

Preface

This book is about two topics, the fast change of learning in the open-learning worlds of Web 2.0 which I refer to as open-learning cultures and quality development and assessment for those open-learning worlds and landscapes. When I started out to draft the first chapters, two things became apparent to me: First, I noticed that indeed we have arrived at fast changing learning cultures and that every month brought about new aspects to my topic which I strived to integrate and which expanded the scope. Many issues I feel are barely enough elaborated for their actual and emerging importance. Second that a great variety and diversity of learning cultures exist, which expresses in manifold learning designs and in the emergence of open-learning landscapes, and also the discourse about the topic has a great diversity of actors, in parts deviating terminology and fashions. Therefore, I decided to add to the original plan to publish a book on quality and assessment—two already broad themes—the chapters on learning in a Web 2.0 world, open-learning cultures, and learning with peers in networks.

Assessment and Quality are amongst the topics which are hotly debated and extremely important to educators today. While much of the reality of assessment is (still) tied to formal learning scenarios in higher education institutions, we can see that higher education institutions' teachers more and more are bound to recognize also informal learning processes and networks of their students, moving ahead to new and more open-learning cultures. Many are embracing this fact already as a naturally given reality, as many case studies in the book show. It is, however, not evident and often not easy to create assessment concepts for open-learning cultures which allow recognition of informal learning influences into institutionalized learning worlds. The open-learning cultures are drastically opening the learning process to influences beyond the classroom and the institutional context and merge private, informal learning, the benefits of open knowledge, and publicly available content with traditional formal and often institution-bound learning processes. Open-learning cultures are challenging the old and long practiced pathways of our practice as educators. They are often characterized through elements of open-learning architectures and transform learning into a more student driven and self-responsible learning, using technology to connect resources, students, and teachers

in a new way. I also like to think of them using the metaphor of learning ecologies due to the fact they have an evolving and emerging nature which is composed of many interdependent parts, beyond traditional classrooms borders stretching into the family, private life and activities, or professional contexts, and all together building the ecology in which learning is embedded. In these open-learning ecologies, assessment has the function of moving closer to the actual learning experience itself and is a tool for learners to determine their own progress, learning needs, and next steps. Evaluation criteria are negotiated with peers and facilitators or learning coaches and assessment and evaluation become integral parts of learning themselves. But how to deal with these so dynamic and individual processes of evaluation and assessment?

After a phase of divergence and polarization, we can see now that a new form of blended learning is evolving. Blended learning here means not only that technology is enhancing the learning environment but also that blended forms of quality development, of blending formal and informal learning, and of self- as well as peer assessment are evolving more and more. Open learning is displaying a new *mélange* of contexts and elements. This book is a contribution to understand better the challenges we are facing when creating assessments for new and more open-learning cultures, how open-learning landscapes, open-learning ecologies look like, and how, as educators in higher education institutions, we can still get to terms with quality development and assessment.

The motivation to publish this book has its origins in numerous discussions during the last few years that I had the opportunity to hold with colleagues from all over the world. They took place during many international research projects and conferences related to learning technologies, as well as in higher education institutions meetings and in policy seminars, and they were triggered by the fundamental changes visible through integration and adoption of technologies into all areas of teaching and learning. I would like to thank everybody who contributed to this often critically discussed topic which is—sometimes—splitting the community into two—the skeptics and believers. Between both communities there are large plains of consensus, some sharp hills of disagreement, and many valleys of fruitful learning opportunities. To all those colleagues whom I had the chance to work with in international research and development projects, from Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia, and which contributed in their own ways to this book, I wish to express my gratefulness for their open minds, their willingness to share, and contribute to a more global vision of learning.

To my wife Virginie I would like to say thank you for being a critical friend in many discussions and also for allowing me to take time for such an isolated activity of writing a book. And to my little son Joshua who is already and will be in the future an active inhabitant of these new open-leaning landscapes.

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