LEARNING OUTSIDE SCHOOL: IS A SINGLE LABEL ENOUGH?

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The way which learning outside school is understood differs in western northern and western southern countries. In the formers, the majority of studies use the single label *informal education*, on the other hand, in southern countries it is usually named *informal* or *non-formal education.* It is necessary to point out that such difference reflects political and educational contexts. Amongst the most unique characteristics of the formal education to be pointed out are as follows: it is compulsory; hierarchically organized; the contents addressed are determined by mean of curriculum; it is strongly sequenced; learners are permanently evaluated and finally; it is highly structured. Whilst, although in different extension, non-formal education is also structured, others aspects are exclusive. First, non-formal education programs are recurrent, that is, whenever people want they can interact with them. Second, non-formal education uses to be controlled by the learner: when, how and why to interact with non-formal programs are factors that are under the control of the learners. Two others characteristics are shared by the informal education: people are free to decide if they want or nor to experience such programs, the themes approached could be virtually anyone, there is no commitment with official curriculum. However, the informal learning has some exclusive characteristics. There is no evaluation of the learning that takes place, informal education experiences are not structured at all in the sense that the learning situations are not oriented under any pedagogical theory, even though they could be didactic in some extend. Finally, only the informal education is actually experienced continuously through the lifetime. Disciplines such as physics, biology, history, mathematics and even linguistics are relatively well approached in non-formal contexts of education, but this is not the case of chemistry. Why?