

Section I: Front matter

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ferings (Colley et al. 2003; Schugurensky 2000). It thus is pull-based rather than push-based, if you like (Sloep et al. 2008).

Thus far, we have characterised non-formal learning by exclusion, by describing what it is not and does not assume. This prompts the question of how non-formal learning may become a reality. If institutions such as schools and universities with their lecture rooms and curricula are not the answer, what is? It is our claim that Learning Networks are the devices that should come in their place. This section discusses the social aspects of Learning Networks will be discussed. First, the question will be addressed *why* non-formal learners would bother to act socially (Chapter 2). What is in it for them? Given their busy lives, perhaps having to fit learning into a schedule filled with work, family, and leisure obligations, this is a valid question. And if indeed it is useful for them to engage socially in a Learning Network, how then can they be convinced of this? Second, the question of *how* sociability in Learning Networks best could emerge and be maintained will be taken up (Chapters 3, 4 and 5). Chapter 3 looks at guidelines for the maintenance of the patchwork of communities that will arise within the boundaries of a specific Learning Network, Chapter 4 discusses in detail guidelines that should guarantee the emergence of such communities. For this a new notion is introduced, that of ad-hoc transient communities. Such communities provide the mechanism for community emergence, the argument is. Chapter 5 describes a case in which they can be seen in action.

At this juncture, a word of caution is in order. The above characterisation of non-formal learning may seem to indicate that thinking in terms of Learning Networks has no bearing on formal learning at all, perhaps even seeks to ban it entirely from the landscape of education. That would be a grave mistake for at least two reasons. First, in all likelihood the initial education of children and adolescents will be best served by a formal approach to it, even if reforms may be in order. Indeed, in formal education, particularly in vocational formal learning, attempts are being made to adapt the traditional push model and make it adopt features of the kind of pull model we advocate here (Anonymous 2007).

Second, there is no reason why, in the context of Learning Network, bouts of formal learning could not be incorporated if those happen to be the most efficient and effective way for particular learners to cater for their competence needs. The reason why formal learning is downplayed in this section is because much of our current expertise in schools and universities is with the push model. So promoting a pull model requires a rethinking of much conventional wisdom. This pertains to many of our traditional educational assumptions, but also to the organisational aspects of the educational universe that is needed, and to the business models that underpin the economic viability of such a universe. Thinking in terms of Learning Networks allows us to break away from conventional wisdom, precisely because several of the traditional assumptions that one surreptitiously makes, are abandoned or at least questioned. Indeed, it the unconventional attitude which thinking in terms of Learning Networks requires that may teach us valuable lessons for formal learning as well.

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