

06.4.2026

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Title

Qualitative variation in constructive alignment in curriculum design / Keith Trigwell ; Michael Prosser

Publication year

2014

Source/Footnote

In: Higher education. - 67 (2014) 2, S. 141 - 154

Inventory number

35967

Keywords

Studienreform ; Studiendauer, Studienerfolg : allgemein ; Studentenschaft : Studienverhalten

Abstract

Constructive alignment has emerged as a powerful curriculum design idea, but little is known of the extent to which the effectiveness of this idea is a function of qualitative variation. This article introduces a model of qualitative variation in constructive alignment, and uses the results from known alignment studies to test the model. The research reviewed reveals that university teachers have at least two qualitatively different experiences of the core elements of constructive alignment. The teachers who describe their approaches to teaching as involving conceptual change/development intentions with student-focused strategies were found to be likely to see the intended learning outcomes for students in more holistic terms, and assessment as an integral part of that teaching approach. When teachers had more of an intention to transfer information using teacher-focused strategies, they saw the object of study more in terms of parts (concepts, definitions, formulae) with assessment focused on those parts. The implications of this qualitative variation in constructive alignment for curriculum design and for the quality of the outcomes of student learning is discussed.

06.4.2026

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