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

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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 are 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 out 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:

- Meyer, J., & Land, R. (2003). *Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Linkages to ways of thinking and practising within the disciplines*. (ETL Project Occasional Report 4). Retrieved from Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Project: http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf

- Meyer, J., & Land, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Overcoming barriers to student understanding: Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge.* London: Routledge.

- Meyer, J., & Land, R. (2007, August 17). Stop the conveyor belt, I want to get off. *Times Higher Education Supplement, 1807*, 14. Retrieved from http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/ story.asp?storyCode=90288&sectioncode=26

- Brown, A.J. (2006). *Biblical Texts as Literary Texts.* Retrieved from Transforming Perspectives: Technology to Support the Teaching and Learning of Threshold Concepts: http://www.caret.cam.ac.uk/tel/outcomes.html

Class Web Site: http://1210-1551.weebly.com password: format

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http://tinyurl.com/thresholdconcepts-loex2009