Identity formation in informal spaces: A Communities of Practice approach

Claudia Fracchiolla
University College Dublin, Ireland

In the last few years many studies have looked at understanding the main factors that influence discipline-based identity formation. A large number of these studies focus on identity formation from the standpoint of the individual, however research shows that identity is a social construct that is highly dependent on the environment we are emerged in. In this study, we present an operationalization of the Community of Practice framework that can be used to study identity from the collective perspective. The different elements of the framework allow us to establish the individual’s positionality within the Community of Practice and the mechanisms within that community that help the individual become a more central member of the community and therefore develop a community identity. To demonstrate the use of the framework, we present findings of a study focused on the understanding of physics identity development of university students who facilitate informal physics programs.