

Threshold Concepts

Education

The few ideas in a subject that change how everything after them looks.

Meyer and Land: threshold concepts are transformative, irreversible and often troublesome.

Signs of a threshold

Pupils cannot proceed without it

It contradicts everyday intuition

Once grasped, it cannot be unseen

It links parts of the subject together

Learners get stuck at it for a long time

Examples across subjects

Opportunity cost in economics

Natural selection without intent in biology

The limit in calculus

Deep time in geology

The equals sign as balance, not as answer

The liminal state, where a learner half holds the idea, is normal and slow. Rushing past it produces fluent nonsense.