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Threshold Concepts in TESOL: A Thematic Analysis of Disciplinary Guiding Principles

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Abstract : The notion of Threshold Concepts has offered a fertile new perspective on the transformative effects of mastery of particular concepts on student understanding of subject matter and their developing identities as inductees into disciplinary discourse communities. Only by successfully traversing key knowledge thresholds, it is claimed, can neophytes gain access to the more sophisticated understandings of subject matter possessed by mature members of a discipline. This paper uses thematic analysis of disciplinary guiding principles to identify nine candidate Threshold Concepts that appear to underpin effective TESOL practice. The relationship between these candidate TESOL Threshold Concepts, TESOL principles, and TESOL instructional techniques appears to be amenable to a schematic representation based on superordinate categories of TESOL practitioner concern and, as such, offers an alternative to the view of Threshold Concepts as a privileged subset of disciplinary core concepts. The paper concludes by exploring the potential of a Threshold Concepts framework to productively inform TESOL initial teacher education (ITE) and in-service education and training (INSET).

Keywords : TESOL, threshold concepts, TESOL principles, TESOL ITE/INSET, community of practice
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