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## A Critical Analysis of Student Approaches to Learning in the Light of Recent Empirical Evidence

There is a rich body of research on students' approaches to learning from the last 50 years. My aim is to explore the nature of the approaches to learning in the context of today's university and in the light of recent multidisciplinary empirical evidence. In addition, I will argue that the approaches to learning still is an important research area.

The concepts *surface* and *deep* are problematic, because they can be misinterpreted to characterise a *superficial* student or someone more *thoughtful* or *philosophical*. This is not, of course, what the theory suggests, but this is an important aspect from the students' point of view when they analyse their own learning or receive feedback on their learning. In addition, *surface* and *deep* do not anymore capture the essence of these approaches. Furthermore, providing clear definitions of the deep and surface approaches is challenging because in different disciplines, these take different meanings and forms and this variation needs to be taken into account when interpreting empirical evidence.

According to the original definition, students who apply the surface approach concentrate on memorising facts. In the light of recent evidence, the surface approach is more about problems in constructing knowledge resulting in a

fragmented knowledge base. There is also a clear shift in the deep approach. Aiming at understanding cannot anymore be a criterion for the deep approach. There is a clear ceiling effect in items measuring students' aim at understanding, because almost all university students consider this as an important personal aim in studying. The core of the deep approach is the process of critically evaluating the study material, and integrating knowledge in order to create a personal worldview of topic under study. A systematic use of the deep approach to learning is one dimension of the disposition to understand for oneself, which is pivotal in the development of academic expertise.

**- Prof. Sari Lindblom-Ylänne, EARLI2017 Keynote Speaker, May 2016.**

