

Transforming conceptual space into a creative learning place: crossing a threshold

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This presentation draws on Threshold Concept theory which defines threshold concepts as critical points where students may get “stuck” before make “learning leaps” as they journey towards a “conceptual portal, and through a liminal state of transformed understanding” (Meyer, Land, Bayne 2007). We describe a teaching and learning experiment in our first year BA course, ARTS101. Students were led out of the lecture room – the traditional tertiary learning space – to a different space, the New Place Theatre on campus. While this move out of the usual teaching space was appropriate for the text we were focusing on at the time, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, the strategy aimed to develop students’ grasp of a critical concept we had identified as troublesome to students on the course: subjective interpretation. For us, the concept of subjective interpretation shared the transformative and integrative, as well as the troublesome, characteristics of threshold concepts identified in the literature. Students first participated in a collective exercise, creating the storm which opens the play through movement and vocalisation, and were then invited to intervene in a performance of the opening act, supporting the characters with whom they sympathised. Student feedback confirmed that this teaching strategy not only assisted them to grasp the concept of subjective interpretation, but also promoted transformative shifts in their understanding. A key factor in the resulting student engagement was movement to a different physical space, and a fresh, creative learning place.