

Reflecting pedagogically on means and ends in post-pandemic university education

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Session 7c

Paper

Reflecting pedagogically on means and ends in post-pandemic university education

Program text

With the disruption of university teaching during the pandemic as outset, this paper offers a conceptual discussion of aims and purposes of education to provoke pedagogical reflections on means/ends.

Abstract

Educators have reacted differently to moving university teaching online; some have struggled with digital literacy and getting technology to work, while others have enjoyed the possibilities digital technologies offer for teaching (Piotrowski and King 2020). While the pandemic has been hard for most, the disruption of teaching-as-usual can serve as an occasion to re-think what education is all about. After the dust has settled, such a situation can make us (re)ask fundamental questions of education; what is it we are trying to do? What are we doing it for? Put differently: what are the aims and purposes of our teaching? Tanggaard et al. (2014) argues that such questions should precede questions of methods and means though this split is not clear-cut in praxis.

Asking fundamental questions on ends/means in education is pertinent in times of 'learnification' (Biesta 2010) and an abundance of available teaching methods – both analogue and digital – where many of these promise to 'enhance student learning', 'maximise interaction and engagement' or 'provide efficient learning' (see e.g. Avery et al. 2020). Drawing on Biesta, a dominant focus on methods and learning, risks omitting questions of purpose; what we are educating for. Also, Dewey's inquiry-based philosophy (1916) can offer some help here, as he was arguing for aims and methods to be intelligent meaning they were based on observation and judgment in concrete teaching situations and developed in collaboration between teacher and students.

In this paper, I offer conceptual explorations – through Biesta and Dewey - on the aims and purposes of education that might help and provoke us as educators to reflect pedagogically on means/ends in education. The disruption of teaching is an occasion to stop and think, but the question is what it makes us think – about technology? About methods? Pedagogy? How has the unsettling of teaching-as-usual made you think?

Author(s)

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