Chapter 7

Millennial Adult Learners in the 21st Century: Implications for Adult and Community Educators

Thomas G. Reio Jr.
Florida International University, USA

Keisha Hill-Grey
Florida International University, USA

ABSTRACT

Millennials and their learning needs are in general misunderstood. Little research on how millennials prefer to learn, work, and live has contributed to unproductive, contradictory notions about this generation to the detriment of all. More research is clearly needed to better understand the current and future behaviors of millennials. A wide array of advancing technologies and their direct applications to online and face-to-face learning contexts are explored as means to engaging millennials more in adult learning endeavors. Best practices in employing technologies in the classroom, such as promoting interactivity and social presence through blogs and YouTube, are highlighted in online contexts and through course design. How technology impacts those who have not had exposure to technology is explored as well.

INTRODUCTION

Adult education historically has been part of a US educative system apart from K-12 and higher education in the sense that it focused more on educating for social change (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). More recently, however, adult educative activities in communities as well as workplaces (e.g., GED completion) have been more aligned with meeting pressing societal needs for a highly skilled workforce and creating competitive advantage (Reio, Wormley, & Boyle, 2005). Adult educators have used Web 2.0 technologies (e.g., wikis, blogs, podcasts) in particular to address these needs in exciting new ways by facilitating not only adult learners’ curiosity and self-directed

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5780-9.ch007
Millennial Adult Learners in the 21st Century

We present the issues, controversies, and problems related to adult educators working with millennials. Although technology use as a means of communication and learning is increasing among each generation (e.g., in 2009, the fastest growing demographic on Facebook was female 55-65 year-olds; Deal, Altman, & Rosenberg, 2010), we focus on millennials because their values and beliefs are most closely aligned with technology (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Cellphones, the Internet, and social networks grew up with the millennial generation, making technology for them a sort of “sixth sense, a way of knowing and interacting with the world” (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010, p. 213). Thus, because of their earlier exposure to technology, millennials are more comfortable with technology and its use for communicating and learning than previous generations (Deal et al., 2010). Yet, millennials seem to eschew great books and scholarly wisdom in favor of online information and peer opinion often lacking in accuracy and validity workplace (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Moreover, millennials read far fewer books with concomitant reductions in reading and writing performance in classrooms and the workplace (Wisniewski, 2010). Millennials must not only learn how to cull valid information from disparate data sources, but also apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information for creating the new knowledge necessary for solving today and tomorrow’s vexing problems.

It is here where adult and community educators can be most effective by assisting millennials in developing their basic work skills and advanced technological skills. First, we highlight technological advances and their links to adult learning, followed by recommendations for best practices for adult and community programs, implications for training, future trends, and the conclusion.
Related Content

**Defining Professional Development for Technology**
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/defining-professional-development-for-technology/105255?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/defining-professional-development-for-technology/105255?camid=4v1a)

**The Essence of Powerful Teaching**
[www.igi-global.com/article/the-essence-of-powerful-teaching/97732?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/the-essence-of-powerful-teaching/97732?camid=4v1a)

**An Honor to Train: The Professional Identity of Army Trainers**
[www.igi-global.com/article/an-honor-to-train/120304?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/an-honor-to-train/120304?camid=4v1a)

**The Learning Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for ePortfolios**
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/learning-landscape-conceptual-framework-eportfolios/20297?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/learning-landscape-conceptual-framework-eportfolios/20297?camid=4v1a)