Fourth Edition

Learning in Adulthood

A Comprehensive Guide

Sharan B. Merriam | Lisa M. Baumgartner

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Acknowledgments

This fourth edition of *Learning in Adulthood* is a direct response to the field's burgeoning literature base on research and theory in adult learning and the need for a single, comprehensive, up-to-date textbook to use in our adult learning classes and as a resource for research in adult learning. In a very real sense, it has been the students in our programs, participants in our workshops and seminars, and colleagues in the field who have challenged us to revise and update the previous edition of the book. Others, of course, have been of invaluable assistance at various stages of the project. David Brightman, an editor at Jossey-Bass for the first three editions of *Learning in Adulthood*, was enormously supportive in assisting us through the process as was Amy Fandrei and Pete Gaughan for this fourth edition. Colleagues Ralph Brockett, Carol Kasworm, Ed Taylor, and Libby Tisdell unselfishly provided us with updated materials and suggested resources for us to consider. A special thanks goes to Bora Jin, student and graduate research assistant at Texas A&M University, for tracking down references, assisting in editing, and in technical matters of getting the book ready for the publisher. Thanks also to Julia Lynch, postdoctoral scholar at Texas A&M, for her editing

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Preface

Learning in adulthood is an intensely personal activity. Yet at the same time, a multibillion-dollar enterprise has arisen in response to adult learning interests—an enterprise that spends more dollars than elementary schools, high schools, and postsecondary schools combined. Indeed, the field of adult and continuing education is characterized by a bewildering array of programs, agencies, and personnel working to assist adults in their learning. It is precisely the focus on adults as learners, however, that unites an otherwise extraordinarily diverse field. It is also the life context of adults and some of the distinguishing characteristics of the adult learning process that differentiate adult education from other kinds of education. To facilitate the process of learning, it is especially important to know who the adult learner is, how the social context shapes the learning that adults are engaged in, why adults are involved in learning activities, how adults learn, and how aging affects learning ability. *Learning in Adulthood* addresses these topics, among others.

There is a voluminous literature on adult learning, ranging from technical articles on various aspects of adult learning to handbooks, guides, YouTube videos, and other online resources, summarizing material for

the new instructor of adult students. If one investigates the Educational Resources Information Center (*ERIC*) website, which contains journal articles, monographs, conference proceedings, fact sheets, and so on, or does some random exploring on the World Wide Web, one encounters thousands of citations under the topic "adult learning." Further, there are dozens of books with either a central or secondary focus on adult learning.

For this fourth edition of *Learning in Adulthood* we have paid particular attention to work published since the last edition of the book. This fourth edition of *Learning in Adulthood* builds on material in the 2007 edition, bringing together the important contributions of the past dozen or so years to our understanding of adult learning. While we have preserved important foundational material (such as a discussion of andragogy), we have also brought to bear the most recent thinking and research. We have endeavored to put together a comprehensive overview and synthesis of what we know about adult learning: the current context in which it takes place, who the participants are, what they learn and why, the nature of the learning process itself, new approaches to adult learning, the development of theory in adult learning, and other issues relevant to understanding adult learning.

The book also takes into account recent work in sociology, philosophy, critical social theory, and psychology. Historically, in much of the writing on adult learning the sociocultural perspective has been neglected in favor of a psychological orientation to the individual learner and how to facilitate her or his learning. In addition to the focus on the learner, we attend to what is today a technology-infused context in which learning takes place and to learners' interactive relationship with that context and with the learning activity itself. We look at how the social structure influences what is offered and who participates, how the sociocultural context creates particular developmental needs and interests, and how social factors such as race, class, and gender shape learning.

This book is intended primarily for educators of adults and scholars of adult learning. We have organized the material so that it will make sense to readers who are new to adult education and at the same time will challenge those who are already familiar with the knowledge base of the field. The organization and presentation of this material reflect our efforts over the years to find the best way to organize courses, workshops, and seminars in adult learning and development for audiences

with varying levels of expertise. We have endeavored to put together a book that is at once readable, thorough, and up to date in its coverage. In particular, the book is designed for use in courses in adult learning and as a resource for those interested in conducting research on adult learning. In addition to those associated with the field of adult education itself, however, those in counseling, health, social work, human resource development, administration, and instructional technology and in such institutions as libraries, places of worship, museums, business and industry, and higher education often deal on a daily basis with adult learners. We also intend this book to be a resource for practitioners in these fields who would like to know more about adult learners and the learning process.

Overview of the Contents

This fourth edition of *Learning in Adulthood* retains the organization of topics found in the previous edition. That is, in the third edition we realized that in most courses using this text, the chapters specific to adult learning theory and models were read before chapters on cognitive development, intelligence and aging, and psychosocial developmental frameworks. We have organized accordingly. This edition is divided into four parts. Part I describes the context of adult learning. Part II focuses on theories and models of adult learning. The chapters in Part III address newer approaches to adult learning, and those in Part IV present material on topics that intersect with adult learning, such as memory and cognition, adult development, and so on.

The chapters in Part I, "Adult Learning in Contemporary Society," center on the context of adult learning. Chapter 1 sets the sociocultural context for adult learning in North America. In it, we discuss three forces—demographics, globalization, and technology—that have shaped adult learning today. It is important to understand how the interaction of those three factors has led to changes in both what adults want to learn and the learning opportunities provided for them. Chapter 2 is a new chapter devoted to the ubiquitous presence of technology in all forms of adult education from formal to nonformal to informal and self-directed learning environments. Directly related to the sociocultural context of adult learning are the environments where learning takes place, the

subject of Chapter 3. These range from educational and noneducational institutions, such as hospitals and government agencies, to nonformal and community-based agencies, to incidental and informal learning that is more self-directed than structured by others. Also in this chapter we explore the concepts of organizational learning and the learning organization, lifelong learning and the learning society. The fourth chapter in Part I summarizes the literature on who participates in primarily formal adult learning activities, why people participate, and what they choose to learn. We also take a critical look at key questions of access and opportunity and examine the gaps between the rhetoric and the reality in the provision of formal and nonformal learning activities in our society.

Part II, "Adult Learning Theory," builds on foundational material in adult learning, material that is at the heart of our field of adult education. The topics covered in these chapters represent the field's efforts in distinguishing itself from the education of children. We begin Chapter 5 with a description and critique of the best known of these theories, Knowles's (1980) concept of andragogy. Based on six characteristics of adult learners, andragogy focuses on the adult learner as distinguished from preadult learners. In this chapter we also cover one other model of learning, McClusky's (1970) theory of margin, which has great intuitive appeal to adult learners introduced to it. McClusky considers how everyday life and transitions can be both an opportunity and a barrier to engaging in an adult learning activity. In Chapter 6 we explore the rich array of work that has been completed on self-directed learning. Addressed are the goals and processes of self-directed learning, the concept of self-directedness as a personal attribute of the learner, recent approaches to self-directed learning, and some suggestions for building research and theory in this area. Currently, self-directed learning along with transformative learning has taken center stage in research and writing. Chapter 7 summarizes the development of transformational learning, reviews the burgeoning recent research in this area, and examines unresolved issues inherent in this approach to adult learning. In Chapter 8, the last chapter of Part II, we look closely at the role of experience in learning: both how adult learning builds on prior experience and how experience shapes learning. The concepts of experiential learning, reflective practice, and situated cognition are also examined in this chapter.

Part III, "Newer Approaches to Adult Learning," contains three chapters. There is a burgeoning interest in embodied or somatic learning,

spirituality and learning, and narrative approaches to learning, topics addressed in Chapter 9. We uncovered so much recent material in these areas that, had space allowed, we could have easily devoted a full chapter to each of these subjects. Chapter 10 explores Eastern and indigenous approaches to adult learning. Because the majority of the knowledge base represented in *Learning in Adulthood* is from a Western perspective, characterized by cultural values of privileging the individual learner and cognitive processes over more holistic approaches, we wanted to introduce readers to other epistemologies, other ways of thinking about learning and knowing. We hope we have done that through brief introductions to five non-Western perspectives. The final chapter in Part III is an update of critical theory, postmodernism, and feminist pedagogy. These three perspectives draw from literature outside the field of adult education. Scholars have applied these perspectives to our field, enlarging our understanding by inviting us to question how the structural inequities based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, and so on affect learning.

Part IV, which we have titled "Learning and Development," brings together material from philosophy, psychology, sociology, biology, and so on that has a bearing on adult learning. Chapter 12 focuses on adults' developmental characteristics. Beginning with biological and psychological perspectives on adult development, we move to sociocultural and integrated perspectives. The work on adult development in recent years places less emphasis on age and stage models and more on the effect of such factors as race, gender, class, and ethnicity. Much has been written lately about cognitive development in adulthood, and so this is treated separately in Chapter 13. Here we review several theoretical models of cognitive development as well as present the concept of dialectical thinking. Chapter 14 reviews the work on intelligence, especially as it has been studied from a developmental or aging perspective. Drawing on several disciplines and summarizing recent work on memory and aging, expertise, cognitive and learning styles, and brain-based research, Chapter 15 on the brain, memory, and cognitive functioning is one of the few compilations of its kind in an adult learning textbook.

Finally, in the last chapter we step back from the accumulated knowledge base to summarize and integrate the material on adult learning presented in earlier chapters. Chapter 16 also reflects how we ourselves have come to think about learning in adulthood.

About the Authors

Sharan B. Merriam is professor emerita of adult education and qualitative research methods at the University of Georgia. Merriam's research and writing activities have focused on the foundations of adult education, adult development, adult learning, and qualitative research methods. She has published more than 30 books and dozens of chapters and articles and held major editorship roles throughout her career. For 5 years she was coeditor of *Adult Education Quarterly*, the major research and theory journal in adult education. She was also coeditor for the book series Professional Practices in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning. She has won the Cyril O. Houle World Award for Literature in Adult Education for four different books. Various of her books have been translated into Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Farsi, Italian, and French. Her most recent books include *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (with Robin S. Grenier, 2019), *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (with Elizabeth J. Tisdell, 2016), *A Guide to Research for Educators and Trainers of Adults* (with Patricia Cranton, 2015), and *Adult Learning: Linking Theory and Practice* (with Laura Bierema 2014). Based on her widespread contributions to the field of adult education, Merriam has been inducted into the International

Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame and was the first to receive the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education's Career Achievement award. She has served on steering committees for the annual North American Adult Education Research Conference, the Qualitative Research in Education Conference held at the University of Georgia, and the Commission of Professors of Adult Education. She has conducted workshops and seminars on adult learning and qualitative research throughout North America and overseas, including countries in southern Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. In 1998 she was a Senior Fulbright Scholar to Malaysia, in 2006 a Visiting Scholar to South Korea, and from 2016 to 2018 she was a Distinguished Visiting Scholar to Northwest University in South Africa.

Lisa M. Baumgartner is an associate professor of adult education at Texas State University, San Marcos. Her research and writing focus on adult learning and development in marginalized populations. A recipient of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation Cyril O. Houle Scholars Research Grant for Emerging Scholars in Adult Education, she completed a study on civil rights activist Septima P. Clark's lifelong contributions to social justice adult education. She received the Houle O. Cyril Award for Outstanding Literature in Adult Education for the coauthored text *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive* Guide (3rd edition) in 2007. She has served on the steering committee for the annual North American Adult Education Research Conference. She was a coeditor of *Adult Education Quarterly* from 2011 to 2014 and serves on the editorial boards of several journals including *Adult Education Quarterly, Adult Learning,* and the *Journal of Transformative Education*. In 2004, she received the Commission of Professors of Adult Education Early Career Award, which honors individuals in the early stages of their academic career who have made significant contributions in scholarship and service to the field. In 2019, she received the Circle of 50 Award from the Learning, Leadership and Organizational Development Program at the University of Georgia. Awardees are seen as having made an impact on the research and practice of adult education, learning, leadership, and organizational development.

Part I

Adult Learning in Contemporary Society

It is very much the perspective of this book that learning is a personal process—but a process that is shaped by the context of adult life and the society in which one lives. Compare how industrialization of the early years of the twentieth century affected what an adult needed and wanted to learn with the knowledge economy of the early twenty-first century. This learning in turn affects the social context. For example, as we become more technologically savvy, businesses respond by developing more sophisticated systems and gadgets that then require us to keep learning. It is indeed an interactive process between the learner and the social context. The four chapters in Part I explore the current sociocultural context, the range of learning opportunities available to adults in this context, and who takes advantage of these opportunities and why.

Chapter 1 describes three factors characteristic of American society today that affect what adults want to learn. First, dramatic changes are occurring in the demographic base of our society. Adults outnumber

those under 18 years old for the first time ever. Moreover, the percentage of the population over age 65 continues to grow, commanding the attention of policymakers, businesspeople, and educators alike. Our population as a whole is also better educated than ever before, and there is more cultural and ethnic diversity. Therefore, there are simply more adults seeking learning opportunities, as well as more groups of adults with particular learning needs.

The second and third factors shaping the learning enterprise are globalization and technology. These are very much interrelated, of course; technology has had an enormous impact on the economy. Robotics and automation displace production workers but create other jobs; technology has fostered whole new work structures, such as job sharing and telecommuting. The effect of the global economy and technological advances on the nature of adult learning is staggering. Adults find that they must continue their learning past formal schooling in order to function at work, at home, and in their communities. The need for new knowledge, for updating old information, for retraining, has resulted in a multibillion-dollar educational enterprise.

Because of its ever-increasing presence in our lives, we have added a new chapter on technology and adult learning. From online courses offered by educational institutions and corporations to the myriad of online sites on the World-Wide Web to technological innovations that are pervading our everyday world, technology is both creating learning demands and facilitating learning in adult life. Chapter 2 is thus devoted to broadly examining the role of technology in the context of adult learning today. Some of the topics include the history of distance education, online learning theories, and the role of technology in informal and nonformal learning.

Some of this learning takes place in formal settings sponsored by countless institutions and agencies. As might be expected, business and industry and educational institutions offer many adult learning opportunities, but so do the military, cooperative extensions, churches, hospitals, and other institutions. Chapter 3 explores how the context of formal institutional settings influences the learner and the learning process. Also reviewed are learning opportunities that are nonformal, such as those offered by community-based agencies such as museums, libraries, hospitals, and so on, and informal, incidental, and self-directed opportunities, as might happen in the course of the workday or by looking up

something on the Internet. In addition, we briefly discuss online learning, a fourth environment for learning that overlays formal, nonformal, and informal modes of learning. In the second half of this chapter, we explore the interrelated concepts, first, of organizational learning and the learning organization, and second, of lifelong learning and the learning society.

Chapter 4 profiles who participates in adult learning, why adults participate, and what an adult chooses to learn. Most of this information on participation and motivation is in reference to formal learning, such as that provided by educational institutions and employers. Estimates of the percentage of the adult population that participates in learning have steadily risen over the past 50 years, with the most current study suggesting that approximately 44% of all adult Americans participate in learning. Studies of self-directed learning and other nonformal types of education reveal the percentage of participation to be even higher. Clearly, learning is an important activity for today's adults. What motivates adults to participate and what deters participation is important information, especially for program developers. This chapter also reviews motivational studies.

The final section of Chapter 4 "problematizes" the concept of participation. By examining the assumptions that underlie participation we squarely confront the issues of access and opportunity in adult education. The gap between the better educated who seek out continuing education and those who do not continues to widen. Adult learning seems to have become a vehicle for solidifying a socioeconomic structure that limits access and opportunity, contrary to the stated goal of equal access to education in our society. We examine the rhetoric, which espouses one set of values, and the reality, which demonstrates another, in the provision of adult learning opportunities.

Chapter 1
The Social Context of Adult Learning

Learning, even self-directed learning, rarely occurs "in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives; . . . it is intimately related to that world and affected by it" (Jarvis, 2012, p. 11). What one wants to learn, what is offered, and the ways in which one learns are determined to a large extent by the nature of the society at any time. Contrast the young male apprentice of colonial times learning to be a blacksmith with today's middle-aged woman learning a new smartphone app, or the preparation needed to become a medical doctor at the turn of the twentieth century—less than a high school diploma—with today's long and specialized training.

It can also be argued that the nature of society at any point in time determines the relative emphasis placed on adult learning. In preindustrial societies, the rate of change was such that what a person needed to know to function as an adult could be learned in childhood. In societies hurrying to catch up, however, and in our own society with its accelerated rate of change, the urgency of dealing with social realities is felt by adults. In this global, increasingly technologically interconnected world, "the context for adult learning is growing more complex" (Nicolaides & Marsick, 2016, p. 9). The challenge for learners and adult educators is to understand the learning context whether it be "simple, complicated,

complex [or] chaotic" and to adapt our learning and teaching (p. 10). Further, social issues such as immigration and climate change and individual concerns such as those related to health or family or finances often result in individuals attending courses or learning informally about these issues.

Although adult education is responsive to the context in which it takes place, it affects that same context. Take, for example, enormous changes in our society brought on by advances in technology. Advances in telemedicine mean doctors can diagnose patients who live at a distance using increasingly sophisticated web-based communication and patients can use smartphone apps to monitor their health. Auto mechanics must now be trained to diagnose engine problems using computers; auto manufacturers tout self-driving cars; a smartphone can be turned into a 3D printer; misplaced items such as keys, wallets, and backpacks can be located via smartphone. Adult education has responded to these technological advances by offering courses to learn this technology so that we can better function in our digital environment.

Although the preceding examples of learning are particularly contemporary, historically there has always been an interlocking of adult learning needs with the social context in which they occur. The skills needed in colonial America reflected the agrarian context; further, since early settlers were fleeing religious persecution in Europe, there was a moral and religious imperative in learning to read so that one could study the Bible. After the Revolutionary War, the newly independent nation needed leaders and informed citizens to build the democratic society. In this new world, civic education, which included learning about philosophy, science, and politics, eclipsed religious education and became paramount in the education of adults.

With the Industrial Revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, industry-based skills training became a necessity. Also, because of the massive influx of immigrants to the United States at this time, "Americanization" and citizenship programs became a prominent form of adult education. It was felt that these immigrants needed to learn the ways of their adopted country so that they would "melt" into society. Interestingly, immigrants themselves organized their own schools to maintain their culture, but these were largely invisible to society at large.

Although a major thrust of adult education at any particular time reflects the sociohistorical context, varied purposes and learning

interests coexist. We might argue that technology is a major thrust of learning today, but there is still job training, literacy, civic education, liberal (such as Great Books clubs) and leisure learning, along with community-based social-action initiatives. As Stubblefield and Keane (1994, p. 312) observed from their survey of adult education from colonial times until the present, regardless of the historical era, "Americans learned because there was knowledge to master, technology to adapt, and life's uncertainties to be resolved."

Thus, to a large extent, the learning that goes on in adulthood can be understood through an examination of the social context in which it occurs. How is learning in adulthood shaped by the society in which it takes place? How does the sociocultural context determine what is learned and by whom?

This chapter explores three conditions characteristic of the current sociocultural context that are shaping the learning needs of adults in today's world: changing demographics, the global economy, and information and technology. Although we present each of these separately at first, these three factors are very much interrelated, and thus their convergence and subsequent impact on learning in adulthood are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Changing Demographics

Changing demographics is a social reality shaping the provision of learning in contemporary American society. Demographics is about people, groups of people, and their respective characteristics. For the first time in our society, adults outnumber youth, there are more older adults, the population is better educated than ever before, and there is more cultural and ethnic diversity. For various reasons, individuals and groups of people seek out learning experiences; for other reasons, society targets learning activities for certain segments of the population. Thus, certain learning activities are learner initiated and others are society initiated in response to the changing demographics. The field is concerned with the growth and development of adult learners, while at the same time, there are emerging groups of learners with special needs.

To begin, there are simply more adults in our society than ever before, and the population will continue to age. In comparison to colonial times

when half the population was under age 16, in 1990, fewer than one in four Americans were under age 16 and half were age 33 or older. The median age of the American population was 38 years in 2017 up from of 35.3 years in 2000 and this figure is expected to increase to 43 by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b). The so-called Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are a contributing factor to this change in the population. The Baby Boomers started turning 65 in 2011 and by 2056 those over age 65 will outnumber individuals under 18 (Ortman, 2012, U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b).

The shift from a youth-oriented to an adult-oriented society is solidified by the increasing numbers of older adults in the population. In addition to an increase of persons over age 65, the oldest old, those over 85 years old, are the fastest-growing segment of the older population. The number of people age 85 and older is expected to grow from 5.8 million in 2010 to 19 million in 2050. This age group is expected to comprise 2.3% of the population in 2030 and 4.3% in 2050 (Vincent & Velkoff, 2010). In addition, the population over age 65 is expected to become increasingly racially diverse and the life expectancy gap between men and women is expected to narrow (Vincent & Velkoff, 2010).

Today's older adults are also increasingly better educated, in better health, and many are economically better off than previous cohorts. Society is already heeding their learning needs with policies like tuition waivers for higher and continuing education programs and specially designed programs, such as the popular Road Scholar program and learning-in-retirement institutes. There has also been a subtle change in the philosophical rationale—at least among those working in the fields of gerontology and educational gerontology—underlying the provision of education for this group. Along with an economic rationale (the better educated need fewer social services) and a social stability rationale (millions of healthy retired people need something to do) is an awareness that older adults as well as younger ones have an unending potential for development. The stereotypical idea of retirement as a time for cognitive decline and withdrawal seems to be slowly changing as an increasing number of individuals are reaching retirement age and the media, although still promoting some stereotypes, is showing older adults actively engaged in a wide variety of activities. Additionally, retirement communities arrange learning opportunities for their residents including lectures, travel, concerts, and discussion groups.

Thus, *more* adults and an increase in the *number of older adults* are two demographic factors influencing the provision of learning activities in our society. So, too, is the rising level of education characteristic of U.S. citizens. This is dramatically illustrated by the fact that 90% of the U.S. population age 25 or older has completed high school or higher levels of education, which compares with 24% in 1940 (Schmidt, 2018). Because previous education is the single best predictor of participation in adult education, the rising educational level of the adult population is a contextual factor of considerable import. For example, 66% of U.S. adults 26–35 years old participated in adult education activities compared to 49% of those 56–65 years old (Desjardins, 2015). In adults age 16–65 (excluding individuals from 16 to 24 in formal studies), 31% with less than a high school education participated in adult education activities whereas 79% of those with a high school education or higher participated in adult education activities (Desjardins, 2015).

Participation in adult education is also affected by literacy and economics. In the United States, 27% of low-literate adults said they had participated in adult education within the last year, while 84% of those with higher levels of literacy participated (Desjardins, 2015). This pattern is seen in other countries as well. In Korea, the respective figures are 13% for low-literates and 77% for those with higher literacy rates, and Cyprus's figures are 24% and 51%, respectively (Desjardins, 2015). Participation rates for U.S. adults ages 16–65 whose parents had not graduated from high school was 39%, while individuals where at least one parent completed high school was 72%.

Another demographic characteristic of the social context is the growing cultural and ethnic diversity of America's population. Roughly 13.4% or 43.7 million people residing in the United States are foreign born (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2018). Twenty-six percent of those who are foreign born and living in the United States are from Mexico (OECD, 2018). Applications for asylum in the United States have risen especially from citizens from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (OECD, 2018). Although immigration rates are expected to slow somewhat in the short term due to U.S. governmental policies enacted in the late 2010s, (OECD, 2018), starting in 2030, "net international migration is projected to become the largest driver of population growth" (Vespa, Armstrong, & Medina, 2018, p. 12). Immigration combined with birthrate

projections in the United States mean there will be an increase in the Latinx, Asian, and African American populations with a decrease in Whites. In 2016, non-Hispanic Whites comprised 61.3% of the population and by 2060 they will make up 44.3% of the population. In contrast, the Latinx population is expected to increase almost 10% from 17.8% of the U.S. population in 2016 to 27.5% in 2060. The African American population is projected to increase almost 2% from 13.3% in 2016 to 15% of the population by 2060. The Asian population is expected to grow from 5.7% to 9.1% of the population. The percentage of those of two or more races is expected to expand from 2.6% of the population in 2016 to 6.2% in 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017c). By 2045, people of color will account for 51.3% of the population (Frey, 2018).

The socioeconomic and cultural diversity of today's immigrant population presents special challenges. In 2016, 30% of the foreign-born population age 25 or older possessed a bachelor's degree or higher and 29% lacked a high school diploma or GED (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). Fifty-two percent of the immigrants in the United States over age 5 are English proficient (Radford, 2019). Immigrants' income varies with education level, occupation, industry, and geographic region, but immigrants tend to earn less than their native-born counterparts although the gap is small for those with a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). Hence, immigrants' income and opportunities can vary depending on their education level and language proficiency, with the less educated and less English proficient "concentrated in trade and labour professions and confined mostly to general education programmes" (Calvo & Sarkisian, 2015, p. 1044). Courses for immigrants include English as a second language courses, adult basic education (ABE), and other community-based courses in "nutrition, parenting, immigration issues and other informal education opportunities" (Larrotta, 2017, p. 67). Typically, churches, libraries, social service centers, and community centers are places where immigrants engage in adult education (Larrotta, 2017).

In summary, the composition of society is an important factor in the provision of learning opportunities for citizens of all ages. In the United States, there are more adults than youth, the number of older adults is growing, the population as a whole is better educated, and more diverse—racially, ethnically, and culturally—than ever before.

Globalization

Globalization is an overarching concept encompassing changes taking place worldwide. But globalization is not a new concept because it can be argued that the world has always sought to connect through travel, trade, and cultural exchange. (For a brief overview of the history and various definitions of globalization see Gulmez, 2017) Since the 1980s, the term has more frequently been used to reflect the increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through trade and the flow of finances. Globalization includes the flow of "goods, services, people, knowledge, ideas, information and financial capital across borders" (Desjardins, 2013, p. 184). An incredibly complex and controversial phenomenon, we can only try to convey some of its essential characteristics and some of the issues and speculate as to how it is shaping adult learning in our context.

Neoliberal ideas of free trade, privatization, and "reduced capital controls on cross-border flow of finance" fuel the images most associated with the economic view of economic globalization (Desjardins, 2013, p. 183). These images include the loss of low-wage manufacturing jobs to less developed corners of the world, with transnational companies operating in a space outside national boundaries and control, with consumerism and commercialism supplanting other interests. Those opposed to the neoliberal agenda say that the costs of globalization include the loss of human rights including poor working conditions, although proponents indicate that globalization promotes economic growth (Richards & Gelleny, 2016). Although the market economy is clearly a driving force in globalization, so too is information technology. Technology has changed the way we work in that individuals can work from anywhere in the world. Changes in information technology have changed the teaching/learning transaction. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), synchronous and asynchronous distance courses, communication tools such as Skype, Zoom, and Google Hangouts, and the plethora of web-based resources including LinkedIn Learning, and YouTube have affected the way individuals learn alone and in groups.

But globalization is not only about economics. Brysk (2003, p. 22) contends that it is a combination of four elements:

- *Connection* means greater traffic in bodies, goods, services, and information across borders.
- *Cosmopolitanism* describes the growth of multiple centers of power and influence above, below, and across national governments: international organizations, grassroots groups, and transnational bodies from Microsoft to Greenpeace.
- *Communication* is an increase in technological capacity that strengthens transnational networks of all kinds (from multinational corporations to nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] to terrorists) and diffuses ideas and values more quickly and broadly.
- *Commodification* is the expansion of world markets, and the extension of market-like behavior across more states and social realms. Increases in global capital flows, privatization of formerly state-owned enterprises, and increasing employment of children are all examples of commodification.

Brysk goes on to show how these elements of globalization are both a plus and a minus for human rights issues:

> Connection brings human rights monitors to Chiapas, but it also brings sex tourists to Thailand. Cosmopolitanism creates a U.N. Human Rights Commission and countless NGOs to condemn China's abuse of political dissidents and religious minorities; yet commodification makes China the United States's second-leading trade partner. (p. 22)

Part of the controversy surrounding globalization has to do with economics. Those countries that can be competitive are already better off and become even richer through globalization. Critics of neoliberal policies observe that more wealthy countries hurt less developed countries because richer countries "extract more money from developing countries than they invest, displace local capital, and add to unemployment by promoting capital-intensive production rather than labour-intensive activities" (Richards & Gelleny, 2016, p. 219).

What does all this mean for adult learning? Walters (2014) asserts that globalization "has been a driving factor in the commodification of learning" and that learning has become individualized and more expensive, widening the gap between the rich and the poor (p. 186).