

*Teaching & Learning Ancient Religion Network*  
**Threshold Concepts and Ancient Religion**

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[tlarnetwork.org](http://tlarnetwork.org)

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- How does it make you *feel* (eg if you were a student)?

## Threshold Concepts

Seven aspects (not all need to be present)

- **Transformative**
- **Troublesome**
- **Irreversible**
- **Integrative**
- **Bounded**
- **Discursive**
- **Reconstitutive**
- **Liminal** (recursive)

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- and just how much you wanted it to be true.
- Imagine sitting in maths classes if you hadn't grasped the equals sign's meaning . . .



# Observation

It's almost impossible to remember what it's like not to understand a threshold concept.

## It's more than the stuff . . .

Assertion: the disciplinary gaze is what we are actually teaching them, not the stuff (though that comes in handy). This is acknowledged, but somewhat haphazardly.

- There is no 'learning curve' as is often unconsciously assumed. There is a zigzag, like a set of paradigm shifts.
- It will probably involve struggle and even distress.
- There is a need for iteration and circling around these concepts.

Students 'struggling' is not just permitted but legitimised: putting such things at the centre of the curriculum might be interesting . . .

- We can move away from the dichotomy of ‘student-centred’ and ‘teacher-centred’
- Mutual exploration of these concepts (spiral)
- Permits more creative material, activities and assessments

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A lot of our ('tacit') understanding is internalised to the point of being a gut feeling and students learn best by articulating: this points us towards discussion and dialogue. What about (eg):

- inventing a new 'abstract' deity for modern times (eg 'Wealth Redistribution' aka 'Fairness') complete with festival, poetry, rituals etc
- creating rituals for class that run throughout the course (eg arriving on time?)

Consider a threefold cycle for teaching threshold concepts:

- Introduce them
- Create space for struggle, articulation, experimentation, creation
- Review