Chapter V
The Role of Community Formation in Learning Processes

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the effectiveness and the necessity of forming a community when engaged in online learning. The Internet and its online communities offer new learning opportunities for many who cannot attend full-time, residential training sessions or higher education courses. Web-based course delivery affords these students and professionals the opportunity to work together, “anytime, anywhere,” exchanging information, resources, expertise, without leaving their homes or their jobs.

INTRODUCTION

As testimony of what is affirmed in terms of the role of community in online language learning processes and the significant capacity of Web 2.0 social software to facilitate such processes, the chapter includes examples of computer mediated conferencing messages from a case study, which presents the experience of two online groups of participants training on-the-job and in the process of forming a community of practice. The case study includes messages posted on the First Class network conferencing system (http://www.first-class.com) of two online groups, the Australian Community and the International Community, whose common denominator was the nature of the participants themselves: they were all pro-
fessional educators who convened online for 5 weeks to re-qualify as e-moderators in order to include an e-learning component as part of their training or teaching methodology. The e-moderating courses were based on Salmon’s five-stage model shown in Figure 1, which has a twofold purpose. Its step-by-step structure is designed to scaffold a successful development process for learning online as well as provide a framework for e-moderators that illustrates what interactive skills they need to apply at each stage in order to help the learners achieve this success (Salmon, 2004, p. 28).

Although the participants were not involved in learning a language, they were dealing with language issues, thus, it is this study’s view that their experience can be easily transferred to the world of language education, as it embraces all learning processes occurring through social software, and in this case by means of CMC. By providing a set of lenses to observe the community members through their discourse behaviours, this chapter hopes to provide insight into the broader use of the concept of Web 2.0 technologies and its role in online language education, going beyond the implications behind learning the language to include learning about how language works when the interlocutor is the Internet.

In considering a variety of other issues connected with online education and community formation, the discussion begins by exploring the advantages as well as the pitfalls of online learning and the role that it plays alongside its more traditional classroom approaches to teaching and learning. This naturally leads to a discussion of the importance of retaining some of that human contact, along with the regular buzz and social dynamics that characterize the classroom and this is where the idea of a learning community steps in. However, as not all social groups that convene online actually form a community, even with the aid of social software which naturally tends to facilitate networking processes, this chapter also discusses some of the salient attributes that

![Figure 1. 5-step model of e-moderating](image)
