

Can 'Threshold Concepts' help to define the challenges confronting students from non-traditional background aspiring to enter Higher Education?

Round Table

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With respect to locating thresholds within the questions *“Can 'Threshold Concepts' help to define the challenges confronting students from non-traditional background aspiring to enter Higher Education?”* it is necessary to consider the concept of 'Thresholds' differently. For example - They do not necessarily reside within a curriculum – but perhaps may reside within a program. They do not necessarily represent a learning outcome – but perhaps they may represent an intellectual 'shift' of another kind. They are not so much about progression within a course at HE level – but they may be about developing confidence and motivation.

The ideal outcome of the aspiration building programme known as 'Aimhigher' is to move young people over the threshold of believing they can enter HE. It is a transformative in that the ontological journey challenges cultural and institutional traditions. In many respects it is irreversible as cognitive development relies on the construction and not deconstruction of learning. It is integrative in that it is about developing the whole person and is not limited to only the skills that are necessary for achieving the goal of entering HE. It is bounded in that it aims to develop aspirations in a given direction. It is troublesome in that it may challenge an individual's perception of who they are, where they have come from and the social and cultural networks that they belong to.

The thresholds for learners from non-traditional backgrounds to achieve and attain access into HE may be described in the following Table;

Personal – this threshold requires the learner to develop cognitively to a point where they move from a position where they had no knowledge or self belief, to a position where they have a sufficient understanding of HE and a self belief that they can enter HE.

Intellectual - this threshold requires that the learner understands the nature and the level of their own skills and talents and can correspond these with those that are required to enter HE within their chosen field of study – and that they have the capacity and desire to develop strategies to bridge the gap between where they are now and where they know they need to be in order to enter HE.

Cultural – this threshold requires that the learner recognises and respects the traditions and customs of their family unit, their community and their social networks and develops a level of autonomy from these to the point where it becomes necessary to revise their place within this culture and reassess and perhaps renegotiate these relationships.

Motivational – this threshold requires that the learner embodies an excitement, passion and enjoyment in a particular idea and/or area of study which propels them forward. It also enables them to feel rewarded for their efforts in attainment and progress.