



Learning, risk and difficulty

Teaching in
unprecedented
times



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Warwick Education Conference 2018

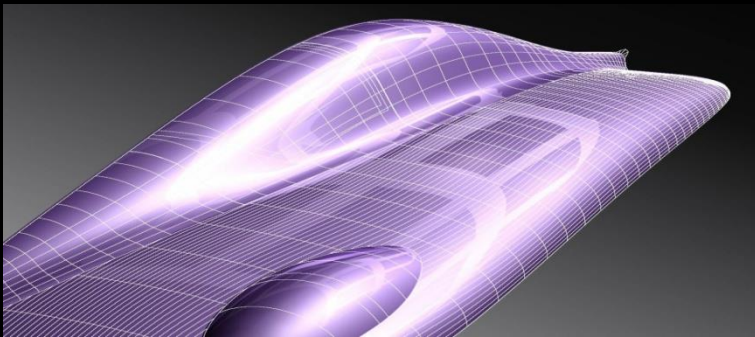
15 May 2018

'A dance with ambiguities' (Appiah 2016)

- Uncertainty
- Speed and acceleration
- Complexity
- Interculturalism
- Mobility of population(s)
- Conflict (social, military)
- Inter-generational tension
- Need for ethical citizenship
- Information saturation
- Proliferation of knowledge
- Globalisation
- Internationalisation
- Private /public sector tension
- Increasing panic

Characteristics of the 21st century

- Surveillance
- Post-truth, post trust, fake news
- Unpredictability
- Risk
- Displacement
- Need for flexibility and agility
- Entitlement v responsibility
- Scarcity of resources
- Austerity
- Sustainability
- Need for prudence
- Transparency & accountability
- Discontinuity and rupture
- Shifting paradigms
- Poverty v affluence
- Outsourcing of jobs, automation
- Youthfulness





Sankofa (Adinkra symbol Ghana)

Pedagogies of uncertainty



In these settings, the presence of emotion, even a modicum of passion, is quite striking--as is its absence in other settings. I would say that without a certain amount of anxiety and risk, there's a limit to how much learning occurs.

One must have something at stake. No emotional investment, no intellectual or formational yield.

(Shulman 2005:4)

Venturing into strange places

The student is perforce required to venture into new places, strange places, anxiety-provoking places . This is part of the point of higher education. If there was no anxiety, it is difficult to believe that we could be in the presence of a higher education.

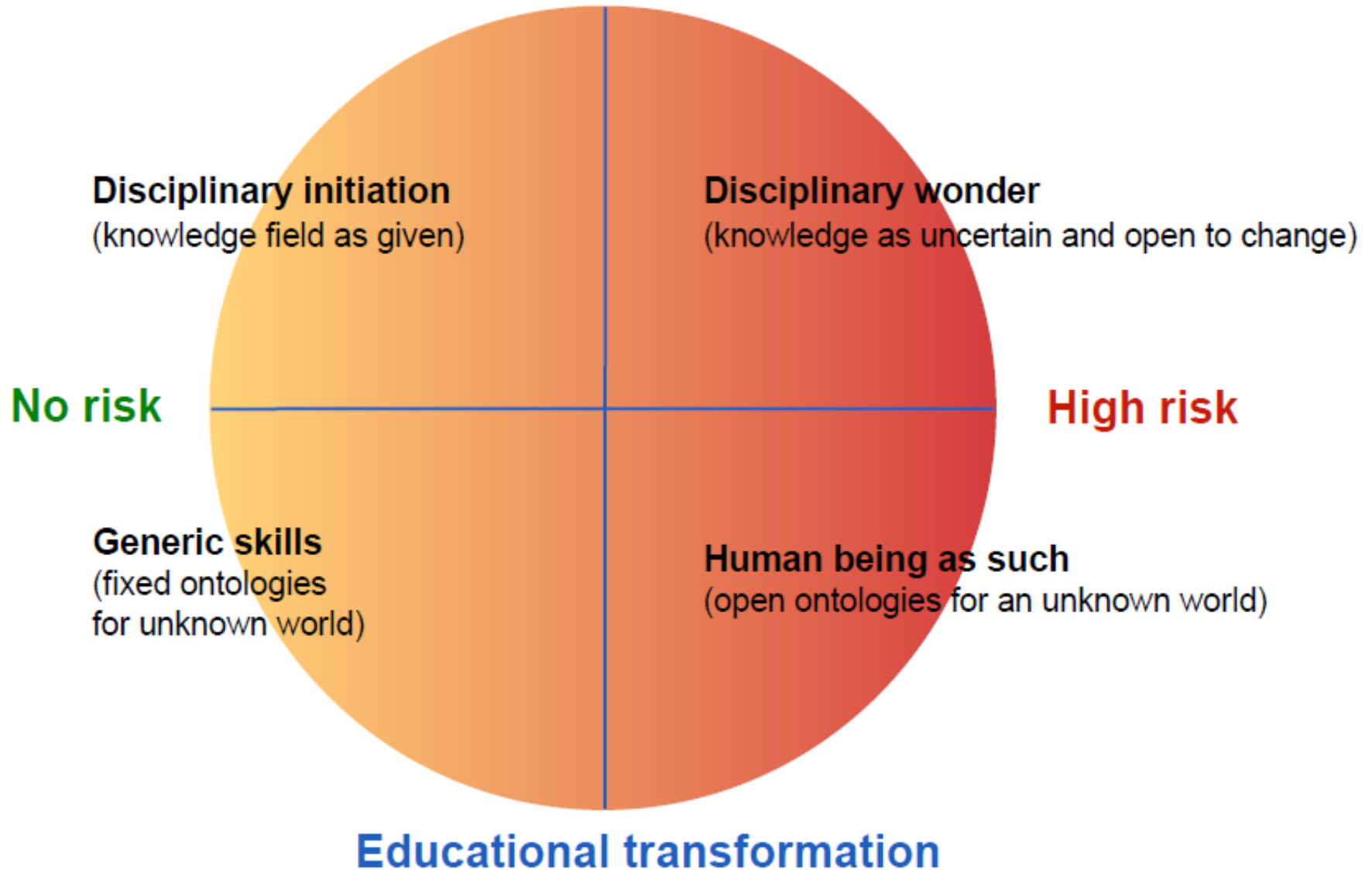
(Barnett 2007: 147)



Barnett (2004) argues that it would be irrational and self-defeating to assume that we can prepare a new generation of students to cope with uncertainty by establishing a new kind of certainty in the curriculum.



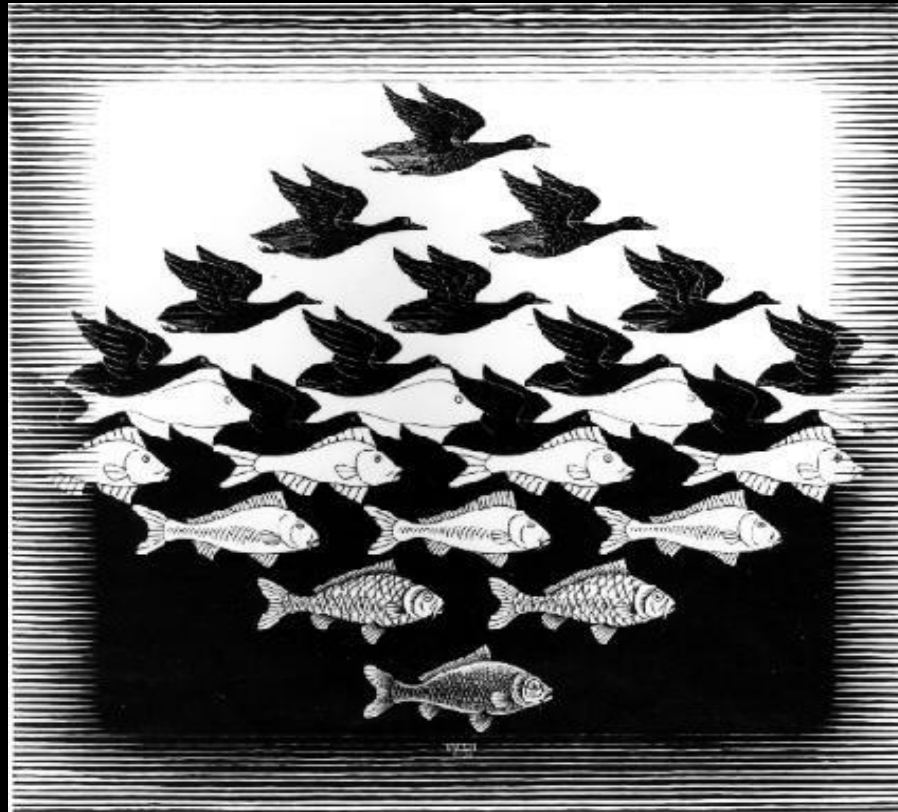
Educational development



The capability
to make informed and reasoned judgments
as the basis of good decisions



Transformational Learning



The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes, in seeing the universe with the eyes of another.



Marcel Proust, 1900

Troublesome knowledge



A safe place

- ‘An accessible environment in which every student feels comfortable and safe and can get involved free from intimidation *or judgement*’

NUS definition of university campus safe space, TES Scotland 30 June 2017, p.18

pax intrantibus, salus exeuntibus (1609)

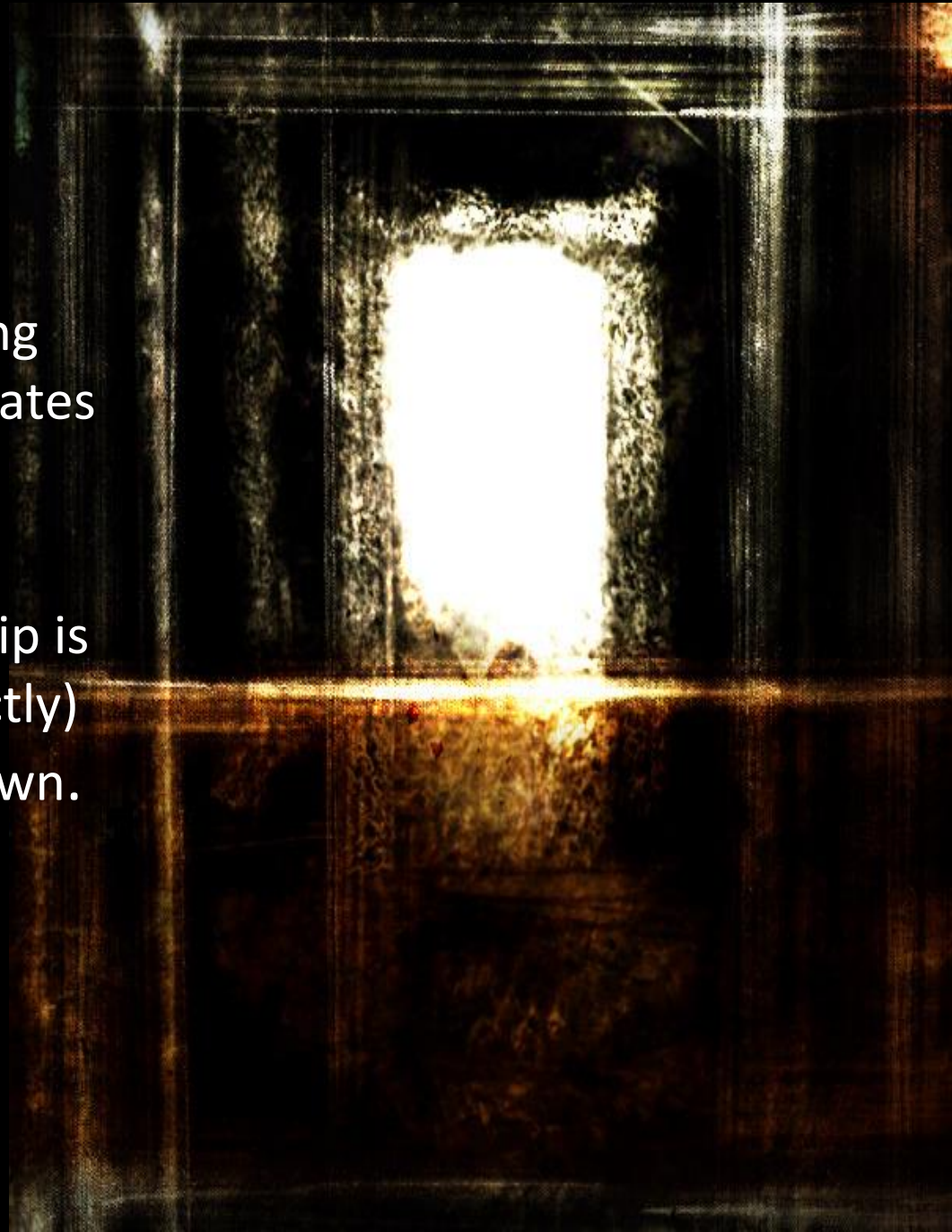


Threshold Concepts

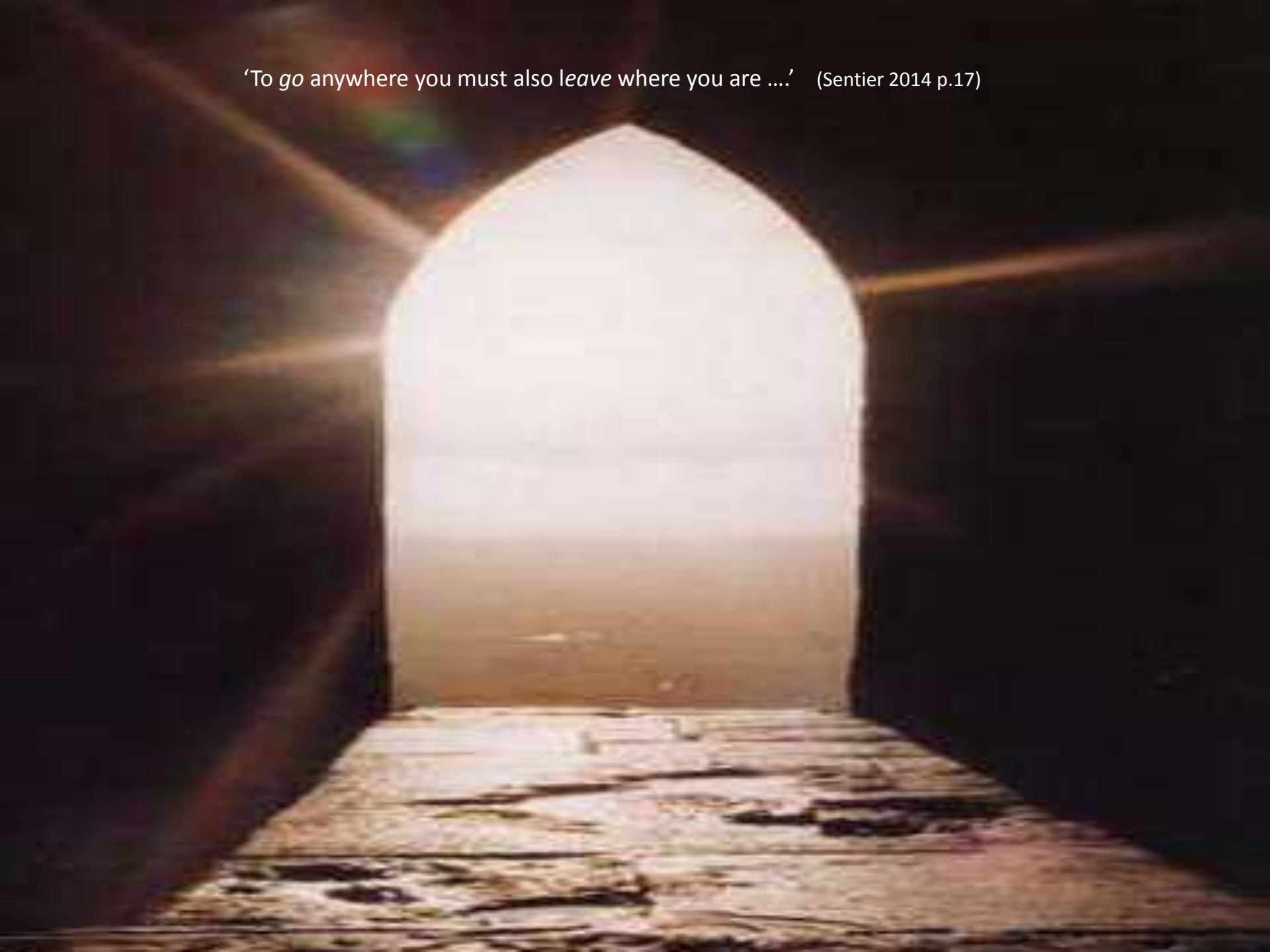
Real learning requires stepping into the unknown, which initiates a rupture in knowing...

By definition, all TC scholarship is concerned (directly or indirectly) with encountering the unknown.

Schwartzman 2010 p.38



'To go anywhere you must also leave where you are ...' (Sentier 2014 p.17)



Threshold Concepts



As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even world view.

Such a transformed view or landscape may represent how people 'think' in a particular discipline, or how they perceive, apprehend, or experience particular phenomena within that discipline, or more generally.



However the engagement by the learner with an unfamiliar knowledge terrain and the ensuing reconceptualisation may involve a reconstitution of, or shift within, the learner's subjectivity, and perhaps identity.

Ontological implications. Learning as 'a change in subjectivity'. (Pelletier 2007).

East of Eden

through the threshold

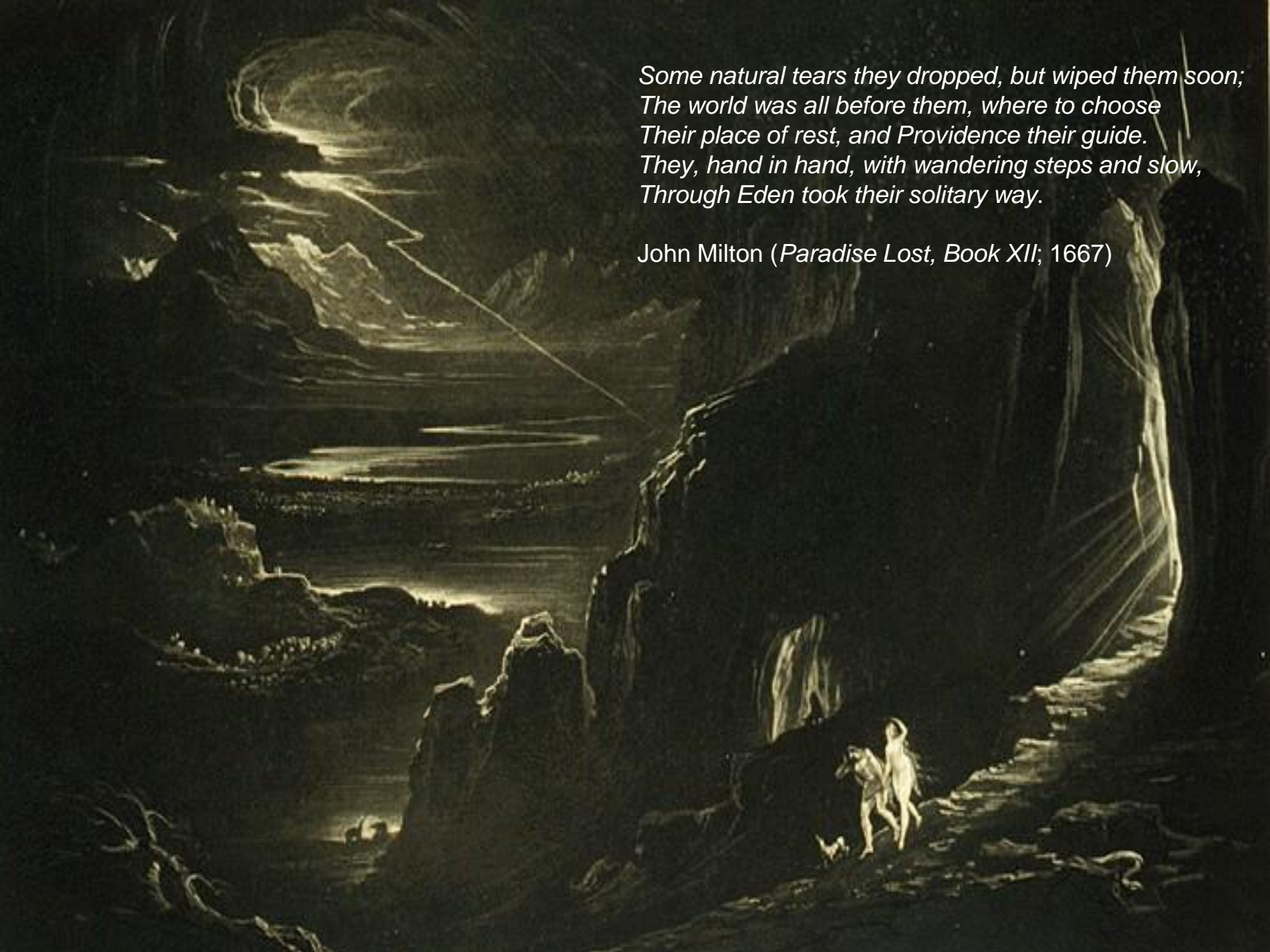




St. Mark's Anglican Church
"The Friendly Church"

WORSHIP SAT 5PM SUN 8:30AM & 10:30AM

**ADAM & EVE
THE FIRST PEOPLE
TO NOT READ THE APPLE
TERMS & CONDITIONS**

A dramatic, dark landscape painting. The scene is dominated by deep shadows and a few glowing points of light. In the foreground, a path leads towards a dark, cavernous opening in a rocky cliff. Two small, pale figures are walking along this path. The middle ground shows a wide, flat expanse, possibly a valley or a plain, with a bright, glowing horizon line that suggests a sunrise or sunset. The sky is filled with swirling, ethereal light patterns, and a single, bright beam of light descends from the upper left towards the center of the scene. The overall mood is mysterious and somber.

*Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.*

John Milton (*Paradise Lost*, Book XII; 1667)





Liminality

Van Gennep 1960, Turner 1969

a transformative state that engages existing certainties and renders them problematic, and fluid

a suspended state in which understanding can approximate to a kind of mimicry or lack of authenticity

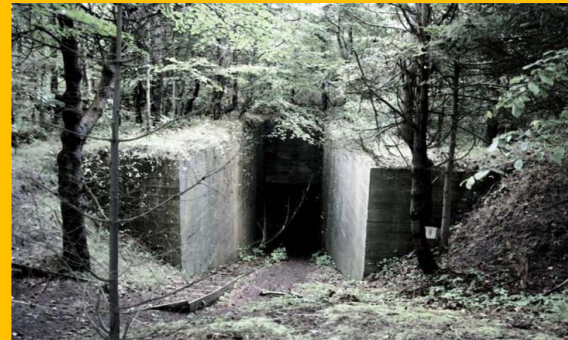
liminality as unsettling – sense of loss

Progressive function of the liminal state

- Countenancing and integration of something new
- Recognition of shortcoming of existing view
- Letting go of the older prevailing view
- Letting go of an earlier mode of their subjectivity
- Envisaging (and accepting) an alternative version of self through the threshold space (as a practitioner) - 're authoring' of self. 'undoing the script' (Ross 2011)
- Acquiring and using new forms of written and spoken discourse and internalising these

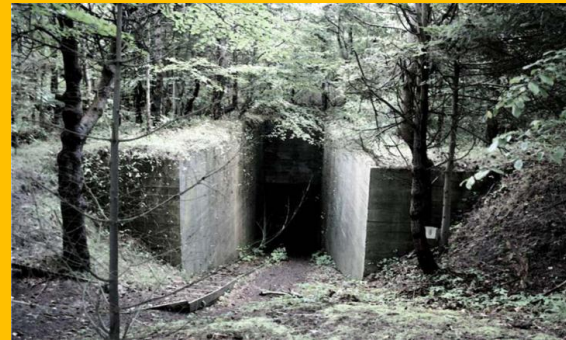
Student voice:

In the beginning we were thrown into something completely new and unknown that has been difficult to deal with. The feeling of not being clever enough, and not having control of what you are doing, have resulted in a lot of frustration and stress, and this has influenced the process to the extent that I have become exhausted and depressed, and I wanted to quit”



Student voice:

“Eventually it became clear that the project was about examining the edge/ridge, the exciting state of mind where meaningful and many faceted places may emerge.The architecture here on the edge/ridge is rich on senses, a delicate point of balance. It *is* senses”.



Characteristics of a threshold concept



- integrative
- transformative
- irreversible
- bounded
- re-constitutive
- discursive
- troublesome

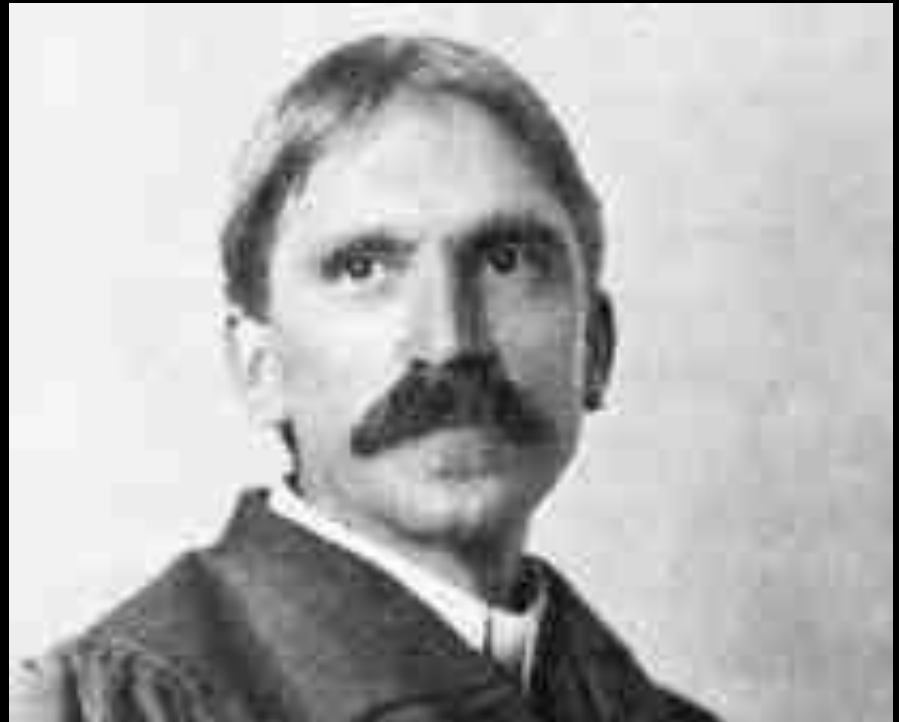


Troublesome knowledge

- ritual knowledge
- inert knowledge
- conceptually difficult knowledge
- the defended learner
- alien knowledge
- tacit knowledge
- loaded knowledge
- troublesome language

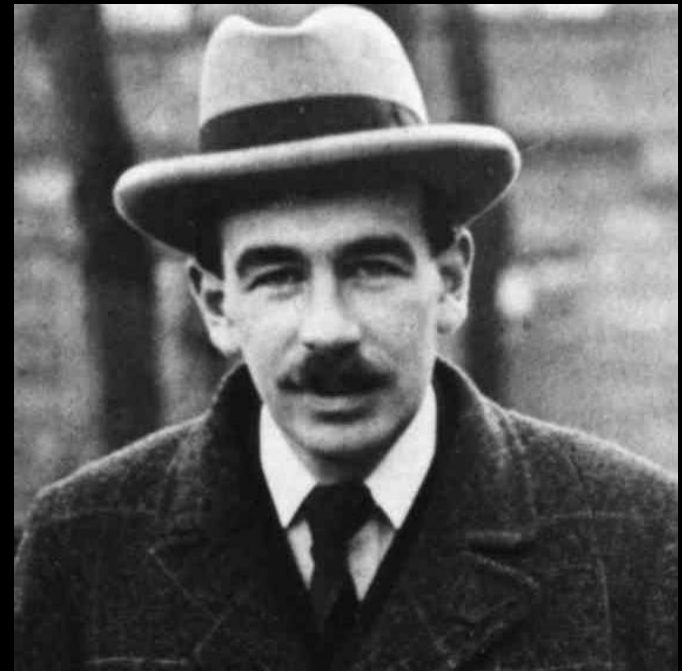
'The path of least resistance and least trouble is a mental rut already made.

It requires troublesome work to undertake the alteration of old beliefs.'



John Dewey 1933

The difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones, which ramify ... into every corner of our minds.



John Maynard Keynes (1936)

Janus – divinity of the threshold

epistemological



ontological

TCs Candidate concepts

- Pure Maths – ‘complex number’, a ‘*limit*’, the Fourier transform’
- Literary Studies – ‘signification, deconstruction, ethical reading’
- Economics – ‘opportunity cost, price, elasticity’
- Design – ‘Confidence to challenge’
- Computer Science – ‘programming’, ‘Y and Recursion’
- Exercise Physiology – ‘metabolism’
- Law - ‘precedence’
- Accounting - ‘depreciation’
- Biology, Psychology - ‘evolution’
- Politics – ‘the state’
- Engineering – ‘reactive power’, ‘spin’
- Nursing ‘Evidence-based Practice’
- Mental Health Nursing ‘Recovery’
- Comparative Religion– ‘Biblical texts as Literary Texts’
- Plant Science ‘Photoprotection’
- Health Science – ‘Care’
- Physics – ‘Gravity’, ‘Measurement uncertainty’
- Geology - ‘Geologic Time’



Students do not always enjoy studying with me. Often they find my courses challenge them in ways that are deeply unsettling. This was particularly disturbing to me at the beginning of my teaching career because I wanted to be liked and admired. It took time and experience for me to understand that the rewards of engaged pedagogy might not emerge during a course.

bell hooks (1994 p. 206)



My models were the people who stepped outside of the conventional mind and who could actually stop my mind and completely open it up and free it, even for a moment, from a conventional, habitual way of looking at things ...

If you are really preparing for groundlessness, preparing for the reality of human existence, you are living on the razor's edge, and you must become used to the fact that things shift and change. Things are not certain and they do not last and you do not know what is going to happen. My teachers have always pushed me over the cliff ...

Pema Chodron 1994



Safe spaces, trigger warnings, deplatforming

If you hold back from learning about deception and violence you won't understand why we have the laws we do, or any system of law at all. Equally you can't appreciate great works of literature if you resist depictions of the darker side of human life...The power of these works of art comes from their truthfulness, their unswerving fidelity to the enduring features of the human world. Anyone who shrinks from them is in effect refusing to explore what it means to be human. (Gray 2016)

John Gray *Against Safe Spaces* 2016



Difficulty

We are an entangled species. We are not to be unknotted easily. When we turn our backs on difficulty ... we turn our backs on who we are.

Howard Jacobson *In Praise of Difficulty* 2016



In public and marketing documentation our discourse of the student experience has become interwoven with narratives of graduate success, images of student happiness, a sense of student entitlement and the friendliness and helpfulness of (providing) staff.





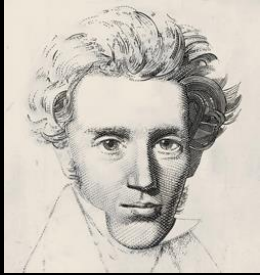
Sorry!

The lifestyle you
ordered is currently
out of stock

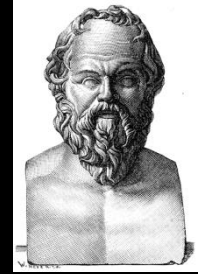
BREWERY
CO. SALE

SALE

SALE



Transcendence in teaching



- transcendence (Kierkegaard) v maieutics (Socrates)
- ‘...teaching only has meaning if it carries with it a notion of ‘transcendence,’ that is, if it is understood as something that comes from the outside and *adds* rather than that it just confirms what is already there’. (Biesta 2013, p.453)

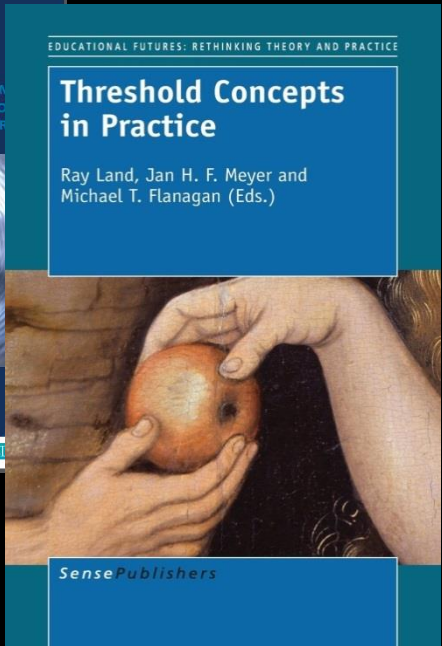
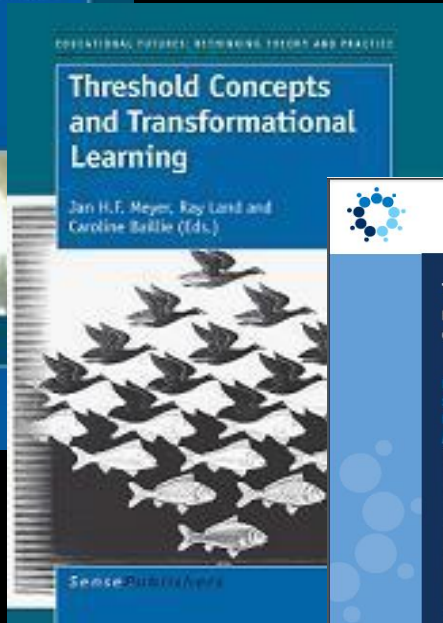
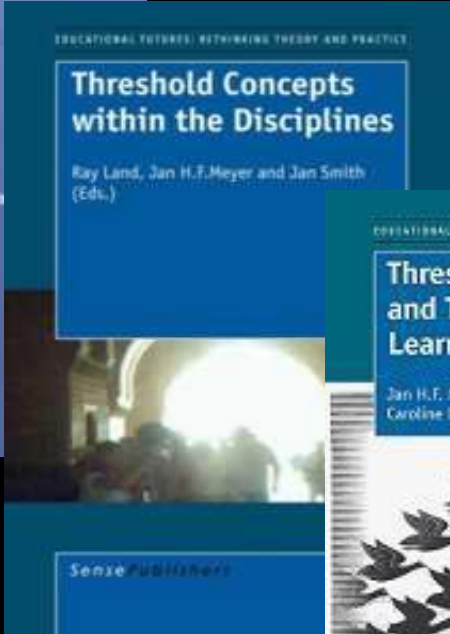
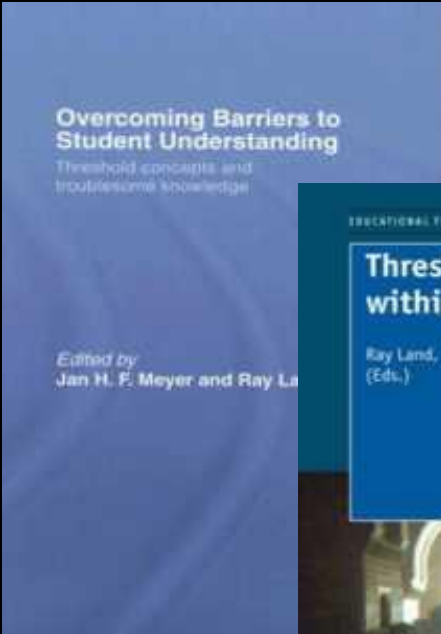
Alterity in teaching

- ‘...the maieutic model erases the significance of the Other and claims that learning is a recovery contained within the I, rather than a disruption of the I provoked by the Other in a moment of sociality.’
(Todd 2003, p. 30).
- **Double truth giving:** presenting students with something that ‘is neither derivable from nor validated by what [they] already know’ (Westphal 2008, p. 26)

Predictive Learning Analytics

- Express purpose to measure engagement and more accurately predict retention
- A 'surveillance of care'?
- Risk in profiling of *as yet unsubstantiated* judgements
- Current trialling of recording 'emotional data'
- Right to opt out?
- Right to ask university 'What do you think you know about me?'





<http://www.ee.ucl.ac.uk/~mflanaga/thresholds.html>



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