



Shifting Discourse: Threshold Concepts in CYC

Laura Steadley & Graham McPheat



Outline of Presentation

- Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care
- Political and Professional Landscape
- Dominant Discourses
- Threshold Concepts
- Shifting the Discourses
- Role of Threshold Concepts?
- Tangible Outcomes

Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care

- Established in 2000
 - A National College should be developed providing a continuum of training and professional education opportunities, from induction to management, for workers in residential child care. This was in recognition of the fact that existing training opportunities did not adequately prepare workers for what is an increasingly complex and demanding job.
- MSc in Advanced Residential Child Care has first intake in 2001
 - Develop a cadre of well qualified child care practitioners capable of bringing qualities of critical thinking and discourse to a field of practice which has not been well served in these areas. enhancing the calibre of leadership in the sector.



Political and Professional Landscape

- Repeated scandal and inquiry
- Decreased numbers
- Ideological opposition to use of RCC and dominance of family based care
- Lack of professional recognition
- Increasing managerialism
- Decreasing trust in professionals

Dominant Discourses

- *a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area (Fiske, 1987)*
- *structures of knowledge claims and practices through which we understand, explain and decide things, (Smith, 2005, p.266)*
- *a system of possibilities for knowledge and agency which makes some action possible whilst precluding others (Parton, 2002, p.241)*

Dominant Discourses in RCC

1. Institutionalisation – the ‘Goffman’ effect
2. RCC as a last resort, family based care very much the preferred option
3. Abuse, scandal and inquiries
4. Poor outcomes for care leavers

Threshold Concepts

- A type of core concept
- Opens up new, previously inaccessible ways of thinking
- Can be thought of as a portal or threshold to another level

5 Characteristics of Threshold Concepts

- they are **transformative**, once they're understood;
- they are **irreversible** – it is virtually impossible to forget them once they're understood;
- they are **integrative** in their capacity promote the connection of previously unconnected ideas;
- they are **bounded** in that they often help to define the scope or boundaries of a subject area; and
- they are **troublesome** in that they can initially be counterintuitive or hard to grasp. (Meyer and Land, 2006a)

Once Threshold Concepts are Grasped

- Students move from more basic, compartmentalised understanding to one that is foundational, coherent and integrative, permeating the acquisition of new knowledge and ideas (Meyer & Land, 2006b).
- Extension of language and discourse transforms not just understanding but often identities and world views (Meyer & Land, 2005).

Threshold Concepts and RCC

- There is “substantial empirical evidence for threshold concepts in the disciplines, drawn from over 150 scholarly papers in 80 disciplinary or subject contexts” (Land, 2011, p. 177).
- Threshold concepts hold potential to assist in shifting discourses about residential child care, but have yet to be applied to CYC.

Threshold Concepts on the MSc

- Discourse
- Care (Clouder, 2006 – Nursing; Care Ethics)
- Development (Phelan, 2008)
- Containment and Holding Environments (Steckley)
- Lifespace (most recently, Garabahi & Stewart, 2013)
- Therapeutic use of Daily Life Events (Garfat, 2002)/Opportunity Led Work (Ward, 2002)
- Relational Practice (Garfat, 2008)
- Situated Leadership (Ward, 2009)

Shifting the Discourses

- Engagement with threshold concepts have contributed to the creation of new and/or shifted dominant discourses
- The MSC and activities and networks sparked by it have proved central to this process in Scotland

Shifting the Discourses

1. Institutionalisation – the ‘Goffman’ effect

- Increasing evidence of RCC being used as a placement of planned choice, but not always!
- Increased differentiation and specialisation in placement type on offer
- Institutions versus total institutions
- Challenging the illegitimacy of dependency

Shifting the Discourses

2. RCC as a last resort, family based care very much the preferred option

- Restorative and developmentally enhancing environment
- Care environment to be something more than a simple alternative
- Shared care
- Permanence
- Challenging notions around family—(Kendrick, 2013)

Shifting the Discourses

3. Abuse, scandal and inquiries

- Putting the care back into care
- Reclaiming the concept of love and redefining professional boundaries and even what 'professional' means
- Naming our world
- Challenging the effectiveness of Inquiries in developing social policy and improving practice
 - Kerelaw
 - The Interaction

Shifting the Discourses

4. Poor outcomes for care leavers

- Measuring the measurable
- Appropriate baselines
- More nuanced measurement of outcomes based on restoration, healing and development
- A relational based approach to assessing outcomes with an emphasis on a narrative approach

Role of Threshold Concepts?

- The tacit to the explicit, invisible into visibility;
- The role of naming in recognising & challenging;
- The element of co-construction;
- The development of voice;

Tangible Impacts

- Scottish Government
- External Management
- Agency Management
- University of Strathclyde

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