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 Pyhää 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 Pyhää, 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 development process of a pedagogical model for meaningful work-based mobile learning (MWBML) in tourism education and to explore 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 conducted through design-based research (DBR), and this paper presents the first cycle of that process (Table 1).

Generally, DBR aims to improve educational practices and theoretical constructs through iterative stages of design, implementation, and analysis (Brown, 1992; Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). Essential to DBR is a tight connection between theory and practice, which in this case was realised in the collaboration between researchers, teachers, and students of TravEd Pyhää tourism school and entrepreneurs at different tourist destinations. 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 learning and (2) exploring these theories and investigating 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 reliable, valid measurement and generalization (Rourke & Friesen, 2006). The original pedagogical model in this case was, however, designed on the basis of previous educational research (e.g., on mobile learning) and legislation 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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<td><strong>Design</strong></td>
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