From Early Theories to New Ideas for Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century

Anne Sibbel
RMIT University (Australia)
anne.sibbel@rmit.edu.au

Abstract

Universities have many new responsibilities to meet as they prepare graduates for the changing world of work, and particularly, the challenge of sustainability. But rather than changing the curricula, they have mostly become pre-occupied with campus greening or more efficent resource management, with associated measurable economic benefits [1][2]. New frameworks are required to guide curriculum development in ways which respond to the urgent calls for sustainability. Among many other factors, the rapid development and accessibility of a wide range of information communication technologies have been significant drivers for renewing efforts to change higher education curricula [3]. But the direction is not clear, and there are many barriers to change [4][5], so unsustainable education policies and practices persist.

Some liberal education principles, including the work of pioneering educational theorists Dewey, Steiner and Bloom, have direct relevance here. Largely applied in early education settings up to now, the natural learning processes recognised in these theories provide a useful point from which to reflect on how university curricula must change to promote transformative learning [6][7]. The underlying principles can be applied in higher education to developing teaching strategies, in ensuring real-world relevance of content and assessment, and in the shaping of virtual and real learning spaces. For transformative learning, these strategies and spaces must encourage students to reflect on their place in and relationships with the natural environment, local and global communities. Drawing from these well-established theories, recommendations for future teaching and learning are made with reference to contemporary exemplars, and ideas for benchmarking to measure success are proposed.

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