

**Title:**            **Threshold Concepts in Educational Development**

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## **Abstract:**

### **Session Learning Outcomes**

On completion of the session, participants will be able to:

- Explain the idea of Threshold Concepts
- Identify and prioritize issues in educational development which conform to the five main characteristics of Threshold Concepts
- Critique the methodologies used to compile data on these concepts in educational development

### **Session Outline**

Threshold Concepts have been described as being ‘akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. [They represent] a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress’ (Meyer and Land, 2003). Research to date has focused on identifying threshold concepts in various disciplines at undergraduate level to enable course teams to redesign their courses so as to give these concepts the prominence and space needed for students to be able to grasp them more readily.

What, then, are the threshold concepts in educational development? Which areas are most likely to affect the worldview of our course participants and encourage them to regard themselves not only as experts in their own disciplinary fields, but also as educators taking an equally scholarly approach to their pedagogic practice? These questions may prompt quick lists of key concepts, yet Threshold Concepts are far more complex: they are perceived to be transformative, irreversible, integrative, bounded and potentially troublesome (Meyer and Land, 2003). Identifying them is therefore far less self-evident than might be assumed. In this workshop, participants will tentatively explore and interrogate potential Threshold Concepts in educational development, supported by initial findings from research undertaken with lecturers at UCE Birmingham and UCLan. They will also be able to review and critique the methodology used so far with the hope of stimulating further discussion and research potential in other institutions.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

	Approx. timings
Introductions	5
Introduction to the idea of Threshold Concepts	10
Group work and poster tour: transformative, irreversible, integrative, bounded and potentially troublesome issues in Educational Development	35

Comparison with initial findings at UCE Birmingham and UCLan (short overview from presenters)	10
Discussion and critique of methodology (whole group)	15
A moment to reflect (individual): to what extent do you think your courses emphasize Threshold Concepts in educational development?	5
Summary and next steps (outline of where we go from here)	5
Session Evaluation	5

## References

Davies, P (2003) 'Threshold Concepts: How Can We Recognise Them?' Paper presented at the European Association in Learning and Instruction Conference (EARLI), 26-30 August 2003, Padova. Available at [www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/business/iepr/info/Economics\(2\).html](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/business/iepr/info/Economics(2).html) Accessed 19 Jan. 2006.

Davies, P and Mangan J (2005) 'Recognising Threshold Concepts: An Exploration of Different Approaches.' Paper presented at the European Association in Learning and Instruction Conference (EARLI), 23-27 August 2005, Nicosia, Cyprus. Accessed from [http://www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/business/iepr/info/Economics\(2\).html](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/business/iepr/info/Economics(2).html) 19 Jan. 2006.

Entwistle, N (2005a) 'Learning Outcomes and Ways of Thinking Across Contrasting Disciplines and Settings in Higher Education.' Available at [www.ed.ac.uk/etl/publications.html](http://www.ed.ac.uk/etl/publications.html) Accessed 13 Jan. 2006.

Entwistle, N (2005b) 'Ways of Thinking and Ways of Teaching Across Contrasting Subject Areas.' Paper presented at the Improving Student Learning 2005 Conference, London. Available at [www.ed.ac.uk/etl/publications.html](http://www.ed.ac.uk/etl/publications.html) Accessed 13 Jan. 2006.

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