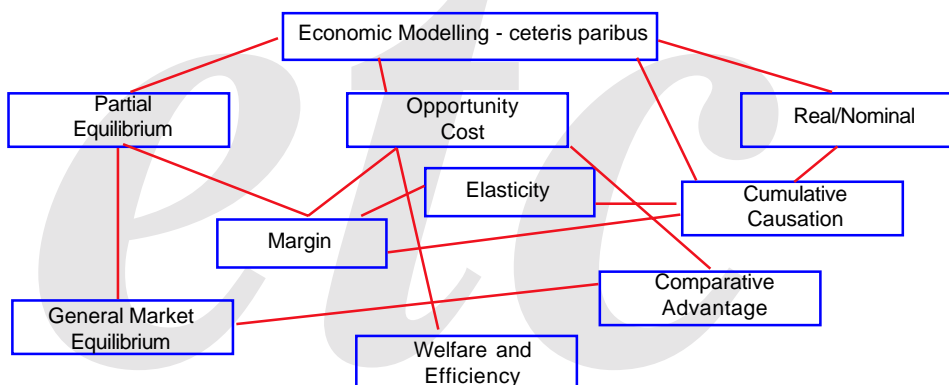


This project aims to improve students' understanding in economics by developing first year undergraduates' acquisition of threshold concepts. Threshold concepts were developed as part of the Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses (ETL) Project and our work is to extend the identification of these concepts and to assess ways of embedding these in the first year curriculum. Our application concerns both students on specialist economics degrees and non-specialists, for instance those on business degrees.

The project is led by Staffordshire University and our partners are Coventry University, Durham University and the University of the West of England. We also have a number of cascade institutions participating in our work and if you would like join us as a cascade partner please contact us.

The funding is by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) under the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning.

A Web of Threshold Concepts



The most important activity in the project so far has been our work on identifying threshold concepts. Our discussions and evidence in economics are leading us to the view that we are not looking for a set of isolated 'magic concepts' but for a web of concepts that stand in a particular relationship to each other, arising partly from the historical development of thinking in a subject.

For example, the analytical power of opportunity cost is only realised when it is used in conjunction with other economic ideas. An economist's explanation of the level of profits in a competitive industry and an economist's argument about the desirability of free trade would necessarily involve opportunity cost. However, opportunity cost is not sufficient for an economist's perspective on either of these issues.

This is a development of the threshold concepts approach in ways that has not been covered in the previous literature and the project has presented a paper on this at two conferences this summer (the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI) and the Developments in Economics and Business Education Conference (DEBE)). Our conference paper is now available on our website and we would value any feedback.

Some of the reflective and problem-based exercises are now available for download on our website and you are welcome to make use of these in your teaching. We would appreciate any information you could give us on their impact, any problems you find with them and what, if any, adaptations for use you made, given your teaching and learning environment.



Website News

This section highlights the main recent additions to the website

Discussion points

These are records of the ongoing discussion of threshold concepts from our project group meetings and provide a guide to current developments on the project.

Discussion Points of the Meeting of September 7th 2005

Working papers

The working paper below was presented at the EARLI and DEBE conferences.

Recognising Threshold Concepts: an exploration of different approaches

Teaching Materials

Reflective exercises on:

- *Opportunity Cost*
- *Marginality*
- *Welfare (externalities)*
- *Comparative Advantage*
- *the Multiplier*

Problem-based exercises:

- *Trade (Comparative Advantage)*
- *Pollution*

Developments in the next few months

Plans for Embedding Threshold Concepts in the Curriculum

Work has started on embedding threshold concepts in the curriculum of the four partner institutions.

Students have been introduced to the idea of threshold concepts in module handbooks and we are trialling three approaches: reflective exercises, problem based learning exercises and personal development profiles.

We are using modules taken by economics, business studies and other students. The exercises will be adapted to the particular situation in the various institutions, for instance, the lecture/tutorial mix. We shall be appraising the effect of these approaches during the year.

More Teaching Materials

There will be some more exercises developed as the year progresses, concentrating both on different Threshold Concepts and on different areas of application in economics. These will all be posted on the website.

Workshops on Threshold Concepts

We are planning a series of workshops and seminar presentations this year. If you would like us to visit you please get in touch. Although our project is directly aimed at level one economics, much of our work applies to other disciplines and years and we are happy to run sessions for various types of audiences.

Contacting us.....

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Bookmark our website

<http://www.staffs.ac.uk/thresholdconcepts>