Preface

Behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism are the three broad learning theories most often used in the design of adult instructional environments. These theories, however, were developed in a time when learning was not influenced by information and communication technology. Over the years, digital technologies have grown and revolutionized how we live, think, communicate, and learn. As education moves forward into the digital age researchers must remain critical of implications ahead.

In recent years the declining cost of digital technologies have made digital technologies accessible to nearly everyone in all parts of the world, from inner-city urban neighborhoods in the United States to the rural villages in developing nations across the world. These new technologies have the potential to fundamentally transform how and what people learn throughout their lives. Just as advances in biotechnologies have made possible the “green revolution”, digital technologies have made possible a “learning revolution” that has changed the face of education as we know it. This remains true for adult learning.

Adult learning within the scope of the digital age has emerged as a popular venue for both students and educational institutions. For universities and other educational programs, this introduction and expansion of digital technologies has completely changed the means and levels of educational access to reach and engage learners in distant and diverse locations. Given this new reality of a global technologically connected society, adult learners through digital technology will face an even greater challenge as digital technology becomes more pervasive and ubiquitous. Moreover, as instructors move further into the digital age, a new paradigm of digitally-enriched mediated learning has emerged giving way to theories and strategies for the adult teaching and learning process.

Adult teaching and learning in the digital age is moving away from the passive acquiring of factual information towards a more active application of knowledge. The focus is on assisting learners to construct knowledge and new ideas both as independent self-directed inquiry and communally in peer groups in order to demonstrate their knowledge attainment through enactment and application.

While digital technology could make a learning revolution possible, it certainly does not guarantee such opportunities. In most places where digital technology is used in adult learning, it is used simply to reinforce obsolete approaches to learning. Even as scientific and technological advances have transformed other fields, ideas and approaches to teaching and learning for adults remain mostly unchanged.

To take full advantage of new digital technologies, we need to fundamentally rethink our approaches to adult learning and education and our ideas of how digital technologies can support them. To that end, Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes will serve as a spring board to better understand the role of digital technology in adult learning.

With this ideal, the purpose Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes serves to identify the factors that shape and impact adult learning opportunities in the digital age. As educators move forward in this new frontier of teaching practice, understanding the impact of digital technology on adult learning is crucial not only in terms of the tools itself, but also of
the impact on those undertaking adult learning opportunities. The information presented in this text will lead to the development and implementation of innovative strategies that promote quality adult teaching and learning. In order to effectively develop a conducive environment for adult learning in this digital age and to capitalize on the digital technologies, instructional designers, educators, trainers, and facilitators must pay particular attention to the design of instruction, the mode of delivery, instructional and teaching practices, as well as the digital technologies employed to disseminate learning that occurs in adult learning online learning.

Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes provides a comprehensive framework of trends and issues related to adult learning for the facilitation of authentic learning in the age of digital technology. This significant reference source offers researchers, academicians, and practitioners a valuable compendium of expert ideas, practical experiences, field challenges, and potential opportunities concerning the advancement of new technological and pedagogical techniques used in adult schooling.

Based on the trends of adult learning in the digital age we often considered the following questions information: What knowledge is most important for adults to know? What are the best ways to transmit that knowledge from one person (a teacher) to another (a student)? What are the best ways to represent and display knowledge so that it is both understandable and learnable?

It’s not surprising that these questions are at the forefront of instructors who strive to create a quality learning experiences for adult learners. However, the question that remains is “How do we best confront these questions and produce solutions for the adult learners in the digital age”? It’s not surprising that these questions are at the forefront instructors who strive to create a quality learning experiences for adult learners. However, the question that remains is how do we best confront these questions and produce solutions for the adult learners in the digital age.

In order to understand this new frontier for teaching practice, Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes serves to bridge and support adult learning methodologies with digital ICT advancements. Further, this text will highlight the principles and theories of learning including the adult learning methodology or andragogy, active learning principles, and digital technology and its connection to authentic adult learning experiences. Moreover, other principles associated with this text includes instructional design, learning communities, learning management systems, web based instruction, and social networking.

Until we begin to rethink the uses of digital technology and their application to adult learning, digital technology will never live up to its full potential. Like paint, digital technologies can be used for designing and creating things. For example, students can create their own web pages, blogs, wiki’s or podcasts that reflect their learning and learning outcomes. In addition students can create their own music files as an expression of their experience in the learning process. It is through the design activities that digital technology offers the greatest new learning opportunities for adult learners. Research has shown that many of the best learning experiences come when adult learners are engaged in designing and creating things, especially things that are meaningful either to us or to those around us.

Like art, digital technologies can also be used as “material” for making authentic lessons. Indeed, digital technology in adult learning is the most extraordinary construction material ever invented, enabling students to create a variety of products. In addition digital technology can be seen as a art, greatly expanding what adult learners can create and what they can learn in the process.

To that end Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes presents learning models that offers educators and students a wealth of information that was never possible in the classical age of education. The possibility of linking these ideals together worldwide in a multitude of formats creates a remarkably rich medium for learning allowing for a robustness of what
digital technology has to offer. *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* is not merely duplicate of an original discussion, but a new structured conversation that will spark the burning desire to continue strong teaching practices that include digital technology. *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* represents a new type of discussion which takes full advantage of the digital technologies in order to achieve an effective yet enjoyable learning process. Thus, with *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* concepts are introduced in innovative ways – ways that involve the adult learner and integrate them into the learning process. Moreover, *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* links to vast resources available worldwide and introduces new levels of value to adult learning in the digital age.

*Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* can be envisioned as a dynamically-evolving resource that will prove beneficial to both the adult learner and instructors alike - making it a great source for strategy and content. In the light of this text, *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* presents evidence that assists in the design of authentic learning opportunities for adult learning. Thus, *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* teaches that authentic learning experiences in the digital age are developed through the efforts of a team of professionals with a complementary range of skills, as opposed to classical course design, which is typically developed by faculty alone. Designer and educators alike will have opportunities to see teaching practices and principles made alive for the next generation of adult learners.

The richness of *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* allows for unlimited creativity when it comes to adult learning in the digital age. Such richness offers educators new opportunities to develop innovative learning material while posing a challenge in that it requires faculty to rethink their own teaching practices. In order to best serve adult learners *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* takes an active look at effective practices and strategies that inform adult learning. It is not enough for educational institutions to just give financial resources, hardware and software, however, they should fundamentally equip educators to effectively teach, engage, extend, and enhance the adult learners educational experience.

By equipping all stakeholder for effective adult learning practices, *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* offers effective design strategies, content, learning templates, materials, and models to further quality teaching and active student engagement within the realm of adult learning. It is important to understand that in order to foster an environment conducive to effective learning in the adult learning atmosphere, we must pay close attention to the factors that affect instructional quality as discussed in this new frontier of learning. For such research, the future seems very bright and encouraging. This theme will be repeated as other aspects of the digital age come under scrutiny. We know enough at this point to optimize quality in visual aesthetics, however the instructional quality and quality of deliver is more difficult to define and measure; that is why *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* offers to fill this gap with strategies, process, and procedure effectively engage all stakeholders in the development of adult learning in the digital age.

In order to provide the best balanced coverage of concepts and issues related to the topics of this book, current researchers from around the world were asked to submit their chapter describing their unique coverage of adult learning in the digital age and the new teaching practices associated with such innovation. Each chapter submission began with the proposal phase. Following the submission phase, each proposal was submitted for blind reviewed by a team of reviewers who indicated the accepted or rejection of the chapter proposal. Following the proposal review phase, each author was then given
permission to complete their own chapters for the book. After completing their respective chapter, the chapter was then submitted once again for blind peer review once more. After a two round rigorous referred processed of two reviewers, the chapters that were strong and favorable from the reviewers were chosen as entries for this book.

The ideas presented in this book were assembled by the best minds in the online learning field. Further, the chapters authored were selected based on the author’s expertise and leadership roles within the field as well as their unique perspective they tell relating to the subject. As a result of the double blind submission process, Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes highlights current concepts, issues and emerging trends relating to adult learning in the digital age. To this end, Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes offers twenty two chapters that highlights teaching digital immigrants, emerging frontiers of learning online through digital ecosystems and blended learning, empowering adult learning through blogs and social media, understanding the realities of a virtual learning experience, using course management systems to teach constructivist learning design skills to adult learners, community of inquiry in adult online learning, social networking, web 2.0, collaborative learning in adult learning, information literacy, and elearning.

With the mix of educational perspectives outlined in this book, a wide range of perspectives are covered to meet the needs of everyone. This book highlights adult learning and new associated teaching practices as a growing field of study which uses digital technology as a means to solving adult learning challenges. The chapters are not organized by industry; instead, they are divided into three major themes: introduction to adult learning in the digital age, perspectives on online technologies, and finally case studies for adult learning in the digital age.

For all practical purposes Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes discusses various methods and tools for assessment, testing and evaluation of effective adult educational opportunities and challenges the digital age presents. For future development of adult learning and associated teaching practices, this book presents information concerning the history, trends and major issues facing adult teaching and learning. In the end, this book contains a wide range of ideas, examples, guidelines, stories, models, and solution all with the basic premise improving teaching practices for adult learners.

As adult learning in the digital age continues to progress, Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes will continue to serve the purposes of support quality instructional and teaching practices online. As advances in digital technologies reach a diversity of people and adult educational opportunities reach new territories, we can help and support to empower adult learners and related stakeholders throughout the world.

With the diverse and comprehensive coverage of multiple perspectives in adult learning education and its associated teaching practices, this authoritative book, Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes will contribute to a better understanding all topics, research, and discoveries in this evolving, significant field of study. Further, the contributions included in this book will be instrumental in expanding the body of knowledge in this vast field. The coverage of this book will provide strength and support as a reference resource for adult learning. Not only will Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes provide support for better decision makers in obtaining a greater understanding of the concepts, issues, problems, trends, challenges and opportunities associated with adult learning in the digital age, Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes will continue to provide all stakeholders with the curiosity to seek better ways of teaching.
It is my sincere hope that this publication and the strategies presented will assist all adult learning stakeholders in enhancing their understanding of this discipline and to effectively design and implement strong yet high quality online educational opportunities to meet the needs of our global and society. Perhaps this publication will inspire its readers to contribute to the current body of research in this immense field, tapping into possibilities to assist educational institutions in making all educational opportunities open to participants.

Editors

_Terry T. Kidd_
_Texas A&M University, USA_

_Jared Keengwe_
_University of North Dakota, USA_