Chapter II

Computer-Mediated Progressive Inquiry in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

With the introduction of new learning technology into universities, schools and classrooms, there is the potential to change educational practices in the direction of collaborative knowledge advancement. Yet, fundamental change in educational practices necessitates re-examining the foundations and goals of the prevailing learning culture in higher education. This chapter will describe the theoretical background of a pedagogical model of progressive inquiry and provide an overview of how this model has been implemented in the structure of a collaborative learning environment, the Future Learning Environment (FLE). We will take a brief look at studies of implementation of the model of progressive inquiry in university education. In conclusion, we discuss the challenges of changing educational settings.
and students’ study practices, how they may be encouraged to go beyond using individualistic knowledge acquisition skills, towards employing metaskills that are central in academic literacy, knowledge creation and developing expertise.

**INTRODUCTION**

We start this chapter by presenting two episodes that represent collective experiences in our university studies. We have either personally participated in or observed the processes in question although some details have been altered.

Jaana arrived late to the second lecture of one of her introductory courses. Fortunately, the lecturer was late as well. Jaana found a place beside her friend Maria. “Can you give me your notes of this lecture?” she asked hurriedly. “I have another course to take simultaneously. Besides, I am not so interested in this subject matter anyway, but I need to get the credit units.” “All right, no problem,” answered Maria. “I can give you my notes. ...By the way, do you know anyone from the Monday’s subject-level course? Perhaps you could help me to get notes from that course in return.” They agreed quickly to exchange notes, and Jaana slipped from the course just before the lecturer came.

At the end of the semester, they successfully passed the course examinations that focused on assessing how much of the course content they had acquired. Both of them received more than satisfactory scores. They accumulated a couple more credit units needed for graduation, but forgot most of the issues studied rather quickly after the examination.

The above description represents a more or less common episode in studies at Finnish universities, and is also likely to be true of undergraduate studies elsewhere. A traditional explanation for such study practices is that students tend to take surface-level approaches to learning. The students in question apparently did not engage in in-depth processing of knowledge. However, some researchers encourage investigators to take another perspective for understanding the described study processes. Such study practices are proposed to be signs of the students’ ingenious — and economical — adaptation within a learning environment where depth of understanding is not highly valued (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1996). In this perspective, it is assumed that the practices in question do not so much represent specific characteristics of Jaana’s and Maria’s individual cognition, but represent a socio-culturally formed agency concerning practices of taking university courses (Ratner, 2000; Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993). Characteristic of this type of agency is that the teachers of the courses
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