

CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

Biggs (2003: 27) defines constructive alignment as:

The 'constructive' aspect refers to what the learner does, which is to *construct meaning* through relevant learning activities. The 'alignment' aspect refers to what the teacher does, which is to set up a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes. The key is that the components in the teaching system, especially the teaching methods used and the assessment tasks are *aligned* to the learning activities assumed in the intended outcomes. The learner is 'trapped', and cannot escape without learning what is intended.

In simple terms constructive alignment means that all assessment tasks, and learning and teaching experiences (and therefore content and methods) must be linked to the desired unit of study learning outcomes. In order to do this you will find it easier to work from the outcomes desired first, and then organise your content and teaching and learning experiences and activities based on these. It then follows that the assessments designed will be based upon both of these things, but especially upon the unit of study outcomes. The alignment between these three things will ensure that the unit flows and is linked to the desired outcomes for it. The focus then becomes upon facilitating the students' achievement of the learning outcomes and all tasks should be geared towards providing a learning environment in which students are able to show you what they *know* and can *do*. So if you wish to develop communication skills you will need to include class activities and assessment tasks that allow students to demonstrate the degree to which they have achieved this outcome, for example an in-class presentation or group work.

According to Biggs (1999) students become "entrapped" in a web of consistency through the process of constructive alignment. Learning experiences and assessment tasks become purposeful and learners are motivated to explore concepts both in and out side their classrooms, in short a deeper approach to learning, and teaching, is facilitated, reinforced and encouraged. An important aspect here is the role of the academic. It is one thing to write about the need to align a unit of study it is quite another for this to happen.

Figure 2.2 in Biggs (1999: 27) details out the ways in which outcomes, teaching and learning experiences and assessment tasks are constructively aligned. The diagram below offers a brief version of this figure.

BIGGS' THEORY OF CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT (adapted from Biggs, 1999)

