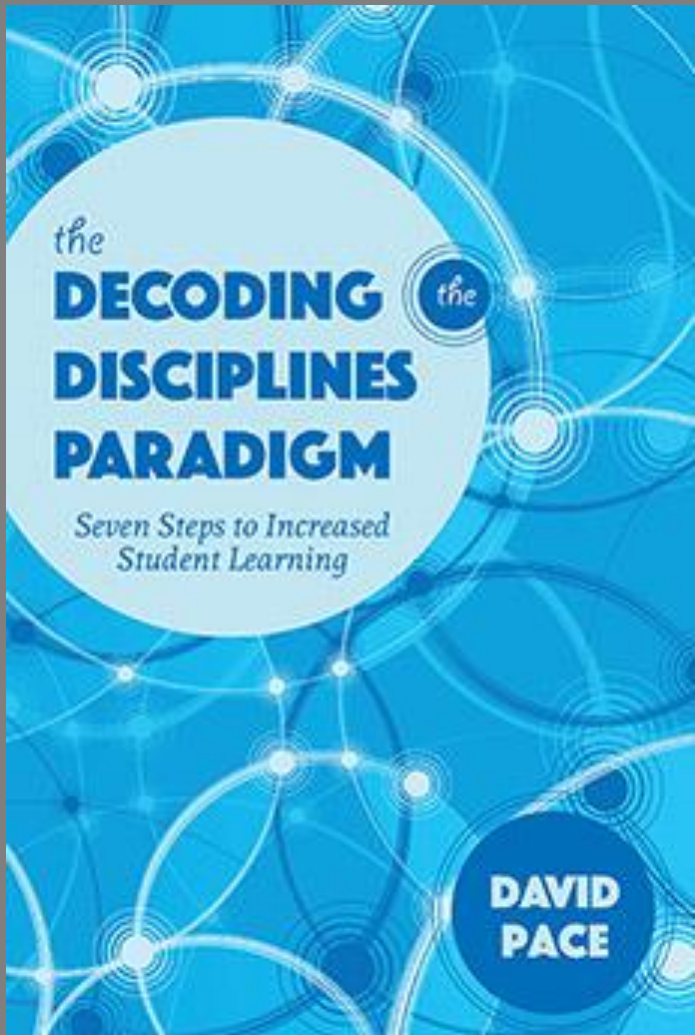


Decoding the Disciplines

James Cronin



Preface

Introduction: An Overview of
Decoding the Disciplines

1. Find the Bottleneck

2. Step 2: Decoding the Disciplinary
Unconscious

3. Modeling Operations

4. Practice and Feedback

5. Motivation and Emotional
Bottlenecks

6. Assessment

7. Sharing

8. The Future of Decoding
Epilogue

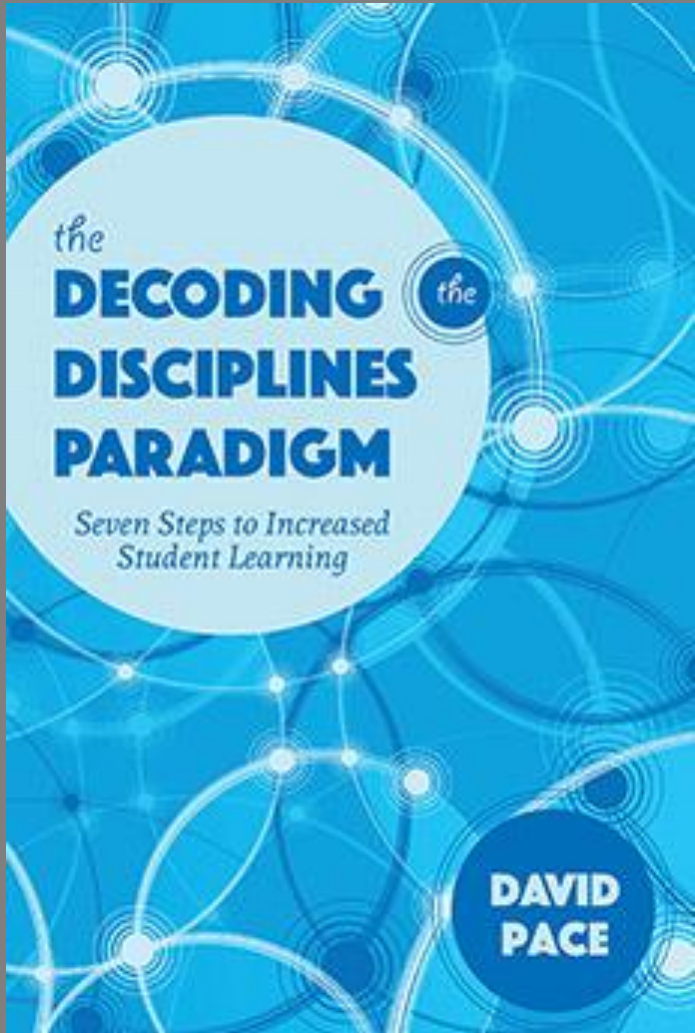
Notes

List of References

Index

Decoding the Disciplines

James Cronin



History: generating an interpretation that is backed by evidence

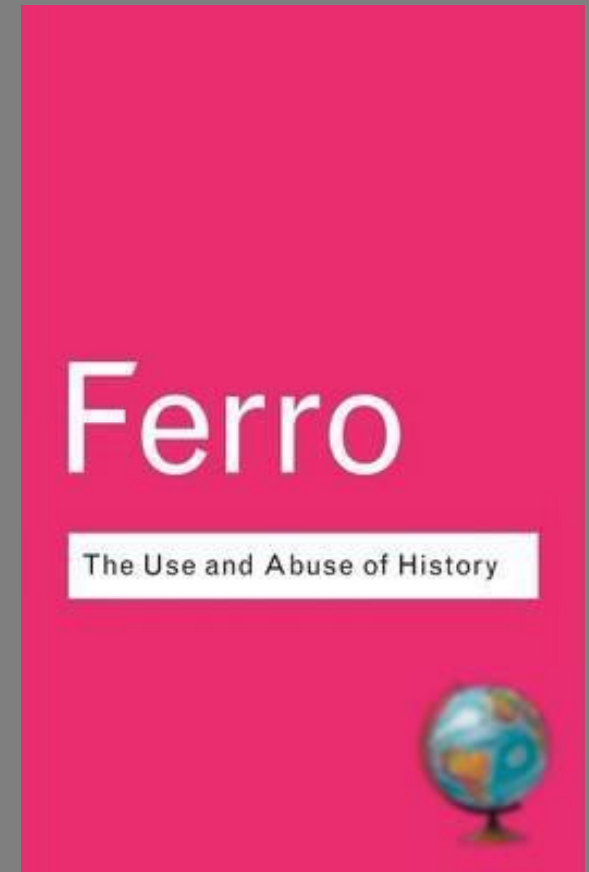
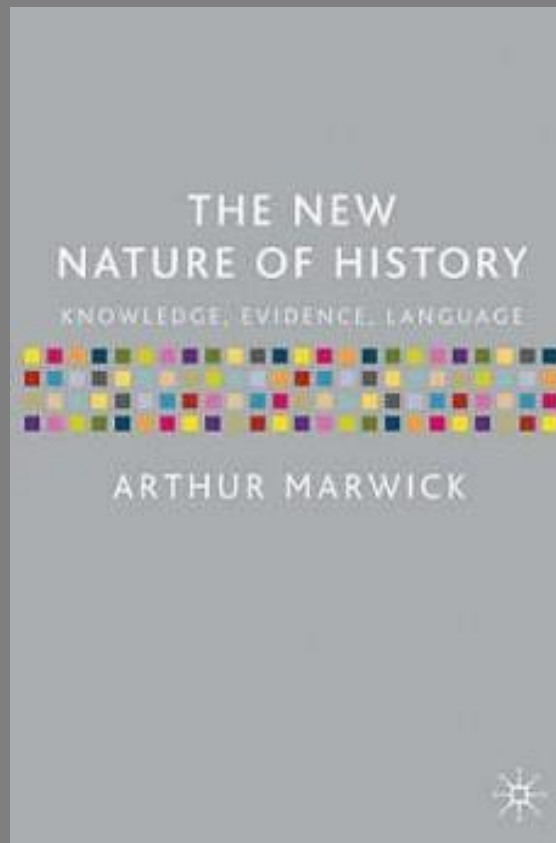
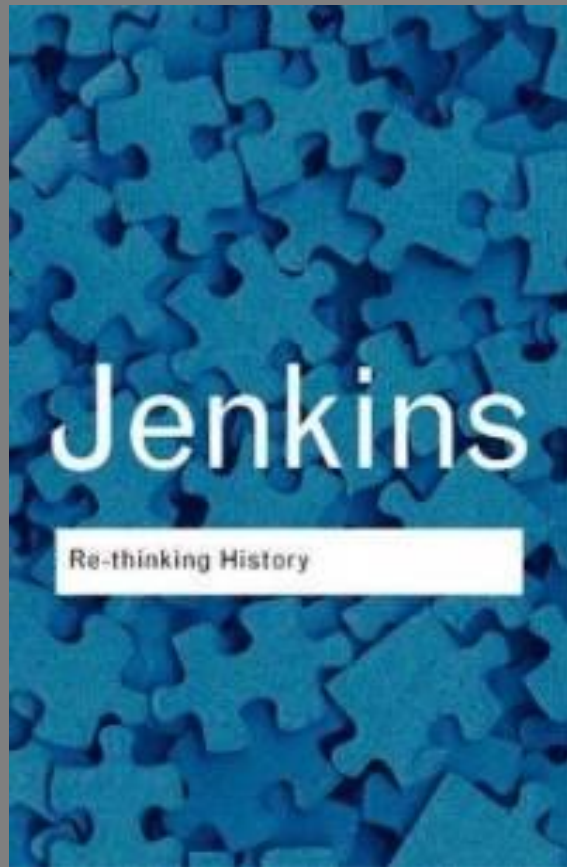
Literature: using secondary sources to interpret literary texts

What scholars mean by academic writing and critical thinking differs across fields.

Geology: asking a question, collecting and analyzing evidence, and drawing conclusions

Accounting: collecting, analyzing, and judging key financial documents in order to make recommendations

Doing History



HISTORY AS A PERFORMANCE OF UNDERSTANDING

1. acknowledging history's crafted nature by interrogating how history is written and studied;
2. assessing key historical periods and patterns of change over time and within and across nations, cultures, and time periods; determining why people view and interpret historical events differently;
3. exhibiting knowledge of research methods, archives and new media resources; demonstrating skill in both constructive critical analysis and empirically grounded creative synthesis;
4. showing awareness of the philosophical foundations of historical knowledge and of current thinking about fixing the grounds of historical 'truth';
5. exhibiting a capacity to evaluate good historical work in fields outside of one's own special field;
6. knowing how to communicate with diverse audiences; demonstrating an ability to work collaboratively;
7. assuming professional responsibility for the institutional governance and management or in the discipline's professional structures;
8. demonstrating a commitment to mentoring young historians.

(Bender, 2006, pp. 307-308)

IDENTIFYING THE LEARNING BOTTLENECK

“When faculty express concern about the inability of students to do the work in a history class, the problem may not be a lack of the component skills, but rather that most of our students do not understand what historians do.”

(Díaz, Middendorf, Pace, Shopkow, 2008, p. 1218)

“[first-year history] lectures emphasise the importance of understanding values in societies . . . but students in their essays were more inclined to provide a narrative of the time period.”

(Anonymous, personal communication, January 19, 2012)

HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS A CONCEPTUAL BOTTLENECK

“Students also must accept that sources are created by human beings and are as complicated as life itself. Faculty expect students to re-create imaginatively the cultural context in which such artifacts were produced and to re-create the meanings and perspectives of the people who produced them.”

(Díaz, Middendorf, Pace, Shopkow, 2008, p. 1214)

“ . . .students who have been led to see history as the chronicle of elites and of world-altering events have difficulty in conceiving of literary sources, pictures, maps, diaries, or songs as legitimate sources for studying history.”

(Díaz, Middendorf, Pace, Shopkow, 2008, p. 1214)

“Lacking both the experience and the confidence of their instructors, many history students are understandably nervous about claiming to understand the meaning in the words or actions of someone in a very different era.”

(Díaz, Middendorf, Pace, Shopkow, 2008, 1215)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Crusading Era (1095-1281)

Military campaigns were promoted by the medieval papacy to recover the Holy Places in the Middle East lost to Islam. Knights who participated in these campaigns were assured of spiritual benefits. Those who died on campaign would achieve the status of martyr. Men so assured – even children on one occasion (1212) – kept the Levant at the forefront of the consciousness of kings and popes in the West for two centuries.

The First Crusade was promoted at the Council of Clermont by Pope Urban II in 1096. The success of this crusade is due to the fact that it was able to exploit weaknesses and anarchy within the Islamic world. The campaign captured Jerusalem and established four Christian states in the Middle East known as the “Latin Kingdoms”.

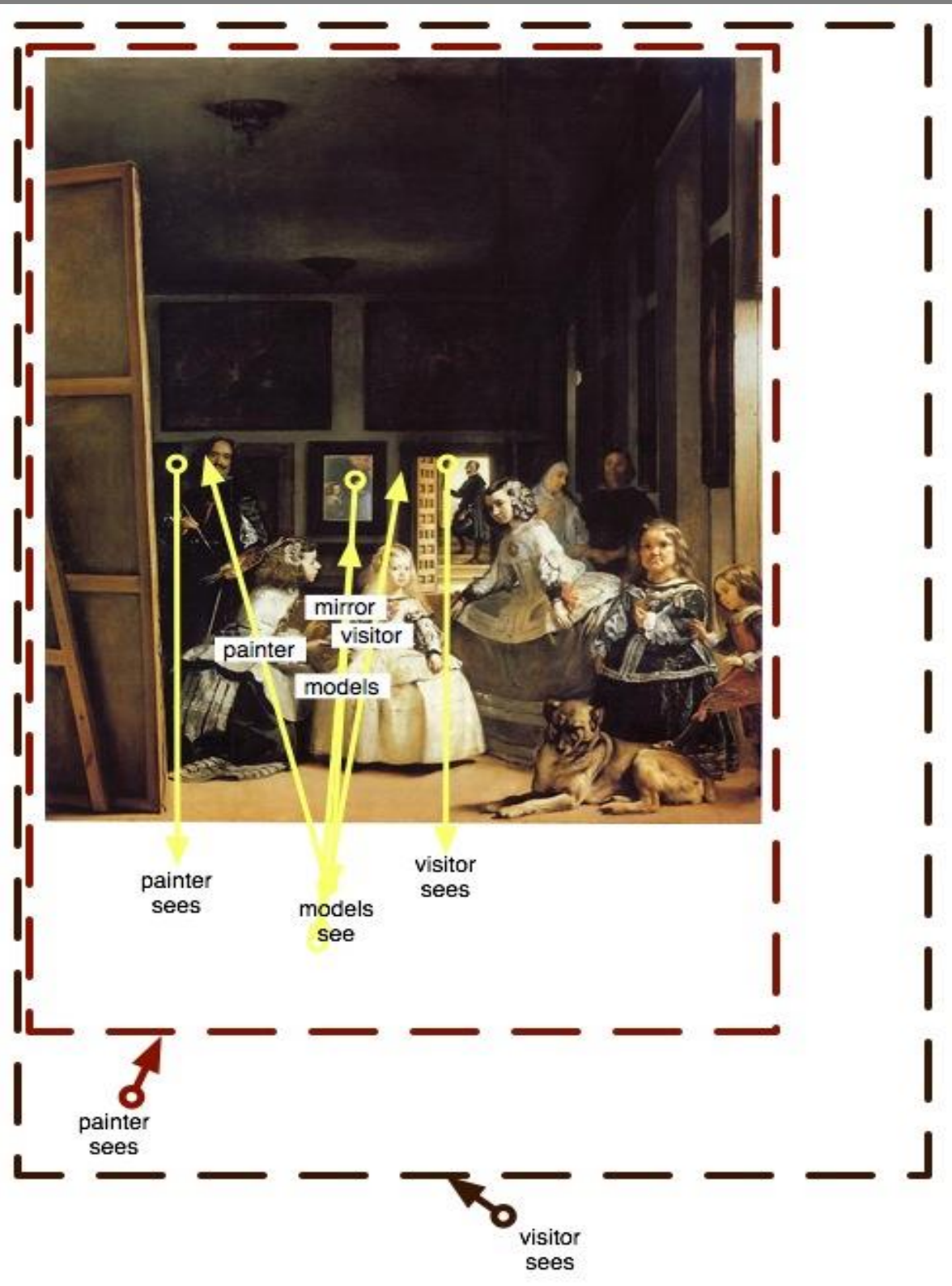
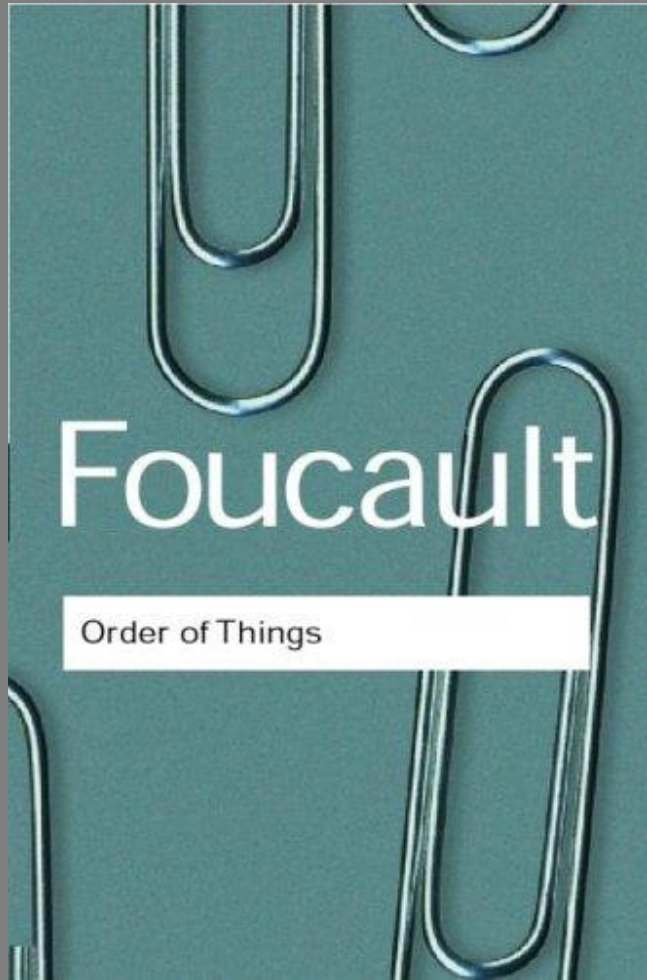
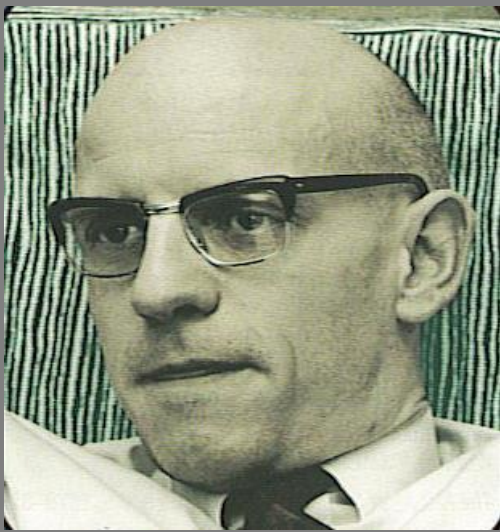
“One approach that I found useful to move the students away from the political narrative was greater analysis of a primary source. In one instance we took a document dealing with Pope Urban II’s announcement of the First Crusade in November 1095. Ironically, this unlike other literary sources such as *Beowulf* was very political in nature. Yet, I attempted to bring in elements of cultural and social history and combine them with political history by first asking them why there was a crusade? Jerusalem had fallen to the Muslims. Secondly, why call a crusade in November? What was special about this time of the year in relation to the religious calendar? They answered that it was Advent and I explained that the Pope was linking the idea of religious war with a time of fasting and prayer. This quickly got a lively discussion going and I think the students could see that there was indeed a cultural side to history, i.e. the belief-system that existed in medieval times. Finally, I asked them why call a crusade in November, but not launch it? They quickly answered that it was too cold and so we discussed the social implications of going to war in medieval times, which helped stimulate further debate in the class. I followed this template of linking the various frameworks for studying sources for the next few classes and it seemed to work well.”

(Anonymous postgraduate teacher-historian, personal communication,
November 19, 2011)

“[The seminars helped me] to reflect on the values which I personally believed important to the study of history, but more importantly it enabled me to step back from these values and explore the discipline of history from a wider perspective. With these issues in mind I became more sensitive to my own students’ perceptions of history and I feel that this perhaps made for greater facilitation of the learning process both for me and my students.”

(Anonymous postgraduate teacher-historian, personal communication, May 11, 2012)





Decoding visual analysis skills for the study of Art History

Adult Continuing Education, UCC, 2009-2017

<i>Looking Level</i>	<i>Visual Questions</i>	<i>Visual Comprehension</i>
Literal (Captioning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Who is the artist? · What is the title of the work? · What is the size of the work? · What is the medium (fresco, oil, tempera etc.)? · What is the date? · Where is the work now located? 	TAGGING: Pictorial information is assessable from image captioning in secondary sources and museum or gallery catalogue information.
Descriptive (Seeing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How is the composition arranged? · How is the subject represented? · How is mood evoked? · What details look familiar or unfamiliar? · Is there anything that stands out? · Does this connect with anything seen before? 	DESCRIPTION: This level encourages the student to articulate their position by critically examining the composition in their own voice. This level is frequently neglected by students who rush to reproduce the critical reviews of scholars in the critical literature.
Critical (Meaning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · What is the original historical context? · Who commissioned the work (patron)? · Why was it commissioned (public or private commission)? · Is it characteristic of the period (art historical style)? 	ANALYSIS: This level allows the student to critically engage with visual analysis. The student demonstrates their awareness of how images allow for the transmission of cultural ideas.
Contextual (Associating)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How does context inform meaning? · Who owned the work (did it change ownership over time)? · What has been written about the work? · How does the composition inform historical analysis? 	CONNECTING: This level encourages students to integrate visual analysis within a network of production, dissemination, and audience reception. This level requires the student to look beyond the image in isolation and to see it as comprising part of a chain of ideas. This requires the student to become aware of the cultural interplay of ideas through texts and images.



KALF, Willem
[Dutch Baroque
Era Painter, Still-
Life with a Late
Ming Ginger Jar
1669 Oil on
canvas, 77 x 66 cm
Museum of Art,
Indianapolis



References

Blackshields, D.; Cronin, J.; Higgs, B.; Kilcommins, S.; McCarthy, M.; Ryan, A (eds), (2015). *Integrative Learning, International research and practice*. London and New York: Routledge.

Higgs, B. and Cronin, J. (2013). “Threshold Concepts: Informing the curriculum” (pp. 161-178) Ciara O’Farrell and Alison Farrell (eds), *Emerging Issues in Higher Education III: From Capacity Building to Sustainability*. Athlone: EDIN.