Hollowed-out genring as a way of purposefully embracing troublesome knowledge: orientation and de-orientation in the learning and teaching of Fine Art.

Shaun Camp and Karl Foster

Abstract

This text emerges from ongoing research focused on pedagogical developments within the curriculum of the Year 0 Fine Art Pathway, at Norwich University of the Arts. Within any subject discipline, including Fine Art, there are threshold concepts (Meyer and Land, 2003, p.1) that can represent troublesome knowledge (Meyer and Land, 2003, p.2); knowledge that must be comprehended in order that students succeed within that discipline. Within the teaching and learning of Fine Art, students will work between both written and visual genres, often struggling to rationalise the two. As part of our research we have developed practiced based research tasks that serve as destabilising prompts, a hollowed out genre, that encourages students to enter into a de-orientated, liminal, conceptual space within their learning. With the introduction of reflective models, students are able to navigate this liminal space and are afforded opportunities for developmental re-orientations, thus beginning to embrace the threshold concepts inherent with the Fine Art discipline. Drawing upon examples of current practice and student learning, we demonstrate how a process of genring and the use of reflective tools encourage students to confront aspects of troublesome knowledge and see critical writing as an important facet of their practice.

Figure 1: *Student response to practice based research task - Contemporary Art Photography*

Norwich University of the Arts (NUA) offers both four and three-year degree options for a number of subject disciplines. Those students that elect to study the four-year option will study Year 0 before they progress onto Year 1 of their undergraduate course of study. Currently, NUA offers four Year 0 pathways – Fine Art, Graphic Design, Film and Moving Image Production and Games Art and Design. Whilst the issues considered in this text are not mutually exclusive to any one pathway, for the purpose of this text we have focused specifically on the teaching and learning within the Fine Art pathway. For a significant number of Year 0 Fine Art students, the genre of the traditional academic essay represents an irritating and bothersome inconvenience that detracts from the proper business of being an artist. Writing in this highly specific genre involves periods of time immersed in mental pain whilst being propelled inexorably towards a deadline precipice that may lead to failure. The resultant anxiety serves to alienate the student against an important aspect of their critical development towards a sustainable praxis. The one specific assesse component can also result an overall drop in assessment performance.

As an antidote to this negative student perception we argue for the twinning of the traditional academic essay with an a-typical visual genre of equal status. We believe that through such dual genring a more appropriate and wider range of resources will, over time, begin to work symbiotically with the essay.

As a counterpoint to the highly structured conventions of academic writing we propose that this a-typical and parallel visual genre is *hollowed-out* so that valuable *troublesome knowledge,* (Meyer and Land, 2003, p.2) inherent within the threshold concepts of the discipline of Fine Art is given space to develop and flourish. Within the space of the hollowed-out genre new orientations are made within the student's chosen discipline and in conjunction with learning from the genre of the academic essay there is a fusing between genres into a hybrid reflective practice. Students begin to develop the necessary written and critical skills central to an exploiting the interrelationship between practice and theory.

Genre can be defined as a classification process whereby our world experiences are conceptualised into contextually determined types. It is a way of organising meaning into a coherent and communicative whole through which we can see reality, orient ourselves and make social responses. Genre has a dual and flexible role; it controls, in that it facilitates a predictable series of expectations and rules which we must meet to be able to participate socially, and at the same time it enables new means of representing our lived experience. When the emphasis and expectations of a genre such as the academic essay have excessive influence over creative practice, the possibility for new representations of our lived experience can become diminished or restricted. Student's agency can be seen to be compromised in that they feel that they are being forced into a mode of expression that is not necessarily their strength and is perceived negatively. Regenring, a term defined by Fiona English (2012) as a reworking of the same material from one academic genre to another, offers the opportunity to re-enliven and break with the conventions of the academic essay. For the entry-level visual practitioner, the potential creative benefits of being able to work within the genre of academic writing can be lost because it can be perceived as being of less relevance to practice. Such students would not be inclined to regenre an academic essay they had written from within their discipline because it would be perceived as a way of prolonging an unnecessary and unwanted experience. Within the Year 0 programme, the establishment of twinned genres provides a way of mitigating against this negative perception. The *fullness* of the genre of the academic essay, its rules, conventions and standards, are contrasted by the relative *emptiness* of a *hollowed-out* genre. Students using this parallel visual genring, experience greatly reduced expectations and rules and have greater agency in the type and form of experiences they engage with. Provided the two genres are eventually brought together through teaching strategies and academic assessment there is the potential for a generative and creative relationship between them. We argue that through this dual genring process academic writing gradually finds natural relevance for Fine Art students, one in which they feel they can begin to exert greater degrees of agency within.

Figure 2: *Practice based research task instructions – Process and Outcome*

Within the Year 0 curriculum, this hollowed-out genre finds practical form in visual research tasks in which learners are directed by practice-based instructions (Figure 2). To complete the tasks, the learner is required to enact and document their response to the instructions, drawing stimuli from experiences inherent within everyday life. The research tasks are designed to deliberately pull students through *threshold concepts*, (Meyer and Land, 2003) that are central to the mastery of their discipline, into a liminal space (see Figure 3) where they have the agency to work in ways that are personally relevant and that ultimately allows for successful re-orientation within their discipline. First defined by Meyer and Land (2003), threshold concepts are, as Cousin states (2006, p.4), '*fundamental to a grasp of a subject'*, they both define the limits of the liminal space inherent within the learning and constitute a significant part of its fabric. For Meyer and Land (2006, p.22), this liminal space is the conceptual space that bounds and constitutes interrelated concepts in the borderlands of a discipline and is essential in the process of the mastery. Learning in this liminal space is complex, challenging and authentic, it involves deep structural changes for the learner. The process of negotiating threshold concepts cannot happen in a straightforward manner, it involves 'ontological as well as a conceptual shift[s]' (Cousin, 2006, p.4). New understandings, irreversible changes in basic concepts, the perception of interrelated aspects of disciplines, a reflexive interrogation of a discipline's conventions and an embracement of troublesome knowledge are characteristic of such shifts. The acceptance of *considered risk*, the *embracement of failure* and the tolerance of *not knowing,* coupled with appropriate use of *ambiguity and metaphor* are the kinds of troublesome knowledge that are embodied within the learning on the Year 0 programme. In order to enable students to begin to negotiate these aspects of troublesome knowledge, teaching and learning is experiential, often workshop-based and involves the specific characteristics detailed in Figure 3. Within this diagram, the reader will see that the threshold concepts are described in white 'bubbles' with the word 'task' marked in red in between each of them.

The progressive completion of accumulated tasks encourages the student to work through the threshold concepts into the hollowed-out space, where, following a period of de-orientation triggered by tasks, students are subsequently able to re-orientate themselves within their chosen discipline. The choice of *de*-orientation over *dis*-orientation is deliberate, disorientation having negative connotations that might not be considered helpful within learning.
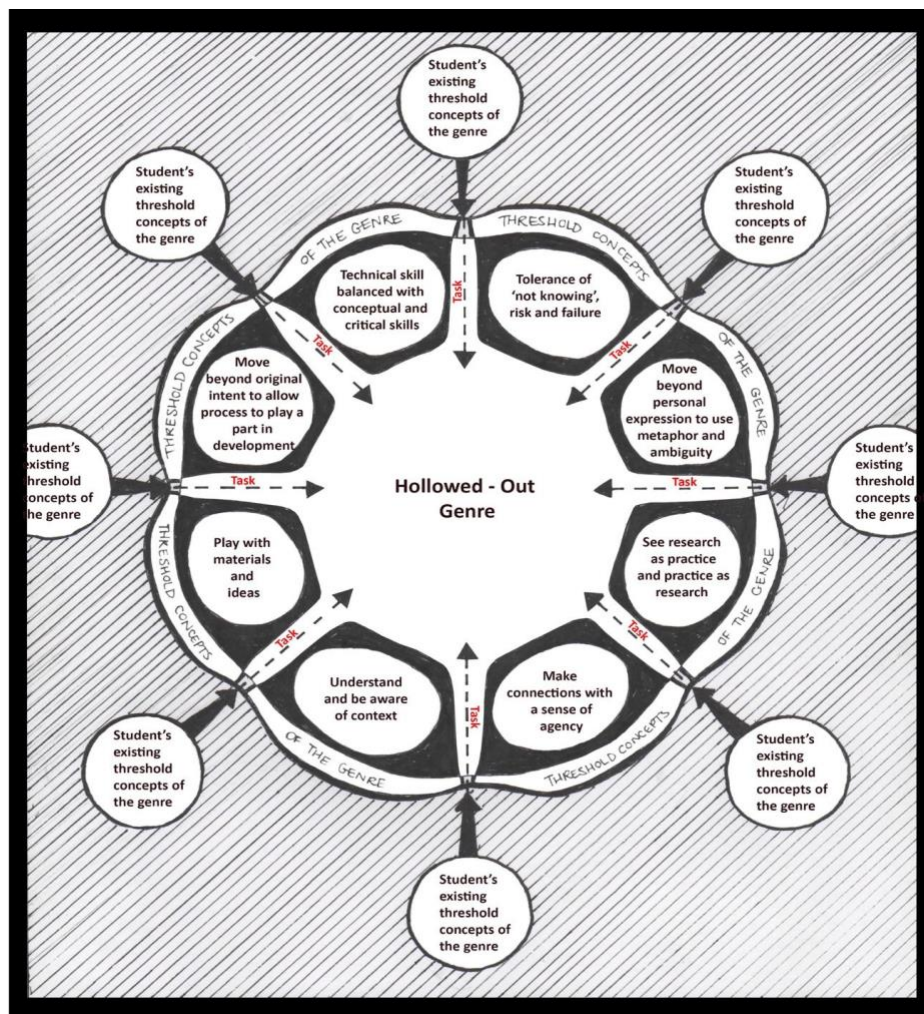
Figure 3: *Hollowed out genre*

The intended activity of each Research Task embodies the principles of the discipline's threshold concepts (see Figure 3), where specific threshold concepts represent new and previously inaccessible ways of thinking about said discipline (Meyer and Land, 2003, p.1). The tasks regularly push the students to grapple with the idea of 'not knowing' where the journey of their work will take them. They are encouraged to take considered risks and to embrace failure. These troublesome values are evident in the task example provided (see Figure 4) where a student decided to 'Take a Shower Backwards'. Rather than 'taking a shower backwards' in a literal sense, the student gets undressed after taking a shower whilst following the normal process of washing his body. The student temporarily re-orients his perception of showering by enacting and embodying this reversal of process in his everyday actions.

His documentation evidences that he follows the task instructions faithfully without knowing what the outcome would be, he takes risks relative to his normal everyday routines and he succeeds in generating an interesting outcome through the failure brought about by the combined processes.

Process – Taking a Shower Backwards

1. Tidy Up
2. Don't Take Off Clothes
3. Wrap Self in Towel & Dry
4. Turn on Shower & Enter
5. Use Conditioner then Shampoo
6. Wash Self with Shower Gel
7. Turn off Shower & Exit
8. Get Undressed and Leave
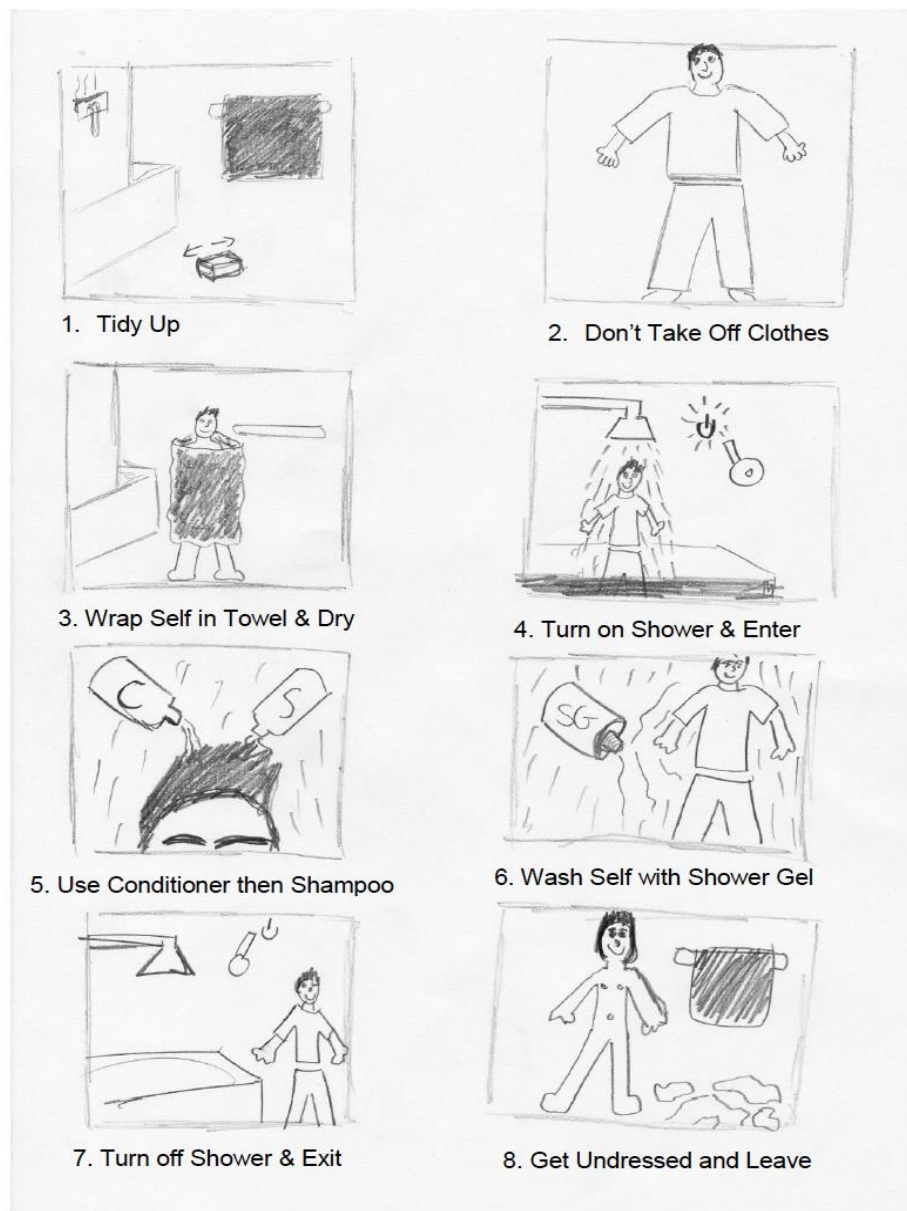
Outcome

After doing this for the third time over the weekend, I now have ruined clothes due to the excessive amount of shower gel, shampoo and conditioner reacting with the clothing dyes. It felt weird using this process to have a shower, as I started off dry but ended up with a wet body and wet clothes with no step to getting dry at the end.

Figure 4: *Student response to practice based research task – Process and Outcome*

The cartoon-like and somewhat naive mode of representation could easily draw a viewer to critique the work due to the level of skill in execution, but this would be to ignore where the strength of the work lies.

The task is strong because it combines both the visual and written modes of expression, evidences a healthy commitment to new ways of learning and has a lot of humour embedded in the narrative. It is worth noting that this student was not following the Year 0 Fine Art pathway - Year 0 students are taught as a mixed group in the early stages of the course and all must complete this specific task for assessment. In terms of technical skills-based challenges, the student has hand-drawn the cartoon - breaking the narrative into six coherent images, he has added printed text to a photograph and then re-scanned before adding an extra commentary. The document evidences an ability to integrate a complex range of activities that are essential to the development of a creative visual practice. As standalone tasks, the students' responses have multiple values because threshold concepts have been worked through, but what they are not aware of at first is the accumulative significance that accrues through each task.

The Year 0 Fine Art programme requires students to consolidate contextual research and learning within an essay *and* a portfolio of research tasks (see Figure 5). Central to the fusing of these activities into a sustainable practice, where practice and theory are integrated and serve each other, is a further interrogation of the intersection of these two genres. The process of keeping a reflective journal offering a method for synthesising thinking between the two. All three genres feed the studio work, (see Figure 5) which is the main emphasis of the students' learning journey. The implications between the genring process to the reflective journal and the studio work will be addressed in the latter part of this article. As two assessable components, the academic essay and the portfolio of research tasks are given equal weight in the end-of-unit submission and each task in the portfolio could be approximately equated with a paragraph of text in an essay. The essay follows the familiar academic format; it is 1,500 words in length, it must follow Harvard referencing guidelines and is submitted for assessment at the end of a unit. The parallel requirement of the portfolio of research tasks consists of the documented evidence of six tasks (Harvard referenced where appropriate), each set for the students in response to emergent learning from a weekly series of Research and Context seminars. Each of these seminars have over-arching themes such as 'The Unexpected and Unfamiliar', or 'Process and Outcome' (see Figure 2) and all themes embody aspects of arts practice. The portfolio of research tasks evidences the degree of understanding the students have of foundational principles of art and design, as introduced within the taught seminars, in ways that complement and extend what is evidenced by the essay.
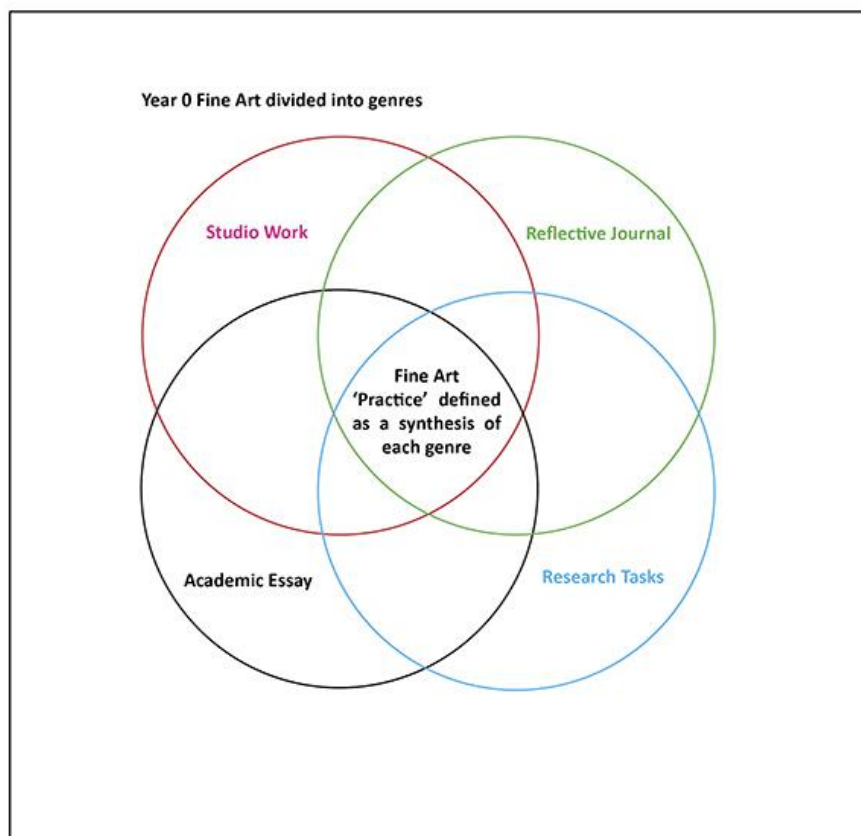
Figure 5: *Year 0 Fine Art genres*

The research tasks quietly, over time, begin to address a long-standing division of what is dichotomously described as research and practice. One of the biggest shifts required in the Year 0 Fine Art students' epistemology is that at a proto-level they have entered-into a visual arts research community. Many entry-level students do not consider learning within an art and design context as research activity, their ideas of research being tacitly defined and populist. For these students, there is a tendency to ventriloquise dichotomised notions of research, long-standing notions that Donald Schön called the 'high, hard ground' of academic research (2007, p.42). A paradox exists, where students whose strengths orients towards the visual, give academic privilege to the written, whilst simultaneously fearing it. The doing activity, the painting, camera work and other material manipulations are seldom seen as research and, for these students, there is a reliance on skills-acquisition. Whilst this aspect is important to their learning, students can focus on this as it is seen as 'safe ground,' however this approach comes without a broader sense of how the skill might be used. In other words, the doing activities and the thinking / writing activities tend to be heavily segregated by preconceived threshold concepts that the students enter Year 0 with. This segregation is compounded by the lack of alternative visual genres to directly rival the hierarchical dominance of the academic essay. In the academic study of Fine Art, the genre of academic essay draws the assessment of learners away from their strongest point of orientation. The aim of the research tasks is to draw the assessment back towards the visual without losing the valuable benefits of written research.

The way the *hollowed-out* genre of the research tasks begins to work together with the *full* academic genre of the essay depends both on the teaching and learning strategies of seminars and through the student's experience of how they are assessed.

The teaching approach within the Year 0 seminars, from which the research tasks emerge, can be considered as regenred in themselves and draws the thinking needed for the research tasks and essay together. The content of lectures is regenred from the conventional learning format of reading out an academic paper for seminar discussion. The modes of delivery of the Year 0 seminars shift, so that performative lecturing accompanies enquiry-based learning and purposeful material play is the central focus of workshop-type encounters. Collaborative play, the making and sharing of short written texts, material demonstrations and discussing artist's films are all relevant modes of experiencing the seminar material, with a rule of thumb being *that unfamiliar and unexpected delivery and a non-hierarchical environment, generally encourages deeper engagement*. The constant shifting between artistic genres and modes of delivery challenges the student's expectations and assumptions about practice, and about learning in general. In the seminars, the links between research, theory and practice are enacted by both the tutors and the students alike, and reflected-on through discussion. In working iteratively through the unfamiliar and surprising processes of the seminars and the research tasks, students are purposefully de-orientated by the practice-based dilemmas presented. The de-orientation of the research tasks complements the de-orientated approach to teaching; the tasks represent breaks with academic conventions that are sanctioned, in-part, by the teaching approaches.

Through the student's repeated experiences of these new learning paradigms their preconceived threshold concepts begin to weaken and fall-away, giving way to more appropriate conceptions of learning within their discipline. The students are pushed into a hollowed-out genre space with very few coordinates and are expected to gradually find a way of self-navigation and re-orientation by learning through experience. This may appear to be a harsh approach, but there is little pressure to produce outcomes of significance in these tasks and there is guidance available for those students who struggle. The students are repeatedly told that as long as there is something submitted, a contribution of any kind for each weekly task, they will pass this specific part of the assessment. The removal of pressure within the hollowed-out genre is a major contributing factor in the success of the tasks, rather than doing the bare minimum, the majority of students become very involved in their responses. Students often discuss their responses to the tasks with each other in the studios and describe conversations about them that happen on social media. The students, in their own time and their own way, work through the learning they have experienced in the seminar. At the point of assessment constructive written comments are given about both the academic essay and the research tasks. When students come for feedback equal amounts of attention are given to both genres and crucially, links are made between the two. This process of reflection (for both student and lecturer) synthesises the elements of Figure 5 into an emerging Fine Art practice.

The research tasks afford a different range of responses than those afforded by the academic essay. English's research into the affordances of genres suggests that they 'afford particular communicative possibilities for a given set of circumstances' (Gibson, 1979, p.127). English argues that it is through examining what the different genres afford that we can begin to more fully understand the different learning potentials offered. A genre's perceived potential is not the attributes, the describable phenomena, but their meanings as communicative resources (English, 2012, p.79) In combination, the portfolio of research tasks and the academic essay afford 'different ways of knowing' (English, 2012, p73), they provide balance for each other. By setting up a genre that has reduced restrictions on what kind of modes of expression can be included, the range of affordance can be increased. The students are given greater agency in their learning and the shifting between different genres and different resources compels the students to engage with a process of transcoding between representational forms. The culmination of the regenred teaching and the parallel genring afford many new and singular strands of learning to emerge for each student. Their sense of subjectivity develops and their identity transforms with an emerging and conscious sense of the changes that happen; *de-orientation* is gradually succeeded by self-negotiated re-orientations.

Figure 6: *Practice based research task instructions – The Unexpected and Unfamiliar*

The completed task shown in Figure 7 exemplifies some of the de-orientations and re-orientations that begin to happen to the students through working in the hollowed-out genre. The following image was created as a response to the Research Task entitled 'The Unexpected and Unfamiliar' (see Figure 6) in which students are asked to make an everyday object seem strange. Nearly all the tasks focus on the everyday and encourage the students to detect patterns, the accumulation of which constitute a grammar of this hollowed-out genre. For Halliday '[g]rammar goes beyond rules of correctness. It is a means of representing patterns of experience…. It enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them.' (1985, p.101 in Kres and Van Leeuwen (2006). This grammar-building is crucial to the development of a visual practice, the students both use existing forms of visual grammar and disrupt them to form their own. The image and words in Figure 6 focus upon what happens when patterns of experience are disrupted.

For this student reality is reconfigured; the device for controlling the television is defamiliarised, it is turned into something else and pointed back on herself as viewer.

'My subject of making the familiar unfamiliar, is using a remote control to watch the television. I turn the television on nearly each day to watch programs, but the action of turning it on with the remote control is something I never really think about, so i wanted to change it.

I edited the photo, making it black and white to make me less familiar. I pointed the remote control at myself as a remote control is not used on me or humans, and nothing will happen if I point it to myself, however television provokes a reaction to me and others when we do touch these buttons to turn on / adjust volume etc. I then edited out my eyes, as I watch the television with my eyes, however they aren't in this image.'

Figure 7: *Student response to practice based research task – The Unexpected and Unfamiliar*

The remote appears to be a very thin stainless steel and stylish object photographed from the side so that it appears to be a thin metal tube, like a telescope. There are two clear perspective reversals in this image, two re-orientations; there is the conventional direction in which one points the remote - towards the herself as looker rather than at the television, and there is also the way that the remote is presented as an optical object. This dual perspective is reinforced by the object being brought up to the place where a viewer would normally see the student's eye, which has been removed. The task implicitly speaks of the act of looking at encoded information that we receive passively. This passivity is disabled, the new viewing device (telescope) looks outward at something that cannot be perceived through normal vision; it is as though for the student the mind has to shift to perceiving reality from a different perspective. In the written text, the student indicates what the process is about for them, but as a semiotic resource (Kres and Van Leeuwen, 2006) communicating socially in the context of academic learning, it seems to speak of a de-orientation

from a conventional way of communicating / looking to a very different kind. The photograph, at a meta level, tells us of a de-orientation from one set of threshold concepts and a re-orientation towards a new way of seeing the world. This is both a different way of seeing, and a different way of seeing herself; one orientation is towards her developing identity as an artist and the other is a different orientation of the self. The two overlap considerably.

English identifies this kind of developmental learning as a particular kind of orientation (*discursive orientation*) where 'genres orient between the social and the material in the process of communication and in doing so 'orient' towards doing things in particular ways' (2012, p.88). We argue that the re-orienting, elegantly described in English's analysis of the regenring process, is preceded by a process of de-orientation. Year 0 students need to untangle themselves from existing threshold concepts (de-orientate) before the re-orientating work can begin. Within the genring of the research tasks, students are initially presented with a *disorientating dilemma* that prevents students from clinging to existing threshold concepts. For Jack Mezirow (1991, p.168) this de-orientation is the first of ten phases of transformation in adult learning. There is not enough space to outline all ten phases here, the important issue is that an initial 'shock 'triggers the process of transformation [a]ny major challenge to an established perspective can result in transformation. These challenges are painful; they often call into question deeply held personal values and threaten our sense of self' (Mezirow, 1991, p.168). The disintegration of the disorientating dilemma finds re-integration in Mezirow's tenth phase, once 'self-confidence in new roles and relationships' (ibid) is found. New orientations, or re-orientations enable the students to have greater agency and contribute to the transformation of their subjectivities. This de-orientative process and subsequent re-orientation often involves an uncomfortable intellectual and emotional repositioning, as Meyer and Land state,

> … the ideas that learners enter into this liminal state in their attempts to grasp certain concepts presents a powerful way of remembering that learning is both affective and cognitive and that it involves identity shifts, which can entail troublesome, unsafe, journeys (Meyer and Land, 2006, p.22).

The metaphor of *journeying* in education is ubiquitous, and for Donald Schön a vorticose destination of professional practice is the *swampy lowlands* visualised in Figure 8. As the hollowed-out genre has a practical emphasis, the tasks regularly push the students into Schön's swampy lowlands so that they are compelled to make decisions that draw upon their everyday experience. However, as academic practitioners the students must also be mindful of the *high, hard ground of academia* (Schön, 2007, p.42), they must learn to oscillate their attention between this varied topography. The image / diagram is a visualisation of the genring that happens between the hollowed-out genre and the academic essay.

High Ground of Traditional Academic Research

The 'Hovering Hawk in the mind' (Bolton, 2014:6) The Compass Reflection-in-Action

Both feed off each other

Swampy Lowlands' of Professional Practice

Navigational Map - The Reflective Journal Reflction-on-Action
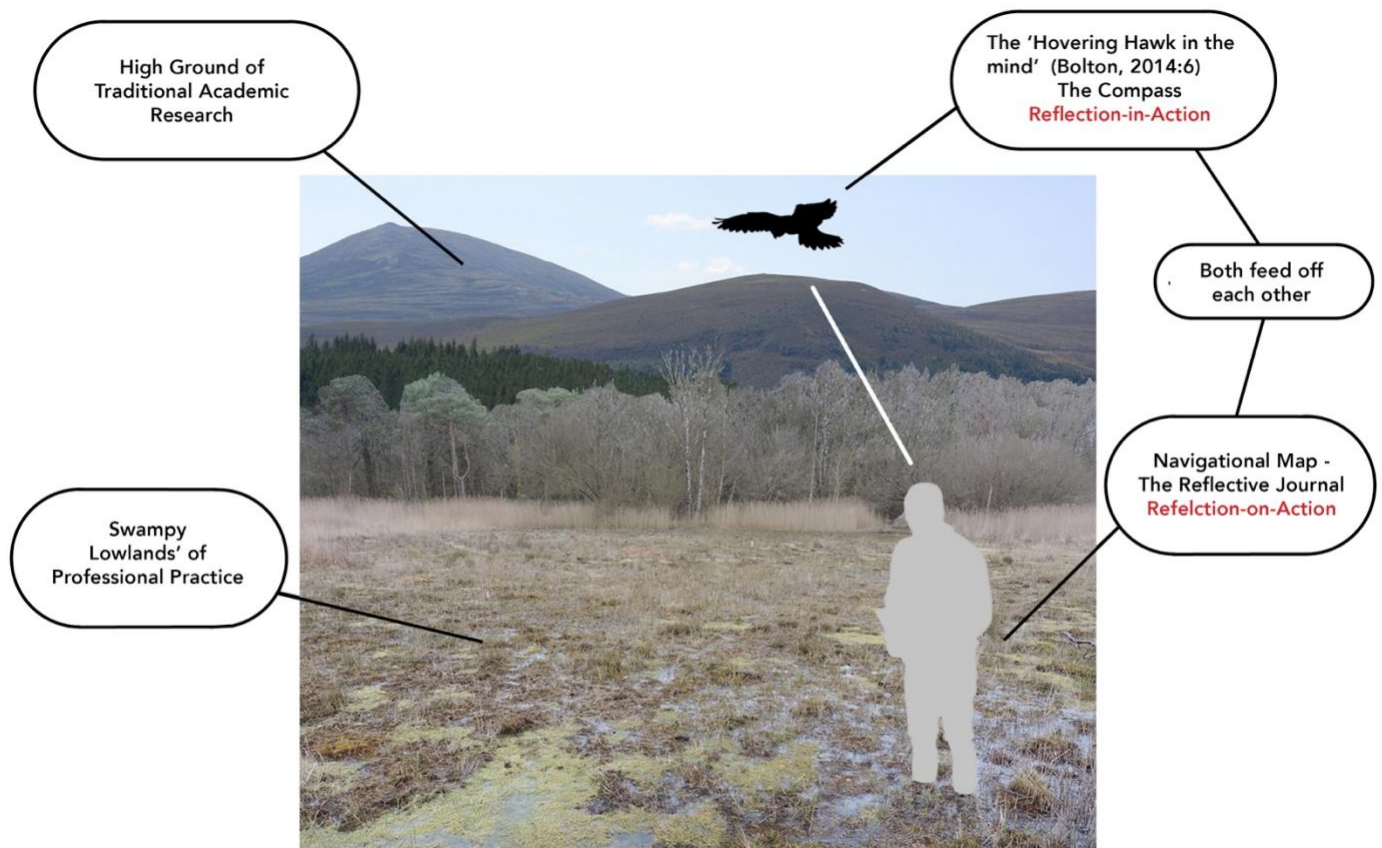
Bolton, G., (2014) Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development. 3rd ed. London: Sage (book and ebook)
Schön, D., (2007) The Relative Practitioner. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Figure 8: *Swampy Lowlands of Professional Practice*

However good the relationship between the genres, the creative and conceptual thought that happens in the genring process cannot remain tacit, it needs externalising in a place that can hold it for future reference. The process of recording thought in a reflective journal provides a combined written and visual hub between the two genres. Gillie Bolton (2014, p.6) argues that this is where practitioners develop skills, experience, values and knowledge and bring them into practical use. It is a holding place where the theory from the high ground of academia becomes synthesised and integrated with ideas and playful thinking. To use Schön's terms, (2007) the students reflect-on-action in reflective journals and gradually begin to reflect-in-action; they make reflexive decisions that draw on workings-out that have happened in previous experiences. Bolton defines reflexivity as an accumulation of 'strategies to question our own attitudes, theories-in-use, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions; to understand our complex roles in relation to others' (2014, p.7). Awareness of these strategies enable practitioners to 'think within experiences' (ibid: p.7) and establish a 'hovering hawk in the mind' (ibid, p.6) (see Figure 8). To extend the navigational metaphor, for Bolton, the reflective journal provides a map for navigation and the hovering hawk is the compass. The research tasks are de-orientating dilemmas of the hollowed-out genre; the map (the reflective journal) and the hovering hawk are the equipment we give to the students to help them self-navigate in the swamp of practice**.**

To increase practical and conceptual orientation in the swampy lowlands of Fine Art practice and to provide a space for synthesis we have also developed a reflective cycle consisting of a series of prompts (See Figure 9). The practitioner in the swamp in Figure 8 is standing in the middle of this cycle, the circle should be seen horizontally on the floor around the silhouetted figure. For the Year 0 student the maelstrom of the disorientating dilemma that happens when we engage with new learning experiences is eased by having some basic reflective co-ordinates to work from and from which to navigate. The prompts, as a set of basic co-ordinates have been arrived at through consultation with students over a two-year period. The action ('act' on the diagram) is the practice that they are engaged in and the clockwise sequence roughly follows a process of reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action (Cowan, 1998). The diagram builds on the diagrams of the reflective cycle produced by Gibbs (1988) and McAleese (1999). By describing what kind of action they are involved in the students begin to orientate and gain more conscious control. The headings might seem a little too prescriptive at first glance, but the intention behind their use is that the students are free to form their own reflective methodology once they have developed some mastery of the terms and the process of reflection becomes a learned behaviour, one that stays with them throughout their studies.
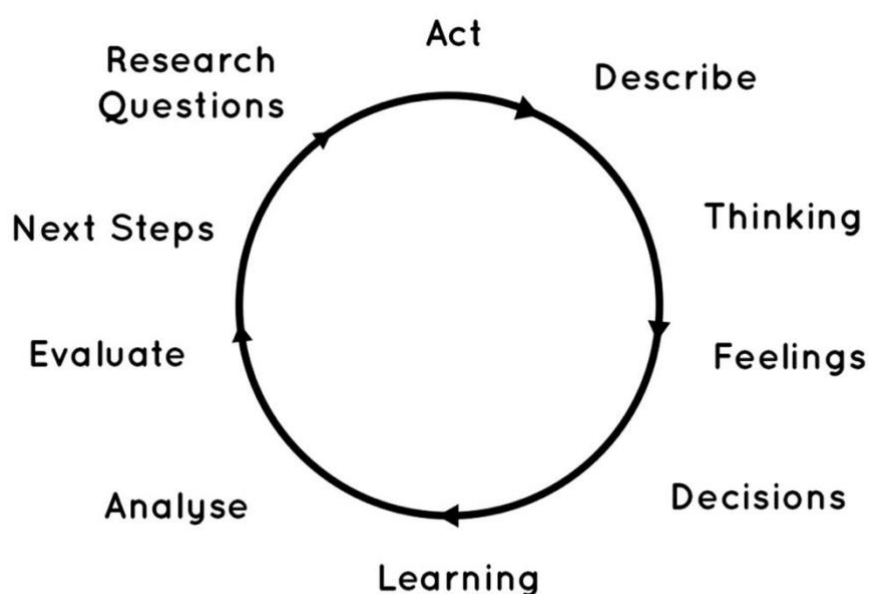
Figure 9: *The reflective cycle*

As the students progress to their second unit they begin to use the reflective cycle to frame their research tasks. Initially a printed sheet of paper, the second iteration of the reflective cycle exists as a digital mind-map that can be emailed between staff and students and can be uploaded to the Virtual Learning Environment for assessment. The mind-mapping software that contains the cycle affords a rich relationship between images of the student's practice and their thoughts. The new impetus is that as the students begin to reflect directly upon the tasks, the values of the hollowed-out genre, the threshold concepts, are more consciously brought into close proximity with practical work.

Writing with a purpose plays a role in eroding assumptions about academic writing and paves the way for more critical reflection to emerge. The same principles of the research tasks continue, but there is a designated space for practical task-work and academic writing to co-exist.

This transitional period from first engagement with this process of genring to the point at which the genres merge can be uncomfortable and difficult. Essentially, we are asking students to leave known, perceivably safe, territories and enter a space of uncertainty and unknowing. According to Meyer and Land,

> 'This space is likened to that which adolescents inhabit - not yet adults; not quite children. It is an unstable space in which the learner may oscillate between old and emergent understandings just as adolescents often move between adult-like and child-like responses to their transitional status.' (2006, p.22)

As they begin to inhabit the liminal spaces afforded by the hollowed-out genre, students can be resistant or choose to stall the process of re-orientation to remain on more stable and familiar ground. This defensive approach means that some choose to revert to old learning practices or knowledge or adopt a practice of mimicry. This kind of student ventriloquises a practice-voice, they have a tendency to mimic the actions of their peers who are authentically engaged or carry out work which they think is expected of them by their tutors. In such cases visual artistic practice becomes inauthentic, where '… learning becomes a product of ritualised performances rather than integrated understandings.' (Cousin, 2006, p5) Whilst it is possible to navigate the Year 0 programme in this way, often students that do this struggle to make the transition to subsequent years of undergraduate study in a meaningful way. Students who are brave and committed enough to face these aspects of troublesome learning in a *meaningful* and *authentic* way begin to establish an autonomous practice that is more sustainable through subsequent study.

The following images (Figures 10 and 11) show an authentic engagement with the struggle to write reflectively in a way that integrates the genres of the academic essay and portfolio of research tasks. For each week the task is to work their way around the reflective cycle using both images and written text. The two images only show the upper part of the cycle which covers the beginning and end of the cycle. This particular student works with collaged photographic material from publications like the *National Geographic* magazine so for copyright reasons we have not been able to show the images he refers to, but the painting he generates from them is shown in Figure 12. The reflective cycle shows how the student moves from describing a plan of action (alongside process-based questions), to placing value upon the outcomes emerging from initial experiments. This represents reflection on visual thinking, which in turn enables the establishment of conceptual and practical inroads for further action. This process results in a series of paintings which emerged from a sustained enquiry where the student begins to push through multiple cycles of action research, addressing instances of troublesome knowledge. Elsewhere in the cycle, the student reflects on examples of not knowing, risk and failure. Within this task, written language mediates between the visual thinking of rapid collage and a more extended painting processes.

The dual genring process that happens in the research tasks of the Hollowed-out genre and the academic essay find hybrid form in this digital reflective journal.

I may allow myself a break between collages, however i feel this will void the purpose of working fast in succession, i feel this allows me to become looser and freezer as time progresses.

I pick up a page, I wonder how i will extract the image? How much time do have left? how neatly do i want tout the image away from the page? Do i rip the image out and save some time? do i want to keep some of the background within my extracted image? should I remove some of the sections of the image to keep it ambiguous?

I start the timer and produce a collage within the five minutes I have allocated for each piece

During my five minutes, I would pick up the first page I put my hand upon, no matter what imagery was on the page itself. I then quickly scanned the page, and used this time to decide what i wanted to extract from the page. My decisions altered with every page I picked up, Sometimes i would extract sections of a fire of face, other times i would go for pattern or wildlife, I chose imagery on my personal taste and interest, i did not top to think how it would alter the composition of the collage.

Act / Do / Make

Plan

Describe what you did

Analyse - examine (something) methodically and in detail, typically in order to explain and interpret it: *we need to analyse our results more clearly.*
• discover or reveal (something) through close examination: *[with clause] : he tried to analyse exactly what was going on.*

Think

I try my best not to think at all, All I keep thinking is to be careful of my fingers when I use the sisters with such speed. I hesitate almost every time before blueing an extracted image onto the a4 paper, then I stop worrying, and place it wherever I feel in that single moment that follows.

Figure 10: *Digital reflective journal (detail – part one)*

I wonder what images I will pick at random, will these images work well together? will i extract interesting imagery or play it safe and extract solid colours, patterns?

I wonder how i can make the imagery more interesting and obscure within my paintings? should i sand away areas of paint? Scrape off paint as i work or paint in 10 second bursts etc? There are many more factors to consider when i start painting that are separate to the process of producing the collages. However due to my research into mark making and materials, I can apply these to my paintings in the same way i did my collage if i desire.

I cut up National Geographic magazines into individual pages and jumbled them in a large pile on the floor. I gathered my materials; (Siscors, glue stick, A4 paper [7 sheets]), and set a timer for five minutes ready for when i started my collages.

I start the tim each piece

Using the isolated sections of my most successful, refined collages, I will produce quick painting responses. The collages act as my reference for imagery and colour, however scale and detail may vary.

Plan

Next Steps

Some of the collages present little or no interesting imagery. I enjoyed working from the scrap oar i accumulated during each series as it gave me a second chance to get it right, i found some of these created the most interesting imagery, and the scrunched up effect added texture to the collages.

The value is very intersting, They go from everyday magazines to cut up and scattered on a floor, the images themselves are then given status by me as I extract what i believe to be the best and glue it onto a canvas. The everyday, discarded images become art, however this does not mean they are all successful in their own right.

Evaluate
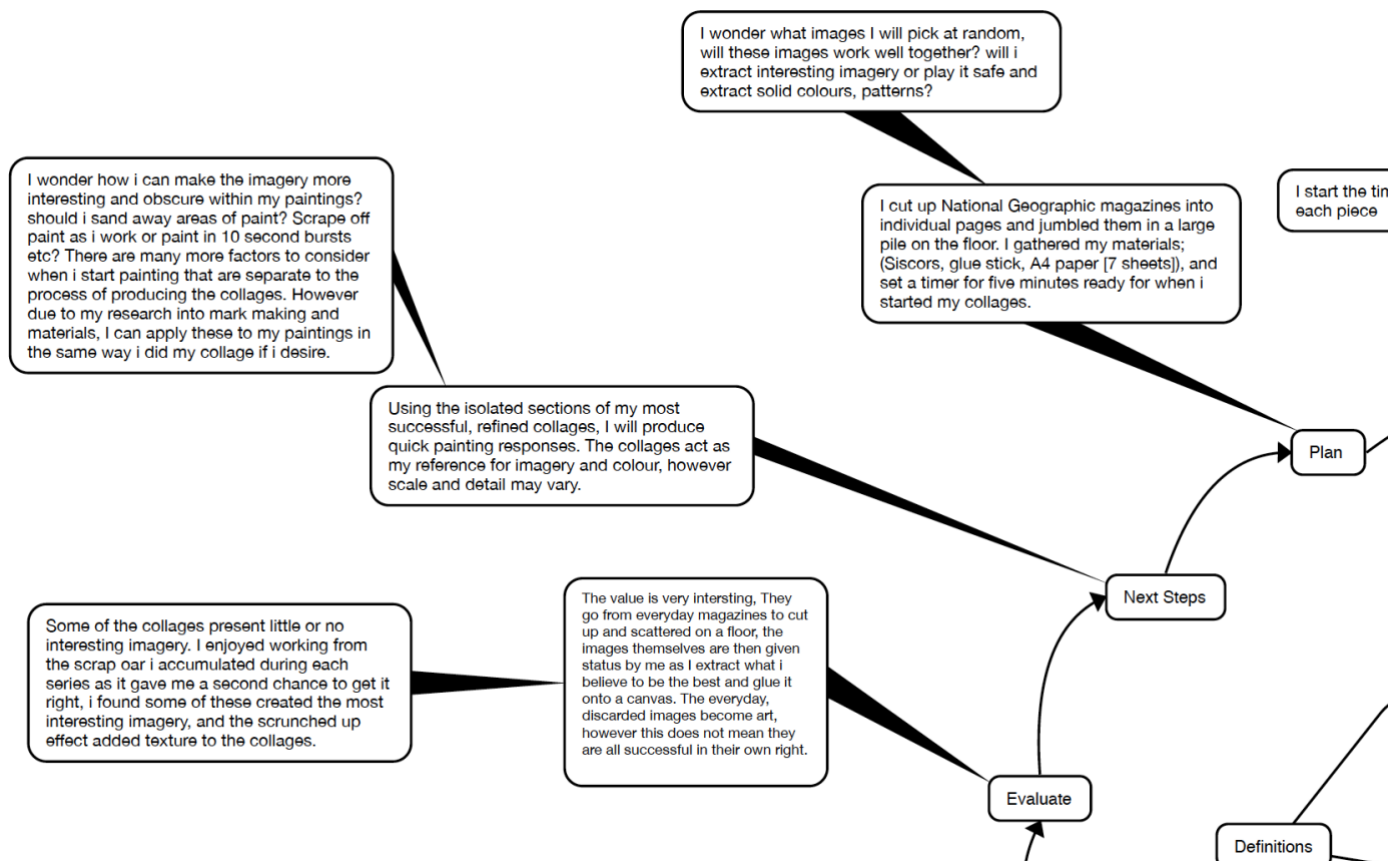
Definitions

Figure 11: *Digital reflective journal (detail – part two)*

As all academic research is cyclical and iterative, the headings within the reflective map move students beyond fragmented orientational shifts and push orientational reflection through a full cycle of recognisable tropes. Students that engage in the reflective cycle led by the suggested headings make a conceptual three-hundred-and-sixty-degree turn. They begin by describing the actions of process and end with a plan of new actions. Within this turn, students start to connect the different sub-genres inherent within Fine Art; there is genre convergence where the visual is informed by the written and the written is informed by the visual. Students begin to see the writing and the visual as interdependent where words serve as anchors for fixing thoughts about practice. The reflective writing process helps mitigate against the disorientating shocks of the research tasks, it enables the students to assert greater degrees of control over what happens within research without control becoming too dominant a force. It is precisely this experiential learning of this ebb and flow of control that gives students confidence in their developing Fine Art practice. As consequence of this, students that begin to write within practice and understand its relevance can approach the genre of the academic essay with a different perspective. They see critical writing as integral to their practice and their anxieties and negativity are allayed. Within this process of genre re-orientation, the vectorial link that connects the two main genres - the academic essay and the research tasks - is strengthened.

Figure 12: *Student painting developed from practice based research task*

As the students develop through this genring process their reflective responses to the research tasks evolves as their facility for critical thinking develops. Students begin to see reflective and critical thinking as an increasingly important facet of their practice and it is extended to the making processes within the studio work. The four genres of Fine Art practice, as identified in the diagram of Figure 5 begin to work together. The students who manage this integration process take more of a critically reflexive stance and practice becomes emerging praxis.

The dual use of genres within the Year 0 programme opens up the core of practice of the Fine Art discipline. To access this core, students must pass through Meyer and Land's liminal thresholds in an attempt to gain mastery of fundamental concepts. The research tasks serve as a Hollowed-out genre that facilitates investigative patterns of experience. They generate shifts from the academic to the everyday, deliberately drawing the student through a range of threshold concepts that de-orientate existing epistemologies. The previously discussed examples of responses to research tasks, (Figures 4 and 7) serve as an embodiment of the students' individual learning and the learning experienced within the research and context seminars. As such, the sophistication of these responses evolve as the student's learning evolves, as they begin to re-orientate themselves within their discipline.

Our teaching and learning strategies and directed reflective mapping process give students the tools to independently navigate the troublesome knowledge of this problematic liminal space. By engaging with the tasks, students enter into regenring activity where they begin to re-orientate towards other modes of representation and communication. The result is that they are able to reflexively utilise a broader range of semiotic resources in their practice. By encouraging students to master key threshold concepts of the Fine Art discipline, they re-orientate themselves towards the discipline and are irreversibly changed. They are transformed both emotionally and intellectually and are better equipped to navigate further undergraduate study.

Table of Illustrations

References

Bolton, G. (2010) *Reflective Practice - Writing and Professional Development*. London: Sage Publications. 3rd Edition.

Cousin, G. (2006) *An introduction to threshold concepts*. Higher Education Academy

Cousin, G. (2006) *Threshold Concepts, troublesome knowledge and emotional capital: an emotional exploration into learning about others.* In: Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. (eds.), Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge, London and New York: Routledge.

Cowan, J. (1998) *On Becoming an Innovative University Teacher: Reflection in Action*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: SRHE/Open University Press).

English, F. (2012) *Student Writing and Genre: Reconfiguring Academic Knowledge*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Further Education Unit.

Gibson, J., J. (1979) *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Hilldale, NJ: Basic.

Kress, G., and van Leeuwen, T. (2006) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. New York :Routledge.

McAleese, R. (1999) *Skill acquisition – the curious case of information searching. Teaching of Information and Communication Sciences*. Pontificia de Salamanca, Spain: Euroconference, September 1999

Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. (2003) *Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: linkages to ways of thinking and practising.* In: Rust, C. (ed.), *Improving Student Learning – ten years on*. Oxford: OCSLD.

Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. (eds.) (2006) *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge*. London and New York: Routledge.

Mezirow, J. (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. S.F. California: Jossey-Bass.

Schön, D., (2007) *The Reflective Practitioner*. Aldershot: Ashgate.