructivism - different approaches within this
  - Social constructivism

Still to come:

- Threshold concepts
- Subject pedagogy
- Blended learning
- Equalities and diversity
- Working effectively with groups
- Personal & group development
- Mentoring / coaching / facilitation
- Supporting independent and interdependent student learning
- Revisit QAE / CPD
Blogwork on your projects this week

Your ideas for your action research projects don’t just come from nowhere - they are influenced and informed by ideas that are already ‘out there’ - & you need to show critical awareness of this fact.

So now is the time to identify the ideas that are influencing you, and to get to grips with these in more depth - there will be some areas that several of you will work on, but also specific topics you’ll be working on just by yourself.
Blogwork on your projects this week

So - your task this week is to post your own, personal, annotated bibliography for your project.

You need between 6 and 10 texts.

Put up the full reference, and a short statement about why it’s on your list; what the main content / idea is; how and why you are using it.

Make this clear so it can be used by other group members - this is about developing a shared resource.

By 2 pm next Thursday (6 May), please.
Where we’re heading with this - peer validation

- Peer validation is the stage between finishing the project off and writing it up

- It’s where we give each other supportive, ‘critical friend’ feedback

- You’ll need to provide the group with an outline report, to give us the background and context, then we ask / comment on:
Where we’re heading with this - peer validation

1. Is the report a valid description of an educational process?
2. Does the work provide evidence that the author is meeting the stated learning outcomes for the module?
3. Is the claim comprehensible? Does it make sense to the reader? (Comprehensibility)
4. Is the researcher telling the truth? Is there sufficient evidence to test the validity of the claim? (Truthfulness)
5. Does the researcher demonstrate authenticity by showing how they are living their values? (Authenticity)
6. Does the researcher show that they understand the contexts in which they are making the claim? (Appropriateness) These include: other work in the field; & the specific contexts of the institution, courses and groups you’ve worked with.
How would we like to work together?

I’d like to talk about how we’d like to work together on our projects this term.

Options include: project work at weekends / short bits in evening sessions / 1-2-1 support now and group validation later, with blog work to keep each other current / topic groups for reading and research methods ...

Are you up for meeting over the Summer?
Next weekend teaching session & a 2nd blog task

- Don’t worry about needing to teach the group content that is new to them! That’s not the aim this time.

- Come prepared to teach a basic, practical skill - suitable for Level 3 / beginner students.

- Our focus is on subject pedagogy this time - seeing how informed we can be as we ask: “What are good ways of teaching these basic practical skills? Why do these methods work? How can we best use them?”
Next weekend teaching session & a blog task

☆ Come prepared to teach a 30 minute session

☆ We will be stopping and starting, however, and discussing your thinking as the session progresses - so expect to be on your feet ‘teaching’ for at least an hour

☆ **BLOG** - please post your session plan on the blog by the end of Friday 7th May.
Critical reading group

What were the main points you got from this text?

What were you not clear about?

How would you evaluate the text? Strengths? Weaknesses? Blind spots? Other views you’d offer instead? Links to other things you’ve read? relationship to your own professional practice?
This week’s reading


- Use the same system we’ve just used in class

- I suggest we all need to read things at least twice if we are to process them, and we need to leave enough time for our processing to occur - so aim to have read it at least once by the end of the weekend

- We will discuss it in class next week.
Tonight’s learning outcomes

By the end of tonight’s session, a successful participant will be able to:

- Use the idea of threshold concepts to analyse what causes their own students most trouble, and why

- Use this analysis to plan and justify improved teaching and learning strategies for a specific group of students.
Threshold concepts
Threshold concepts

- These are the concepts that we hold as central to the mastery of our subject / discipline (I’d add: at particular levels of study and achievement)

- These concepts are often challenging to students - they are at once central and yet often difficult to grasp

- Thresholds are encountered at different educational levels

- They appear to have a number of regularly observed features:
Threshold concepts

1 - they are **TRANSFORMATIVE** - once acquired, they shift our perception of the subject / discipline

2 - they are **IRREVERSIBLE** - once an individual has begun to perceive the world in the terms of a threshold concept, it should be inconceivable for them to revert to viewing it in a more primitive way

3 - they are **INTEGRATIVE** - having the capacity to expose the previously hidden inter-relatedness of things / ideas
Threshold concepts

4 - they are **BOUNDED** - that is, they help to define the boundaries of a subject area / discipline

5 - they may often be **COUNTER-INTUITIVE**, or lead to ‘troublesome knowledge’ that is inherently counter-intuitive. In grasping a threshold concept, a student may move from a common-sense understanding to an understanding which may conflict with perceptions that have previously seemed self-evidently true.

Threshold domains

- **Epistemological** - what do I know? how do I (come to) know it? what are the key ‘ways of knowing’ and ‘ways of making meaning’ in my discipline?

- **Ontological** - who am I? how do I operate with my knowledge in the world? what is it to ‘be’ a literary critic, a scientist, a historian, a scholar ... ?

- **Heautogogical** - how do I study effectively? for and by myself? how do I learn from my experience and my mistakes?
AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL THRESHOLD CONCEPT

THINKING ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN AUTHORS AND TEXTS

Thursday, 29 April 2010
AN ONTOLOGICAL THRESHOLD CONCEPT
LOOKING AT, NOT THROUGH, LANGUAGE AS PART OF THINKING LIKE A LITERARY CRITIC

Thursday, 29 April 2010
A HEAUTOGOGICAL THRESHOLD CONCEPT
LEARNING TO READ IN HIGHER EDUCATION (‘READING’ FOR A DEGREE ...)

Thursday, 29 April 2010
What are the key threshold concepts for your students?
(Epistemological? Ontological? Heautogogical?)
Threshold curricula

- Glynis Cousins - *Planet* No. 17, December 2006. *(On blog)*

1 - identification of threshold concepts allows us to define potentially transformative points in a student’s learning - they are the ‘jewels in the curriculum’ - A focus on these jewels allows for richer and more complex insights into aspects of the subjects students are studying; it plays a diagnostic role in alerting tutors to areas of the curriculum where students are likely to ... experience conceptual difficulty *(Meyer & Land, 2006, p.198)*.
Threshold curricula

2 - listening for understanding - it’s hard for us as teachers fully to go back to our more primitive epistemologies - but we can learn to listen better not for what a student knows ... but for the terms that shape a student’s knowledge (p. 200)
Threshold curricula

3 - we often need to develop more fully a holding environment for the toleration of confusion (p. 201)

4 - recursiveness & excursiveness:
We would argue for the notion of learning as excursive, as a journey or excursion which will have intended direction and outcome but will also acknowledge (and indeed desire) that there will be deviation and unexpected outcomes within the excursion; there will be digression and revisiting ... (p. 202)
Curriculum development task

* How might you use threshold concepts in your own teaching?

* How best might students be enabled to gain these?

* What’s ONE thing you can do / change to gain more learning benefit here?

* How & why do you think this will help?
Any volunteers?

There are PGCert places left for next year, and we’d like current BA Year 3 students to have the chance to meet some current PGCert-ers.

Time Wednesday 5th May – Jon Stewart’s Analytical Perspectives class - BIMM House LR2 - last 20 minutes of one class, and first 20 of the next, so 1 o’clock - 2 o’clock