‘Stuck Places’

Are there **threshold concepts** in learning to teach geography?

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The Trainees

Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDipEd)
Secondary Geography

120 credit, Masters level course of Initial Teacher Education

Optional progression to MEd Teaching Studies (60 credit dissertation after NQT year)

Strong focus on reflection and ‘continuous professional dialogue’

Aim:
To explore the ‘stuck places’ of a group of trainees, through the eyes of the trainees, their mentors and their tutor

The Mentors
Many are ex-trainees and MEd completers. All have been trained by the University as mentors for beginning teachers

The Tutors
One full time and one 0.1 (Paul Weeden)
Threshold Concepts

Bounded

Transformative of understanding

Integrative

Irreversible

Initially troublesome

Meyer and Land (2003)
Where were/are trainees’ stuck places?
Some informal findings

I’m confused by some of the language being used [by mentors, tutors or other trainees] 70% (16/23)

I don’t know how to teach [concept/process/theory/topic] 39% (9/23)

Post-16, physical and dynamic processes, or ‘unfamiliar geography’ such as BTEC T&T

Pupils [some or all] are confused by the language I’m using 30% (7/23)

Using geographical terminology in a pupil friendly way
What has **changed** for trainees?

I feel like my **knowledge** [of something] has changed  **70%** (16/23)  
(Subject knowledge, school culture, how to lesson plan)

I feel like my **understanding** [of something] has changed  **65%** (15/23)  
(How to manage pupils effectively, why to lesson plan, ‘interconnectedness of the subject’ and how to use this with pupils)
I’ve learned how to do something by observing someone else do it

**78%** (18/23)

- Observing a range of teachers (25%)
- Behaviour management (25%)
- Observing other trainees (13%)

I’ve observed someone else doing something but can’t replicate it

**35%** (8/23)

- Behaviour management
- Pace
THE CONCEPT

LIMINAL SPACE

THE THRESHOLD

New knowledge

New understanding

eureka
Crossing the threshold: An example of a small lightbulb

Starter: Write a definition of a landscape.

Philip: It’s when your paper is this way round, not this way.

Mr Wright: So – who can tell me what a landscape is?

Mr Wright: Well, yes, but that’s not very geographical. Who else has an answer?

In the lesson debrief, we discussed a) why the starter activity had proven to be problematic and b) the missed opportunity of Philip’s answer. If this could be interpreted as a lightbulb moment for Mr Wright, what might the threshold concept be in this instance?
Teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom.

(DfE, 2010)
So what’s next?

• Spring 2015: **Continue pilot studies** (extend to Physics PGDipEd, plus other subjects as available)

• Summer 2015: Ethics approval and **selection of methods**. Integration into course documentation and tasks

• Autumn 2015: **Data collection begins** with 2015-16 cohort (n=21)

• Autumn 2015: Begin to track 2014-15 cohort (currently n=24) as **NQTs**

**For your consideration:**
I would like to extend (some) data collection to a number of institutions. Is this something you could be involved in?

31st January 2015

GTE Conference, University of Oxford