



## BOOK REVIEW

### (Re)Considering What We Know: Learning Thresholds in Writing, Composition, Rhetoric, and Literacy

Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, editors

*Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2019*

*(ix + 341 pages, ISBN 978-1-60732-931-2, \$39.95)*

#### Reviewed By

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This book is a follow-up to the volume *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2013), in which they articulated a provisional list of threshold concepts for writing studies. These include: writing is a social and rhetorical activity; writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms; writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies; all writers have more to learn; and writing is a cognitive activity. Threshold concepts, as theorized by Jan Meyer and Ray Land (2006), enable learners to participate in a discipline or community of practice; they are transformative, probably irreversible, integrative, potentially troublesome to pre-existing knowledge, and bounded, or associated with a specific discipline.

This volume explores challenges to Adler-Kassner and Wardle's earlier work (2013): that threshold concepts reify boundaries between disciplines, that they attempt to impose an order that favors the past, that they privilege particular viewpoints and omit others, and that they are not revolutionary or cutting edge. The editors productively engage such critiques in their first chapter, where they suggest that threshold concepts provide a starting point for interdisciplinary work because they shed light on concepts considered so foundational within a field that they have become almost invisible or unconsciously accepted. They acknowledge the contingent, contextual, and provisional nature of threshold concepts, and they admit that there are sites in need of further work to push the paradigm and broaden those boundaries. For example, they concede that writing only occurs within accessible conditions (26-27), that writing assessment must be ethical (28-29), and that writing is world building (29-30). The first part examines threshold concepts that might emerge in regards to literacy, first-year writing, creative writing, journalism, rhetoric, deep reading, and everyday writing, while the second part demonstrates ways they have been used in various writing courses and programs including community college, first-year programs, and tutor education.

Religion and theology faculty will be interested in Patrick Sullivan's chapter on deep reading, as students similarly engage with uncertainty and ill-structured problems when they encounter religious texts. He shares prompts designed to foster critical thinking that one could adapt for theological or religious studies assignments. Those who work with first-year students might enjoy Cassandra Phillips, Holy Sassel, Jennifer Heinert, Joanne Baird Giordano, and Katie Kalish's chapter on "Thinking Like a Writer" where they propose threshold concepts for first-year writing: Writing can be taught and learned; writers write for different purposes and audiences, often using genres with predictable conventions; reading and writing are interconnected activities; and writing processes are individualized, require readers, and require revision.

The volume may also stimulate further thought about threshold concepts within our own disciplines, as well as the larger fields of theology and religious studies. As the editors point out, threshold concepts can provide useful frameworks for conversations both within and across disciplines. The January 2020 edition of the *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* explored potential threshold concepts in the undergraduate biblical studies classroom, and it might be useful for us to consider what those unnamed but largely accepted foundational concepts might be in our own fields.