Designing Pedagogical Models for Tourism Education:
Focus on Work-Based Mobile Learning

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the TravEd Research project is to develop a pedagogical model that exploits mobile technologies and electronic learning environments and that is applied especially to develop decentralised tourism education in tourist destinations with extremely mobile tourism students. Developmental work on the project will be carried out through design-based research (DBR). The approach to learning arises from the socio-cultural tradition inherent to the activities, culture, context, and environment in which the learning takes place. The focuses of attention are collaborative teaching–studying–learning (TSL) processes during which several types of applications that also enable smartphone use are utilised. This paper presents the theoretical underpinnings of the project and the first cycle of the DBR process that will be carried out during an apprenticeship period aiming to develop a pedagogical model for work-based mobile learning in tourism settings/education.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, Design-Based Research, Mobile Learning, Pedagogical Models, Tourism Education, Work-Based Mobile Learning

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the vital areas of business in Eastern Lapland, Finland, and growth in this area has been strong as of late. In order to address the intensifying competition over customers and stand out with something unique to offer, tourism companies have to keep up with the development in the industry and ensure the quality of their services. The availability of skilful and development-oriented staff is an unquestionable prerequisite for this, which also presents a challenge for institutions providing tourism education. The best way for vocational schools to keep up with the rapid pace of development is to proactively address the changing needs of the tourism industry by networking with universities, research institutes, and tourism companies.

The research setting of the study presented in this article is located at the TravEd Pyhä tourism school that operates under the administration of the Vocational College of Eastern Lapland but has been decentralised by physi-
cally moving tourism education from the main
campus to Pyhä, a ski resort located in Eastern
Lapland. Decentralisation also describes
the period of apprenticeship, which covers one-
third of the two-year degree programme, during
which students might be tens or hundreds of
kilometres away from the school or even abroad.

The aim of this study is to start the de-
velopment process of a pedagogical model
for meaningful work-based mobile learning
(MWBML) in tourism education and to ex-
plore the possibilities of mobile technology in
work-based learning during the apprenticeship
periods that students spend working at tourism
companies. The study presented here is part of
the TravEd research initiative aiming to develop
pedagogical models for decentralised tourism
education, a pedagogical model for MWBML
being one of them. Developmental work will
take place over a three-year period (2010–2012).
In practice, research and development is con-
ducted through design-based research (DBR),
and this paper presents the first cycle of that
process (Table 1).

Generally, DBR aims to improve educa-
tional practices and theoretical constructs
through iterative stages of design, implementa-
tion, and analysis (Brown, 1992; Design-Based
Research Collective, 2003). Essential to DBR
is a tight connection between theory and prac-
tice, which in this case was realised in the
collaboration between researchers, teachers,
and students of TravEd Pyhä tourism school
and entrepreneurs at different tourist destina-
tions. The interaction between theoretical and
practical agents brings about the twofold goal
of DBR: (1) producing new theories, artefacts,
and practices that may have an impact on learn-
ing and (2) exploring these theories and inves-
tigating the changes they bring on a local level.
This dual goal brings DBR very close to a kind
of learning that takes place in authentic settings,
such as educating tourism professionals at an
actual tourist destination. Critical in the process
was the interpretation of students,’ teachers,’
and entrepreneurs’ experiences, hence the
analysis leans heavily on the interpretations of
the researchers and the discourses between
researchers and practical actioners. DBR has
been criticized for trying to understand local
practices at the cost of moving away from reli-
able, valid measurement and generalization
(Rourke & Friesen, 2006). The original peda-
gogical model in this case was, however, de-
signed on the basis of previous educational
research (e.g., on mobile learning) and legisla-
tion concerning vocational education to meet
the needs of tourism education in Finland. This
implies that the model will be designed to be
generalized, but in this article the development
process is based on the activities of a certain
educational program in a certain context.

The work started with the design of an
initial pedagogical model for meaningful de-

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<th>Table 1. The first DBR cycle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st pilot</strong></td>
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<td>November 2010 – January 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Design</strong></td>
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<td>Designing an initial pedagogical model on the basis of theoretical knowledge and previous pedagogical models</td>
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<td><strong>2nd pilot</strong></td>
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