Crafting the Perfect Blend: Student Cognitive Development Theory and Threshold Concepts for Student Success

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Today

● Brief review of ACRL Framework
● Teaching threshold concepts using Perry’s Positions
● Group activity- Design a learning activity
Quick Overview

Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education
Quick Overview

Threshold Concepts
The Frames

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration
Scholarship as Conversation

ACRL Definition:
Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations.
Q: How can we help students reach thresholds in a one shot?

A: Design instruction to encourage students’ cognitive development.
Perry's Stages
simplified

- Dualism
- Multiplicity
- Relativity
- Commitment
Cognitive Development

College 1st year
Dualism

College 4th yr
Multiplicity
Relativity

Professional
Commitment
Dualism

• Right/Wrong
• Authorities have the answers
• Students receive knowledge
Dualism - Scholarship as Conversation

Unaware scholars are responding to one another's ideas through writing.

In search of the one “ultimate expert” who holds all of the answers.
Multiplicy

• Experts don’t agree and teachers don’t have all the answers

• Everyone’s opinions are equal
  • Students start to rely on their peers for answers
  • No differentiation between experts or non-experts

• Students have a hard time figuring out what the teacher wants
Multiplicity - Scholarship as Conversation

Recognizes that sources respond to one another about a topic.

Recognizes every voice in that conversation with equal weight and merit.

In search of sources that fulfil assignment requirements.
Relativity

• All opinions are not equally valid
  ○ Context matters
• Authorities can be analyzed
• "Truth" depends on evidence
• Students actively make meaning
Relativity - Scholarship as Conversation

Recognizes that sources respond to one another about a topic and that voices have different weight and merit.

In search of sources that provide a better understanding of the conversation.
Commitment (in relativism)

• Relativity + commitment to personal decisions, opinions, feelings
• Students stake a position in debates
• Respect other’s ideas even if they are different
Commitment - Scholarship as Conversation

Absorbs the conversation and makes decisions based on all of the voices.

In search of sources that provide a better understanding of the conversation.
What level are my students?

- Know your university’s curriculum
  - What level is the class?
  - What level are the students?
  - Can you make any assumptions about past research assignments?

- Know your library’s instruction program
  - Can you make any assumptions about their past IL instruction?
Activity

Using what you’ve learned about Perry’s Stages and what you know about the framework, design a learning activity that teaches your assigned threshold concept to your assigned student cognitive level.

- Your activity should help your students move into the next cognitive level.
Rough Example:

**Threshold:** Scholarship is a conversation

**Level:** Dualist

**Learning activity:**

Divide the students into 2 groups.

Give each group the name of a scholar in the discipline of the class with which you are working. The two scholars should have different views on a topic.

Students are asked to use Google to find out information about the scholar (i.e. credibility) and to use a library database or Google Scholar to find an article on X topic by the scholar.

Students then read and summarize the article.

In the larger group, the groups report back what they found.

The group discusses the idea of “scholarship is a conversation” in the frame of the activity.

- How is it possible that there are experts with different theories or ideas on a topic?
- Discuss how a field/topic/area of study is on-going.
Bringing Perry Home