Save a horse, ride a new train of thought:
Using threshold concepts to teach information literacy

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1. Threshold concepts as defined by Meyer & Land
2. Threshold concepts hold value for teaching and learning information literacy
3. How we applied threshold concepts in our online course; looking ahead

Threshold concepts defined

- Threshold concepts are learning objectives with a twist: the central ideas around which we build a course curriculum
  - Transformative: it causes a perceptual shift in the learner
  - Irreversible: once learned, very difficult to unlearn
  - Integrative: may expose "hidden interrelatedness" of something
  - Bounded: may establish border between disciplines
  - Troublesome: might be counter-intuitive
- Threshold concepts are different from other approaches librarians have taken to IL in the past
  - ACRL standards are both too big and too small to use as instructional guidelines
  - They are a mission statement for higher education overall and a to-do list for librarians to check off - unachievable
- This pedagogical approach works well for higher education because it doesn't require instructors to learn advanced educational theory in order to improve teaching

Case Study: Library 1210 at Cal State East Bay

- Cal State East Bay’s FYE program includes a required, 2-credit Information Literacy course taught by library faculty
- By moving the course online, we could teach IL content through the delivery mode favored by a large proportion of our students
  - Redesigning the course from the ground up using threshold concepts refocused our content
  - Threshold concepts target the places where students get stuck - this forces us to find a new starting places and to build material from there.
Using threshold concepts as our theoretical foundation helped us decide what content to bring into the online environment (from our large stash of lessons, learning objectives, exercises, etc).

- Formats: an IL threshold concept
  - "What's the difference between a journal and a website?" - cut & paste generation hasn't learned to differentiate between formats retrieved online
  - This differentiation remains important because we find, retrieve, use, cite, etc, different formats in different ways
  - Threshold = viewing format as the result of a process

Special considerations

- Take it slowly
  - Students may first need to gain a basic foundation of knowledge in a discipline before they can truly pass through a threshold
  - If introduced to the threshold concept too soon, students might mistake superficial or rote knowledge for understanding
- Privileging certain ways of knowing
  - Thresholds do favor certain ways of understanding the world, see the Biblical texts as literary texts concept above for an example
  - Must be careful not to dismiss alternative perspectives as mistakes
- Do you remember what it was like on the other side of the threshold?
  - Dialog with other subject practitioners
  - Research before/after thresholds with students

For further reading:


Class Web Site: [http://1210-1551.weebly.com](http://1210-1551.weebly.com) password: format