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# ENHANCING OF TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

## ABSTRACT

This article elucidates issues about practical knowledge/deep learning on the current teaching and learning preaching practices in the Department of Practical Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of the Free State. The action learning and action research methodology is applied. Growing evidence indicates that there is a disjunction between the level of student competencies and incongruent teaching practices in the Faculty. Failure in the operationalization of both an interdisciplinary and a constructive alignment approach is at the core of surface learning. It appears that former and current students find it difficult to align their studies and to adapt to an unfamiliar, diverse, pluralistic and complex postmodern society. We teach content and assess students on the basis of what they know. The content does not relate to students' own experiences or the broader issues in society. We are talking about a change that is deeper than surface alterations to the syllabus or to classroom teaching techniques. We are considering a radically different way of framing the ministry of preaching and of viewing the task of those who seek to learn and to teach preaching.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The task of teaching preaching should be redesigned from the perspective of the ministry of preaching as a holistic and integrative Christian practice (Long 2008:4):

A practice is a constellation of actions that people have performed over time that are common, meaningful, strategic, and purposeful (Long 2008:12).

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In this article, practice also refers to practical knowledge about preaching action or homiletic practices that ought to change (Osmer 2008:84). Preaching as a practice provides a framework to integrate different perspectives, to sharpen our teaching focus, and to strengthen student learning (Long 2008:11). This article captures the author's teaching and learning practices and experiences in a homiletics teaching and learning context. It signifies, albeit Zuber-Skerrit (2007:37), the author's way of becoming, knowing, learning, growing and developing as a lecturer in terms of action learning and action research (henceforth ALAR). In this article, action learning refers to the lecturer's (author's) ability to learn from teaching practices and experiences whereas action research refers to critical practical reflection on that experience, practice and praxis. It is instrumental in the re-envisioning of the teaching preaching practice (cf. Long 2008:4). In this article, ALAR presupposes more than the umbrella term "action inquiry" – it seeks to relate to a specific educational issue and a particular form of study (cf. Tripp 2003). It is a form of study that focuses on practical knowledge and understanding by reflective practitioners. The objective is to critique the implicit assumptions in educational practices through a collective understanding of the praxis. This is a revival of Aristotle's practical philosophy/knowledge that transcends positivistic research methodology (Carr 2006a:425-428, 433; Osmer 2008:84).

Interpreted in this way, [action learning and] action research would no longer be understood as a social science 'research paradigm' that can achieve what conventional social scientific research has conspicuously failed to achieve (Carr 2006a:434).

ALAR seeks to close the gap between theory and practice and address the need for a new social scientific paradigm. How we change is to do ALAR – changing our action by changing our thinking in re-changing our practices (Carr 2006b). We concur that a re-envisioned integrative methodology for teaching/learning preaching practices (homiletics) is sought (Long 2008:7). The improvement of the teaching/learning practice through a systematic/collaborative way and the dissemination of the results in public are essential aspects in this regard. ALAR is characterised by group discussions, trial and error, the discovery of new techniques and methods, and learning from both students and colleagues (Zuber-Skerrit 2007:37-38). It could be concurred that lecturer, students and the education institution developed simultaneously: "Action learning is a change process aimed at personal, professional and organisational development" (Zuber-Skerri, 2007:37). The aim of this article is to record the author's action teaching and learning findings based on the action research methodology. Zuber-Skerrit's

(1992:15) (cited in Zuber-Skerrit 2007:37) CRASP model is illuminating in this regard. It refers to the following aspects:

critical collaborative enquiry; reflective practitioners being accountable and making the results of their enquiry public; self-evaluating their practice, and engaged in participative problem solving and continuing professional development (Zuber-Skerrit 1992:15).

The CRASP model characterises the lecturer's ALAR knowledge, skills and experience.

The aforementioned is based on both a literature and an empirical study. Both qualitative (ALAR) and quantitative research methods will be applied to collect evidence of the lecturer's teaching and assessment, and students' learning activities. The teaching goals of the lecturer will be analysed by applying the *Teaching Goals Inventory* (TGI)<sup>1</sup> in obtaining scores through the online self-scoring worksheet. This is followed by a critical reflection on the results and suggestions of how teaching should be changed. Principles of reflective teaching will be applied to the results of *The Student Course Experience Questionnaire, adapted from the University of Oxford Student Course Experience Questionnaire*,<sup>2</sup> to differentiate between students' learning praxis and teaching theories.

## 2. CONSTRUCTIVE THEORY OF LEARNING AND ALIGNMENT IN TEACHING

Postmodern students cannot only be taught the facts of science. They have to reflect on their own cognitive, attitudinal, affective, behavioural experiences and practical knowledge. Participative learning in action may enable students to solve scientific and pragmatic problems (Biggs & Tang 2007:50):

Both are premised on the view that meaning is not imposed or transmitted by direct instruction; it is created by the students' learning activities, their 'approaches to learning'. Meaning is personal; it depends on motives, intentions, prior knowledge, etc. Learning is a way of interacting with the world. We structure information we get, not just receive it, thus education is about conceptual construction (Biggs in Shake Seigel 2004:1).

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1 Available at <http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/dataentry.xml?-db=tgidata&lay=Layout01+-view> [accessed 20 August 2010].

2 Available at <http://ceq.oucs.ox.ac.uk/> [accessed 2 July 2010].

A constructionist theory of learning and alignment in teaching should be applied (cf. Biggs in Shake Seigel, 2004:1). Intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks ought to be aligned (Biggs & Tang 2007:50). Our institutional teaching and learning climate should also change (Biggs in Shake Seigel 2004:2). Pedagogy of engagement for multifaceted change that focuses on students' learning and complex social experiences will improve their academic and professional competencies. Students will be enabled to apply learning activities that foster the construction of their own knowledge, behaviour and skills; as well as in assessing its outcomes (Biggs & Tang 2007:50, 52):

Alignment in constructive alignment reflects the fact that the learning activity in the intended outcomes, expressed as a verb, to be activated in the teaching of the outcome is to be achieved and in the assessment task to verify that the outcome is achieved.

Faculty should instead focus on the learning activity (the what and the how) of students and not on the silo teachings of the lecturer's preferred themes (Biggs & Tang 2007:52). Course outcomes should instead empower and inform students on how they are expected to change their world views and behaviour. This is possible on the basis that their learning activities should build on specific theories. The bipolar tension between theory and praxis becomes crucial (Heitink 1979). The use of verbs is critical in supporting the relation between theory and praxis teaching. The application of verb-directed intentional learning outcomes clarifies in which teaching and learning activities students should engage and what and how students need to perform in the assessment tasks. It should develop greater application of practical knowledge/an integrative theory in praxis. Curriculum themes should be defined in terms of outcome statements in addressing both the teaching and the learning activities (TLAs) and assessment tasks (ATs). Most of our courses foster inappropriate learning activities (LAs) which are unaligned and lead to a surface approach in learning. Constructive alignment is designed to foster practical knowledge/deep learning instead. Students become more progressive, while teachers act as mentors/facilitators of students and their learning environment (Biggs & Tang 2007:54). Faculty should thus shift from norm-referenced assessment to criterion-referenced assessment (Biggs & Tang 2007:52-53). Constructive aligned teaching systematises the planning and activities of teaching activities. It results in open-ended assessment tasks which allow for unintended, but desirable outcomes (Biggs & Tang 2007:53). Consistency in the Faculty's different curriculums will consequently be maximised (Biggs & Tang 2007:53).

### 3. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING GOALS

The lecturer's teaching goals (Table 1) were analysed by completing the Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI) online (See Appendix A for all tables). The objective was to reflect critically on the TGI's results which were shared in contact sessions with fellow colleagues. We focused on the assessment of each goal's importance to what the lecturer deliberately aimed to have the students accomplish. The generic results in Table 3 (T3) were compared with the lecturer's in Table 1 (T1) (Brüssow 2010:27). The third column represents the percentage of aspects within each cluster that was rated "essential". The fourth column contains the average rating we assigned to aspects within each cluster. These results were compared with those in Table 3 on the result page of the inventory. A critical reflection on our results was captured and shared with the students during a class session. Each goal's importance was assessed to what we aimed to have our students achieve. The following teaching goals were assessed: higher order thinking skills; discipline-specific knowledge and skills; liberal arts and academic values; work and career preparation; basic academic success skills, and personal development.

#### 3.1 Higher order thinking skills

The highest results, although a slight decreased percentage (from 45%;  $a=3.09$  [T3] to 38%;  $a=4.38$  [T1]), indicate that we considered *higher order thinking skills* to be essential in teaching and learning activities. Current reciprocal teaching and learning activities, if developed, could engender much *higher order thinking skills*. This is only possible within a motivational context which engenders the space for complex learning skills in Practical Theology Lecturers 402 and 602 (hereafter, PTL 402 and PTL 602). PTL 402 and PTL 602 represent 4th- and 5th-year modules on homiletic theory and practical work in the Department of Practical Theology in the Faculty. Such a reciprocal learning environment lends itself to both a reflective and a self-monitoring practice for students. Transformative reflection practices could assist teachers and students in monitoring and improving teaching and learning practices, respectively (Biggs & Tang 2007:98-99). The current nature and construction of PTL 402 and PTL 602 engender "learning to monitor the construction site" in the development and deliverance of sermons (Biggs & Tang 2007:99).

### 3.2 Discipline-specific knowledge and skills

The highest results, although a slight increased percentage (from 36%;  $a=2.83$  [T3] to 38%;  $a=4.13$  [T1]), indicate that we perceived *discipline-specific knowledge and skills* as an essential teaching and learning object. The nature and purpose of PTL 402 and PTL 602 require that students conceptualise and operationalize both the concepts and the application of concepts such as “exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics”. The appropriate conceptualisation and operationalization of the aforementioned discipline-specific knowledge and skills could only engender a relevant and active learning activity for students. The ultimate object is the interaction between exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics through practical hermeneutical knowledge. Its alignment with the specific intentional learning outcomes (ILOs), an academically, relevant and applicable sermon, is the main objective. PTL 402 and PTL 602 engender learning through different sense modalities: hearing, sight and speech: “The more one modality reinforces another, the more effective the learning” (Biggs & Tang, 2007:95). Peer teaching plays a powerful role in the way of learning for the PTL 402 and PTL 602 students:

Most people learn 95% of what they teach someone else; 80% of what they use and do in real life; 70% of what they talk over with others; and 50% of what they see and hear (Biggs & Tang 2007:96).

### 3.3 Liberal arts and academic values

A significant increase in results (from 18%;  $a=2.02$  [T3] to 30%;  $a=4$  [T1]) indicates that we *perceive liberal arts and academic values* as an essential prerequisite in PTL 402/PTL 602 teaching and learning activities. The premise of the PTL 402 and PTL 602 courses lies in a practical theological philosophy of interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity seeks to *construct a base of interconnected knowledge* which in itself is based on the student’s prior knowledge/practical knowledge. The course requires students to acknowledge, research and apply scientific knowledge from other social sciences and contextual realities. The entire course is based on the principle of reconstruction of prior knowledge in relation to new knowledge (Biggs & Tang 2007:93): “In deep learning, new learning connects with old, so teaching should emphasize the interconnectedness of topics”. PTL 402 and PTL 602 aim to improve the scope of learning to transcend discipline-specific knowledge, but to incorporate, for example, insights from the student’s socio-economic, cultural and political contexts. Reconceptualization leads to intrinsic motivation and consequently deep learning. The in-time and in-context learning activity and peer assessment

create an expectancy-value theory. Teaching is based on a relational (fostering a motivational context) and an extended abstract structure (Biggs & Tang 2007:93). Teaching is structured and incorporates a continuous and active practice of formative feedback (Biggs & Tang 2007:94).

### 3.4 Work and career preparation

A slight decreased number of results (from 26%;  $a=2.5$  [T3] to 25%;  $a=3.88$  [T1]) indicates work and career preparation as essential for teaching and learning activities as an appropriate motivational context.

### 3.5 Basic academic success skills

A significantly decreased percentage of results (from 22%;  $a=2.29$  [T3] to 11%;  $a=3.22$  [T1]) indicates that basic academic success skills should play an essential part in teaching and learning activities as an appropriate motivational context.

### 3.6 Personal development

A significantly decreased percentage of results (from 28%;  $a=2.41$  [T3] to 11%;  $a=3.67$  [T1]) indicates that personal development should play an essential part in teaching and learning activities.

It could be concluded that teaching and learning activities in the PTL 402 and PTL 602 courses focus more on higher order thinking skills and discipline-specific knowledge and skills (38%;  $a=4.38/13$ ). The difference between the results in Table 3 (45%;  $a=3.09$ ) and Table 1 (38%;  $a=4.38$ ) on higher order thinking skills indicates that this aspect needs more emphasis. The results on the discipline-specific knowledge and skills seem to be on average with those in Table 3. The increased attention to liberal arts and academic values (from 18%;  $a=2.02$  [T3] to 30%;  $a=4$  [T1]) could be the result of a renewed emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching and learning activities within the Department of Practical Theology. Work and career preparation (26%;  $a=2.5$  [T3] and 25%;  $a=3.88$  [T1]) seem to be on par. However, basic academic skills (from 22%;  $a=2.29$  [T3] to 11%;  $a=3.22$  [T1]) will have to receive renewed attention and redress if excellence in TLAs and deep learning is to be realised. Personal development does not receive sufficient attention in the TLAs (28%;  $a=2.41$  [T3] compared to 11%;  $a=3.67$  [T1]). The rationale could be that it receives or should receive attention throughout the entire curriculum within the entire Faculty. However, the results may indicate that such a crucial aspect may

be overlooked in teaching and learning activities. The three top teaching and learning goals in Table 2 indicate that Wise decisions or discernment (n=52), Analytic skills (n=2) and the Value of the subject (n=21) point to the Department's preference in its teaching activities, which could be ascribed to the nature of the PTL 402 and PTL 602 courses, regarding the high level and requirement for excellence in exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics through practical hermeneutical knowledge.

#### 4. ANALYSING AND IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES

*The Student Course Experience Questionnaire* (adapted from the University of Oxford) was designed to evaluate students' experiences of their learning context (PTL 402 and PTL 602). It was based on the way in which they perceive key aspects of their learning context in relation to the quality of their learning approach and to the outcomes of their learning. The collected results from this inventory provided valuable information on how students experience our module in terms of teaching, learning outcomes, assessment, workload and motivation.

The PTL 402 and PTL 602 modules form the foci for interdisciplinary and cooperative teaching and learning in the Department of Practical Theology. The quality of teaching, learning, assessment, and outcomes tasks should guide the construction of transformative teaching towards a deep learning environment for students. Teaching tasks should make teaching transparent and facilitate deep learning for students (Ramsden 1995 in Adams 1995:5).

#### 5. STUDENT COURSE EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

*The Student Course Experience Questionnaire* is designed to evaluate students' experiences of their learning environment based on the way in which they perceive key aspects of their learning context related to the quality of their learning approach and to their outcomes of learning (Brüssouw 2010:31).

A survey was conducted on 23 September 2010 to evaluate students' perceptions and experiences of their learning environment in the homiletics classes. A random sample of 15 students from both the 4<sup>th</sup>- and 5<sup>th</sup>-year class participated in the survey. The survey measured how students experience our modules in terms of teaching, learning, outcomes,

assessment, workload and motivation. The survey should help lecturers reflect on the results and in decision-making:

A reflective emphasis on decision-making includes a conscious, systematic, deliberate process of framing and re-framing classroom practices, in light of the consequences of our actions, democratic principles, educational beliefs, values and preferred visions teachers bring to the teaching-learning experience (Serafini 2001 in Green 2006:2).

Future decision-making should take account of Serafini's suggestions. Table 4 illustrates the different scales and responses in the survey. The following paragraph focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the student survey results and lessons learnt.

## 5.1 Student survey results and lessons learnt

Table 4 represents the combined responses of students in the PTL 402 and PTL 602 programmes. The general results (n=216; 43% and n=46; 9%) could be regarded as positive and acceptable. However, the remaining results (n=132; 26%; n=92; 18% and n=17; 3%) are cause for concern regarding students' learning and our teaching practices. The respective responses for **Clear outcomes**, **Appropriate workload**, **Appropriate assessment** and even **Generic skills** are of concern. The number of students who agreed (n=27; 37%) and those who strongly agreed (n=5; 7%) that our teaching tasks adhere to *clear outcomes* represents only 41% of the total percentage of students who have a clear understanding and positive experience of the validity of the intentional teaching outcomes.

The fact that significant numbers of students (n=21; 28%) were undecided (n=17; 23%) and disagreed, and that a small number (n=4; 5%) even strongly disagreed on the notion of **clear outcomes** represents 56% of the students' perception and actual experience that our teaching does not demonstrate clear outcomes. During a debriefing session on 13 May 2010, the students requested the team of lecturers to use a rubric for their evaluation and critique of the students' class sermons and preaching action. The students identified the need for a concrete critique evaluation method, for instance, step-by-step suggestions of what they did wrong and how they could improve their preaching. The team of lecturers were asked to explain their manner of critique with examples or guidelines from their own practices of the ministry of preaching. The students called for a collective teaching strategy: "[T]he simultaneous class feedback of three or four lecturers can be overwhelming; the manner of critique makes a difference; we need a safe space for feedback; and require one

lecturer to guide us in our exegetical work two weeks before the class". The department will progress if the foregoing recommendations of the majority of the students are addressed.

The fact that only 7% (n=5) of the students strongly agreed calls for critical and transformative reflection-on-teaching tasks. The Department will progress if it addresses the needs of the students and applies some of the principles of constructive alignment. The alignment of exegetical, hermeneutical and homiletical teaching tasks with students' learning context is required. This may assist in fostering student capacities as well as in attending to the prescribed guidelines on curriculum development at the University of the Free State.

Responses to the question on the **appropriate workload scale** are alarming: 39% (n=30) of students disagreed, 3% (n=2) strongly disagreed and 31% (n=24) of the students remained undecided on whether their workload is appropriate in relation to the total weight of their learning activities. It could be argued that the Department overemphasises content coverage instead of focusing on deep and reflective learning. The majority of students indicated during the debriefing session that they were overtaxed by all the study requirements of the different departments in the Faculty.

Less than half of the students (n=19; 25%) agreed and only 3% (n=2) strongly agreed that their workload promotes an appropriate motivational learning context. The fact that only 3% (n=2) of the students strongly agreed that their workload is conducive for progressive and qualitative learning may indicate that students are overloaded with content. This could limit their learning space, capacity development and ability for deep learning. This may also explain their lack of critical reflection and ability to integrate the different sub disciplines' theories into the PTL 402 and PTL 602 modules. The Department was of the opinion that its **assessment** tasks were clear and effective. However, only 7% (n=4) of the students agreed and 2% (n=1) strongly agreed with its current assessment practice; 33% (n=19) of the students were undecided, and more than half of the students (n=29; 51%) emphatically disagreed, while 7% (n=4) strongly disagreed. Homiletic teaching tasks lack a clear and **appropriate assessment** task and need to be redesigned. This result correlates with students' perception regarding the aforementioned responses on **clear outcomes** in the PTL 402 and PTL 602 modules. The foregoing results raise a serious concern in that students' learning needs, expectancies and experiences are not being met with reference to the module's **outcomes, workload and assessment** activities. This requires a redress that could engender an appropriate learning environment and quality teaching and learning activities that may

raise students' learning capacities. The development of an appropriate and effective assessment rubric is required. This should provide both lecturers and students with a clear theoretical and practical framework of the teaching, learning, activities, outcomes and assessment tasks. Practical knowledge/deep learning necessitates appropriate assessment that correlates with relevant and practical concepts and philosophies. It is the art of relating new material to what students already know and understand. The lecturer should create conditions that stimulate learning – allowing mistakes without imposing penalties (Biggs & Tang 2007:7). The identity and integrity of the lecturer support and promote rewarding students' effort instead of their abilities. Deep learning embodied by integrity engenders consistent and fair assessment which correlates with the intended learning outcomes. Ultimately, the lecturers' capacity in establishing trust validates their teaching and learning activities. Constructive alignment provides a structured reflective framework to anchor teaching decisions in achieving or assessing the intended learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang 2007:11).

The following responses provide building blocks to improve on the abovementioned results. Students seem to regard their levels in **generic skills, motivation and satisfaction** with the module as acceptable: 56% of the students agreed and 8% strongly agreed that the module is actively developing their **generic skills** in exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics, while a minority either disagreed (n=3; 4%) or strongly disagreed (n=2; 3%). The number of students (n=20; 28%) who remained undecided could be attributed to the abovementioned negative perceptions or experiences of students. The ideal is that PTL 402 and PTL 602 should at all times engender the necessary generic skills in exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics – it is the culmination point where the content of the different theological disciplines should overlap and converge (Osmer 2008). The fact that only 8% of the students strongly agreed on this point is not acceptable – this factor requires redress.

The majority of students (n=50; 66% and n=12; 16%) indicated that they either agree or strongly agree that teaching tasks have increased their **motivation** levels. However, the Department needs to increase students' motivational levels for learning. The classroom atmosphere has to be changed to create an atmosphere of worship and faith community. The requests by some of the students for continuous formative assessment in the development of their liturgical and homiletical assignments should be addressed by the introduction of a team of permanent and part-time lecturers who could facilitate the process (Osmer 2008). The students' satisfaction levels may indicate that the Department has attained a measure of success in this regard. This can be substantiated by the responses

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of some of the students indicating that “the homiletics classes were an improvement and more learner friendly in relation to the previous year”.

Similarly, significant percentages of students (56%; n=31 and 15%; n=8) agreed and strongly agreed that the Department’s teaching activities are conducive for their collective **satisfaction** levels, respectively; 20% (n=11) of the students were undecided, while only 5% (n=3) disagreed and 4% (n=2) strongly disagreed.

The fact that the Department is the first in the Faculty to apply a pragmatic interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary approach should foster greater student motivation and satisfaction in future learning tasks. The Department embarked on a deliberate interdisciplinary approach in establishing an integrative homiletics teaching praxis that consists of New Testament, Old Testament, and Systematic Theology lecturers. Intradisciplinary initiatives consist of regular departmental seminars and workshops on the different fields of study in practical theology, particularly homiletics. Specialists in communication, speech quality facilitators and local church ministers (as reflective practitioners) form part of the integrative and collaborative team of lecturers in assisting student learning experiences. Interdisciplinary work has also been extended in cooperation with other social sciences which consist of various disciplines in other faculties at the University of the Free State. Gardner (in Osmer 2008:224) refers to the aforementioned initiatives as the development of educational pathways that “allow students to deepen their knowledge, attitudes, and skills over time”. Collaboration in designing educational pathways engenders the development and depth of introductory courses in relation to higher level courses:

An upper-level course in preaching ... may build on empirical research skills acquired in an introductory course on congregation studies. An advanced course in Christian education may build on a communication model learned in a required preaching course (Osmer 2008:224).

The outcome is to develop students’ critical thinking, reflective judgement, creativity, and skills in the practice of the ministry of preaching (Osmer 2008:225).

It could be concurred that the more positive results are sufficient leverage in developing a teaching and learning atmosphere for deep learning. It requires transformational reflection for deep teaching, learning outcomes and assessment tasks. A constructive alignment of teaching, learning (outcomes) and assessment tasks is required in fostering practical hermeneutical knowledge. The Department should guard

against overemphasising content coverage. Two learning outcomes, as defined by Osmer (2008), should be introduced, namely to focus on developing students' task competencies in preaching and knowledge, attitude, and skills development in practical theological interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary interpretation. Teaching and learning quality could improve if some of the following pedagogical strategies as proposed by Osmer (2008:226-230) are applied:

- Focusing on *modelling* and *student* performances in teaching the pragmatic task in a context of diversity.
- Mind maps, case studies, action research – action learning and critical incident reports to practice practical theological interpretation regarding episodes, situations, contexts.
- Repetitive question-asking (teaching for understanding through public assessment) to integrate task competence and practical theological interpretation.
- Theories of interpretation linked with case studies/critical incidents or practice (interpretive and pragmatic tasks for adaptive challenges).
- Portfolio of performance and self-reflection.

By applying Osmer's (2008) teaching and learning strategies, the Department would be enabled to align learning outcomes and assessment tasks with its teaching tasks – to foster a learning environment conducive for the appropriate teaching and learning atmosphere. Current interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary teaching and learning tasks should be expanded with reflective and modelling teaching communities and small learning communities of student peer groups. Formal and informal formative teaching and learning practices should become part of the Department's pedagogical approach. Faculty as a whole should interact with their respective discipline fields with the Department in a more transformative manner in realising alignment of the different teaching and learning activities through a core methodology, such as (practical) theological interpretation and action. The goal is to shift from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach and, ultimately, to a learning-centred approach (Long 2008:16).

## 5.2 Becoming reflective practitioners

We have to become “reflective practitioners” (Schon 1983 in Biggs & Tang 2007:41, 43) to compare our own teaching with our respective educational experience and theories (Kuit, Reay & Freeman 2001:130).

It will assist faculties in dealing with the disparities in student survey results. Our own teaching and learning assumptions would also be exposed (Brookfield 2002:36). We should “re-adjust” our teaching theories through a continuous reiterative questioning process to attain an accurate teaching and learning praxis (Kuit, Reay & Freeman 2001:130-131). The integration of action research and action learning in teaching tasks could assist in systematically changing “surface” teaching patterns on the basis of the above *and* future research results. This may motivate deep learning activities or practical knowledge in students (Biggs & Tang 2007:43-44). We need to develop explicit and well-structured pedagogical theological theories (Biggs & Tang 2007:44). Osmer’s (2008:4) theory of practical theological interpretation with regard to descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative and pragmatic tasks could prove appropriate in this instance.

It became apparent that students suffer under the current workload. This situation could foster a Theory X (surface) learning atmosphere, whereas a Theory Y (deep learning/practical knowledge) atmosphere is preferred as the appropriate option. A Theory Y climate would enable more time for student reflection, and eliminate or decrease anxiety and cynicism among students. We need to apply the principles and practices of constructive alignment and a centric reflective framework (reflection-for-action; reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action) in terms of egocentricism (view of self), allocentrism (view of student) and macrocentrism (view of professional and content standards) (Biggs & Tang 2007:46; Green 2006:2-7). The centric reflective framework is a practical tool that could provide continuous reflection and assessment of the reality and preferred ideal in teaching practices. We should also address diversity, complexity, as well as historical, cultural and political values or beliefs in framing and re-framing practical problems to which solutions should be sought (Gore & Zeichner 1991 in Hatton & Smith 2006:3). Structured reflection for sound teaching supports the development of “a growth competence in internally directed learning” (Korthagen & Vasalos 2005:48). The Department will do well to build on the positive experience of students regarding their motivational levels. This could sustain deep learning; maintain quality engagement during the learning process between lecturer and student (Biggs & Tang 2007:48), and develop students’ competencies, professional identities and self-directing learning capacities (Korthagen & Vasalos 2005:52-53, 68). Biggs and Tang (2007:91-92) propose the following intentional learning outcome activities as general characteristics for good teaching and learning contexts, namely an appropriate motivational context; well-structured knowledge base; relevant learner activity; formative feedback; reflective practice, and self-monitoring activities. These factors could instil consistency; interconnection between the known and the new; peer

teaching; whole-class interactive teaching; self- and peer assessment; cooperative learning, and monitoring the construction site (Biggs & Tang 2007:97).

## 6. A WAY FORWARD

Deliberate and sustained reflection and action is required to improve self-directed student learning activities – it should not be based on silo teaching practices. This could be realised by implementing action learning, action research, engagement with a critical friend, drama, role play, journal-keeping, mentoring, mind maps, peer observation, teaching, storytelling as well as teaching and learning networks (Hall 1996; Osmer 2008). The Department's homiletic workshops should be expanded to support its teaching efforts in developing and strengthening students' knowledge, attitude and skills in practical theological interpretation and action.

PTL 402 and PTL 602 are structured and aligned within an appropriate motivational context and an inherent formative assessment activity and reciprocal learning environment. Experience has taught that the aforementioned teaching practice leads to "the most powerful enhancement of learning" (Biggs & Tang 2007:97). The entire teaching and learning activities are structured to enhance interactive teaching. Self- and peer assessment as well as cooperative learning are inherent activities. PTL 402 can basically be characterised by *learning from error*. Students do find it difficult to make connections between exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics. Misconceptions occur often and are redressed on a continuous basis. The motivational context of PTL 402 and PTL 602 correlates with a Theory Y climate. Students are generally spontaneous in their peer assessments and participation in reciprocal learning activity – this fosters a climate of admitting errors. The lecturer's positive rapport facilitates public correction as acceptable and appreciative by students (Biggs & Tang 2007:97-98).

## 7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to study the author's teaching praxis based on the action learning and action research methodology. Both qualitative (ALAR) and quantitative research methods were applied to collect evidence of both the lecturer's teaching and assessment and the students' learning activities. The objective was to seek the improvement of the teaching/learning practice through a collaborative strategy. A constructionist theory of learning and alignment in teaching was proposed to develop intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities. The lecturer's

teaching goals were analysed using the *Teaching Goals Inventory* (TGI). One of the findings illustrated that teaching and learning activities in the PTL 402 and PTL 602 courses focuses more on higher order thinking skills and discipline-specific knowledge and skills. *The Student Course Experience Questionnaire* was utilised to evaluate students' experiences of their learning context. Results indicated that there is sufficient leverage in developing a teaching and learning atmosphere for deep learning/practical reasoning. Transformational reflection for deep teaching, learning outcomes and assessment tasks towards practical hermeneutical reasoning are called for. Contemporary lecturers are required to become "reflective practitioners" to compare their own teaching with respective educational experience and student-centred learning.

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### Keywords

Teaching and learning

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### Trefwoorde

Onderrig en leer

Konstruksieteorie in leer en belyning in onderrig

Aksieleer en aksienavorsing

Preekpraktyk

Praktiese wysheid

## APPENDIX A

Table 1: The lecturer’s teaching goals

Cluster	Goals included in cluster	Percent rated “essential”	Mean rating
I. Higher order thinking skills	1-8	38%	4.38
III. Discipline-specific knowledge and skills	18-25	38%	4.13
IV. Liberal arts and academic values	26-35	30%	4.00
V. Work and career preparation	36-43	25%	3.88
II. Basic academic success skills	9-17	11%	3.22
VI. Personal development	55-52	11%	3.67

(<http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/dataentry.xml?-db=tgidata&-lay=Layout01+-view>)

Table 2: Top priority teaching goals

Teaching goal (TGI #)	Arts	Hum	Eng	B.Sk	Soc. Sci	Bus.	Med.	Sci.	Math
Wise decisions (52)							70%		
Analytical skills (2)			66%						73%
Value of subject (21)		56%			52%				

(<http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/dataentry.xml?-db=tgidata&-lay=Layout01+-view>)

Table 3: TGI model of teaching goals

Mean cluster ratings (M) and percent (%) “essential” ratings				
TGI cluster	Four-year colleges		Community colleges	
	M	%	M	%
I. Higher order thinking skills	3.05	43	3.09	45
III. Discipline-specific	2.86	37	2.83	36
VI Personal development	2.28	25	2.41	28
V. Work and career	2.27	21	2.50	26
IV. Liberal arts	2.16	21	2.20	18
II. Basic skills	2.12	18	2.29	22

(<http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/dataentry.xml?-db=tgidata&-lay=Layout01+-view>)

Table 4: Student Course Experience Questionnaire

Scales	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total of each scale
Good Teaching Scale (GTS)	n=3; 3%	n=6; 6%	n=27; 29%	n=45; 48%	n=12; 13%	n=93; 100%
Clear Outcomes Scale (CGS)	n=4; 5%	n=17; 23%	n=21; 28%	n=27; 37%	n=5; 7%	n=74; 100%
Appropriate Workload Scale (AWS)	n=2; 3%	n=30; 39%	n=24; 31%	n=19; 25%	n=2; 3%	n=77; 100%
Appropriate Assessment Scale (AAS)	n=4; 7%	n=29; 51%	n=19; 33%	n=4; 7%	n=1; 2%	n=57; 100%
Generic Skills Scale (GSS)	n=2; 3%	n=3; 4%	n=20; 28%	n=40; 56%	n=6; 8%	n=71; 100%
Motivation Scale (MS)	n=0	n=4; 5%	n=10; 13%	n=50; 66%	n=12; 16%	n=76; 100%
Satisfaction with the module	n=2; 4%	n=3; 5%	n=11; 20%	n=31; 56%	n=8; 15%	n=55; 100%
Total of general results:	n=17; 3%	n=92; 18%	n=132; 26%	n=216; 43%	n=46; 9%	n=503; 100%

Source: <http://ceq.oucs.ox.ac.uk/>