

# AAUT VIDEO SERIES:

## 2021 CAREER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD:

### ADJUNCT PROFESSOR JOHN BIGGS AM

#### INTRODUCTION

My heartfelt thanks to the judges of the AAUT Career Achievement Award, and also to University of Tasmania (UTAS) for nominating me appropriately, because I'm an alumnus of this university.

#### BACKGROUND

After graduating in 1957 with honours in psychology, I spent the rest of my professional life outside Tasmania, returning to retire in Hobart in 2001. My last tenured appointment was at the University of Hong Kong, where I met my now wife Catherine and where also, constructive alignment was born.

#### WHAT IS CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT?

I had long been impressed with Thomas Schull's 1986 statement about the application of psychology to education. He said, "if students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then teachers' fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in achieving those outcomes."

Well, that seems rather obvious, but did we teach in that sort of manner? No, we did not. Not then.

Much of my professional life has been teaching psychology to teacher education students, which I did like most others, I think, by telling them what various psychologists had said about education. And in their assignments, they would tell me how they thought it might apply. Well, it really did. They saw psychology, well, most students saw psychology, as irrelevant to their actual what I did in teaching.

However, in my last year before retiring, it all came together rather late in the day, and I was able to put Schull to work. By 1994-5 class in Hong Kong Uni were 83 teachers doing a part time, Dip in Ed, surely the aim of teaching psychology to them was in order to get them to teach better.

Well, did it? That was the question.

#### HOW DID CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT WORK?

For the assessment of that class then, I asked them to put any evidence they could connect, during their teaching, during the day, into a portfolio, so that I could then judge if their, if psychology had been affecting their teaching. I decided rubrics for assessing that portfolio using the solo taxonomy. This was quite new to them. And there was pandemonium at first, but once they got the hang of it, they were delighted. And in fact, I thought the best teacher ratings I've ever had. Psychology was relevant in last. So this was constructive alignment. The intended outcome was improving teaching. Their learning came out of reflecting through a psychological lens on the way they had been teaching, and how it might be improved. The assessment was how well they had indeed improved their teaching. This was constructive because the students were constructing their learning and the alignment came from, making sure that the assessment and the teaching and learning activities addressed the intended learning outcomes.

#### WHERE COULD CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT APPLY TO?

Well, big question: Could this approach apply to teaching virtually any subject?

Well, I argued that it did in teaching for quality learning at university, which first came out in 1999. Out of that, I got numerous requests to run workshops. But I was no staff developer, that Catherine Tang was. So, between us we ran workshops in Hong Kong, UK, China, Australia, Philippines, and Malaysia. In so doing, we had learned a lot about how to implement constructive alignment. And we incorporated that in the third edition of teaching for quality learning in 2007. With Catherine, this time as a co-author. The fourth edition in 2011, incorporated examples of constructively aligned classes in different subjects. A year ago, the publishers wanted the fifth edition. There's a lot that happens since 2011, especially in Ed Tech, and we're of the generation that is rather baffled by Ed Tech. So, we co-opted the third co-author, Greg Kennedy, of Melbourne University, and that addition will appear later this year.

## CLOSING

So, once again, I'm very grateful to UTAS for having nominated me, and for the judges of the award to consider my work worthy of the award. A wonderful recognition to a long career.

Thank you all again.

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For any further questions, please contact the Awards Team [aaut@rmit.edu.au](mailto:aaut@rmit.edu.au)