Preface

The history of lifelong learning (adult and community education or workforce education) parallels humanity from the Stone Age to modern civilization. When humans were hunters and gatherers, the elders or more experienced workers passed knowledge and skills to the next generations in the learning communities. As humans progressed toward modern civilization, adult and community education has made tremendous contributions to our civilization. Even before 500 years B.C., adult educators such as Confucius, Aristotle, and later Plato emerged as educators who were teachers of adults, not of children. Teaching concepts such as “silent reflection” or “the rectification of the mind” were advanced by Confucius and other educational leaders at the time. In modern times, the U.S. scholar Jack Mezirow popularized the theory of critical reflection based on teaching concepts advanced 2000 years ago. When Alexander Kapp coined the term andragogy in the field of adult and community education in 1833, he did not popularize it. It took the father of adult education, Malcolm Knowles, to do this in the 1970s.

Lifelong learning has become more important in the 21st century simply because many countries have emerged as what we call “learning societies.” In these learning societies, people live longer, and adult and community education plays a major role in shaping and reshaping their economic, political, and cultural realities. There is no doubt that adults are the backbone of any economy as they are the leaders in their local, national, and international communities. However, as older adults retire, especially in the coming years, both the private and public sector will need new leaders in the world’s workforce. The future of these learning societies lies in the hands of these working adults. Therefore, the importance of adult and community education cannot be over emphasized as we are moving to an adult-oriented society from a youth-oriented society. Yet with the worldwide economic recession, adult education programs are faced with many unforeseen challenges. Adult educators/adult learning professionals must demonstrate the value of adult and community education through research into theory and practice. Practitioners in this field must show the world that it is adult and community education programs that have offered value-added education to current and potential adult learners. Without exaggeration, lifelong-learning can be considered as an economic engine that can lead many institutions of higher learning out of this economic crisis. Adult learners pioneered distance learning programs about 150 years ago in the United States; at the time, these programs were called correspondence courses, and they were based on mailing print materials back and forth between educator and learner. Now E-learning programs have become the buzz terms in the new century. E-learning has the potential to bring vigor and vitality to many higher learning programs in many countries. Without reinventing the wheel, institutional leaders should turn to lifelong learning programs to help build the nation’s workforce.

The availability of information via the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies that connect users across thousands of miles is changing education at all levels. At the local, national, and international levels, more adult and community education programs are being delivered electronically, providing needed
convenience and flexibility for learners while saving money. To accommodate the learning needs of traditional age and non-traditional age students, universities must deliver these programs via cutting edge technologies. The goal of depending on technologies is for adult learners to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes to satisfy their interests and needs in life to be productive citizens of the world. According to Habermas, instrumental knowledge is acquired through empirical research in Habamas’ terms. With this purpose in mind, the scholars/researchers as well as PhD candidates have contributed their first rate research to this handbook. Worthy of note is the fact that many prominent scholars/researchers such as Stephen Brookfield, Patricia Cranton, John Henschke, Valerie Bryan, Kathleen King, and Lyle Yorks have contributed chapters to this book. As these scholars have remained the most frequently cited authors in the field of adult and community education, it is predicted that scholars/researchers will continue to cite their chapters from this unique book. Also, worthy of note is that many other authors are leading researchers in the field. The fact that their chapters included in the book have survived the blind review process alone says a great deal about the rigor and strength of their cutting edge research.

As many E-learning or distance learning programs have recently been launched, little research has examined the relationship between adult and community education and the economy at the local, national, and international levels. This handbook of research has evidently filled the void in the literature by evaluating and discussing the economic impact of adult and community education. Such a volume will definitely serve as a premier resource for learning in this field. Now instructional/administrative leaders, counselors, corporate trainers, teacher-scholars, practitioners, theorists and graduate students can all build on such a historic publication. The rise or fall of a nation depends on the education and training of its potential community leaders. This publication will serve as an exhaustive compendium of this community’s expertise, research, skills, and experiences. Authors with a background in adult education, leadership, counseling, management, and human resource development have helped “plant” the education and training of potential community leaders.

OBJECTIVE OF THE HANDBOOK

The Handbook of Research on Technologies for Improving the 21st Century Workforce: Tools for Lifelong Learning features full length chapters authored by leading experts offering an in-depth description of key terms and concepts related to different areas, issues and trends in adult and community education worldwide. Additionally, this volume provides a compendium of terms, definitions, and explanations of concepts, processes, and acronyms.

Finally, to all our readers/users of this book, I invite you to enter into this journey with us and to share your research and understanding with our global academic community. It is with great appreciation that we realize that through understanding one another we create ourselves, and by knowing ourselves, we can reach one another. It is hoped that as you flip through the pages of the book, we are having an honest and sincere dialogue with each and every author of this book in the field. Many thanks for having this handbook of research on your desk top as a premier reference source.

Victor C. X. Wang
Florida Atlantic University, USA
April 4, 2012