ADULT LEARNING IN TODAY'S WORLD

"Anyone who fails to learn . . . is regarded as *oku eniyan* (the living dead),"
says an African proverb that captures not only how embedded but
how necessary learning is in today's world (Avoseh, 2001, p. 483). Indeed,
the daily lives of most people on the planet require constant learning, not
just in a classroom, but as we go about our everyday activities. The way we
communicate with others, deal with personal and family problems, conduct
our work, and build our communities, all require us to learn new informa-
tion, new procedures, and new technologies.

In this opening chapter we take a look at the social context of learning
today, a context characterized by globalization, the knowledge age, tech-
nology, and demographic changes. We then turn to a focus on *adult*
learners, how their life situation differs from that of children, and how
participation in even formal learning activities has continued to grow over
the years. In the last section of this chapter we describe the various settings
where learning occurs, ending with a brief discussion of the global concept
of lifelong learning.

The Social Context of Adult Learning

Learning, Jarvis (1987) writes, rarely occurs "in splendid isolation from
the world in which the learner lives; . . . it is intimately related to that

world and affected by it" (p. 11). From learning to use the newest version of your smartphone, to dealing with a diagnosis of Type II diabetes, to navigating your city's public transportation system, learning is embedded in the world in which we live. In this chapter we first step back and paint a large backdrop of forces shaping the world today against which we can more specifically address who the adult learner is, and what forms of learning an adult might be engaged in. Factors we see as important for understanding the context of adult learning are globalization, the information society, technology, and changing demographics.

Globalization

Of the many factors affecting our lives today, globalization is often mentioned more than anything else. In fact if you Google the term "globalization," you get more than 40 million "hits," a number that increases daily. The widespread use of the term not only speaks to its many meanings and applications, but to its vagueness. For our purposes, we define globalization as the movement of goods, services, people, and ideas across national borders. Of course for centuries people and goods have moved across national boundaries. What is different today is the speed and intensity of this movement. As Friedman (2011), one of the major commentators of this phenomenon writes, we have moved from "connected to hyperconnected."

What first comes to mind when most people hear the term "globalization" is outsourcing of manufacturing to low-income, low-wage countries. Indeed, something of a scandal arose in the summer of 2012 when it was learned that the U.S. Olympic team's uniforms had been outsourced to China! The economic component also makes people think of huge multinational or transnational companies that operate worldwide and are not held accountable by any single nation-state. The "market economy" underpins this accelerated version of globalization. Today, "corporations not only control the means of production—both economic and technological—but they also control the means of spreading knowledge about their products as they seek to convince the public to purchase what they produce" (Jarvis, 2008, p. 20). Thus, not only goods and services, but information and ideas are brokered across the globe, which in turn creates more demand for goods and services. One writer has wryly observed that the market economy and consumerism dimensions of globalization have resulted in the world becoming "one big shopping mall" (Cowen, 2003, p. 17). The downside of global commerce is the exploitation of workers

worldwide, even children (witness, for example, the May 2013 collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh killing more than 1100 workers), along with increasing pollution and environmental exploitation. The rise of "corporate social responsibility" campaigns and a movement toward sustainability in the market are closely linked to globalization. Scherer, Palazzo, and Matten (2010) argue that because nations have declining capacity to regulate socially desirable corporate behavior with commerce crossing national, social, political, cultural, and economic borders, it is becoming more incumbent on organizations to bear this political responsibility.

Education itself has become a commodity of the marketplace. Friedman (2005) gives numerous examples of this in his groundbreaking book on globalization titled, *The World Is Flat*. For example, parents in the United States are hiring math and science tutors for their children—that is, they are hiring tutors who are living in India. Students arriving home from school in the afternoon get on the Internet and are greeted by their Indian tutors who are up early to meet their students in real time (and at a considerably cheaper cost than hiring tutors in the States). Students are now consumers who "shop" worldwide for the educational program that best fits their needs and pocketbooks and which promises the results they seek. There is even a growing area of research and writing on what is being called "academic capitalism." Here institutions of higher education become a commercial enterprise in "the pursuit of market and market-like activities to generate external revenues" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 11). So while students may "shop" for their education, colleges and universities are also shopping for students!

The Knowledge Society

Intricately related to the market economy in a globalized world is the "knowledge economy." Companies will locate where there is a workforce with the knowledge and educational system able to sustain and develop the business. For example, the skill and educational base of potential workers was a major factor in Caterpillar, the world's largest manufacturer of heavy construction and mining equipment, which recently chose to locate a new plant in our university's hometown of Athens, Georgia (Aued, 2012). Not only do companies move to where the qualified workers are, but workers also relocate to where they can utilize their knowledge and training. Spring (2008) talks about moving from a "brain drain" phenomenon to a "brain circulation" trend "where skilled and professional workers

move between wealthy nations or return to their homelands after migrating to another country" (p. 341).

The "knowledge economy," or, as it is more often labeled, the "knowledge society," has replaced the industrial society and has great implications for learning and educational systems across the globe and throughout the lifespan. As Dumont and Istance (2010) point out, "21st century competencies" include "deep understanding, flexibility and the capacity to make creative connections" and "a range of so-called 'soft skills' including good team-working. The quantity and quality of learning thus become central, with the accompanying concern that traditional educational approaches are insufficient" (p. 20). They go on to say that "knowledge is now a central driving force for economic activity, and the prosperity of individuals, companies and nations depends increasingly on human and intellectual capital. Innovation is becoming the dominant driving force in our economy and society (Florida, 2001; OECD, 2004; Brown, Lauder, and Ashton, 2008). Education and learning systems, for which knowledge is their core business, are clearly right at the heart of such a mega-trend" (p. 21).

The knowledge society is much more complex than what is implied by the earlier term, "information" society. While we are inundated with bits and pieces of information (note the millions of Google hits for the term "globalization" above), for information to become useful and meaningful, it needs to be weighed, organized, and structured into meaningful units of knowledge; information and data are the building blocks of knowledge. It is with knowledge that we build new insights, new understandings, and even new products, all of which can contribute to a more enriching context for learning. There are some caveats about this seemingly utopian concept of the knowledge society. Some places in the world are so torn by strife, poverty, and illiteracy that a knowledge society has not evolved, leaving these countries far behind and utterly unable to compete in the developed world. And some groups of citizens, discriminated against because of gender, race or ethnicity, disability, or age, are marginalized in their own societies and prevented from meaningfully participating in the knowledge society. "Women," for example, "make up 70 percent of the 1.3 billion absolutely poor, more than half the population of women over age fifteen worldwide are illiterate, and 75 percent of refugees and internally displaced are women" (Merriam, Courtenay, & Cervero, 2006, p. 92).

Everyone is challenged by the speed of change in this knowledge society. Most feel it is no longer possible to "keep up," for according to some estimates, information doubles every two years and World Wide Web

information doubles every 90 days (www.emc.com/about/news/press/ 2011/20110628–01.htm). Change is at such an accelerated pace that even some of the routine tasks of daily living require new learning. To buy groceries at your local supermarket, for example, you may have to figure out how to automatically scan your items and check out without dealing with a person. Or, you may make your purchases in front of your computer screen, never setting foot in the actual store. Tinkering with your car in your own garage may not be possible without some knowledge of computer diagnostic systems. You can make a banking transaction or check-in at the airport for a flight without ever making human contact. Even our trips to the library can be conducted from the comfort of our homes where we can electronically check out articles and books.

It is also clear that one cannot learn in the first two or three decades all that a person needs to know for the rest of his or her life. Most professional preparation becomes outdated before one gets situated in a career. Hewlett Packard has estimated that what one learns in a Bachelor of Engineering program is outdated or "deconstructs" in 18 months, and for technology-related fields the half-life is even less. Students need to be prepared as self-directed, lifelong learners "for jobs that do not yet exist, to use technologies that have not yet been invented, and to solve problems that we don't even know are problems yet" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2008, p. 2)

Technology

Globalization and the knowledge society are promoted and sustained by communications technology and the Internet. From multinational companies who conduct much of their work through technology-assisted means, to friends in different parts of the world talking in real time over Skype, to social media enabling social change as in the Arab Spring revolution, technology has irrevocably affected how we work, carry out our daily lives, and interact with other people. There is little doubt that the "technology infused lives of today's learners" (Parker, 2013, p. 54) is shaping not only the context of learning, but the learning itself. Even traditional educational systems from elementary through higher education are using technology in designing and delivering curriculum. Teachers in California, for example, are experimenting with the "flipped classroom" where students watch videos for homework, "then go to class to demonstrate their learning" (Webley, 2012, p. 39). Public libraries now loan out e-books. Even prestigious higher education institutions are opening up access to

learning through the Internet. In 2012 Stanford University offered a free online course on artificial intelligence that drew 160,000 students from 190 countries. This experiment has evolved into what are being called MOOCs (massive open online courses). Stanford recently partnered with Princeton, University of Michigan, and University of Pennsylvania to offer 43 courses enrolling 680,000 students (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/ 07/17/education/consortium-of-colleges-takes-online-education-to-new -level.html?_r=1&src=me&ref=general). Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) are engaged in a similar partnership estimating that half a million students would enroll in their free, online courses (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-18191589). Indeed, Friedman speculates that these MOOCs are likely to transform higher education into a credentialing system where participants, rather than getting "degrees" will get "certificates that testify that they have done the work and passed all the exams" (Friedman, 2013, p. SR11).

Technology is also changing how adults learn. Adult basic education programs through continuing professional education are incorporating technology in both the design of curriculum and its delivery. And the field of adult education is becoming particularly attentive to the Net generation, those born between 1981 and 1994. These young adults "bring with them a set of traits that includes familiarity with technology, optimism, ability to multitask, diversity, and acceptance of authority (Bennett & Bell, 2010, p. 417). They are also characterized by "shallowness in reading, lack of critical thinking, and naïveté about intellectual property and information authenticity of Internet resources" (p. 417). And while technology is certainly affecting formal learning, its impact on informal learning, that which we do as part of our everyday lives, is limitless. As King (2010) writes, "Ubiquitous (but not always obvious) informal learning opportunities make it possible for adults to tap the exploding information and learning resources of our times. Informal learning today goes beyond book-based self-study to include a plethora of Web-based, digital, and community resources, along with opportunities for worldwide collaboration with people of similar interests and needs. The world is rich with new learning opportunities—for example, iPods, TV programs, digital radio and virtual simulations—that can fit anyone's schedule and learning style" (p. 421). The availability of massive amounts of information 24 hours a day, seven days a week also challenges us, Bryan (2013) points out, in terms of dealing with information overload and learning how to critically evaluate all this information. The informality of twitter, texting, email, emoticons and so on is also bringing about changes in our language. How do tech-

savvy young people know "what language formats are best suited for the workplace, or to use for technical language in the sciences and math fields, or for scholarly writings, or marketing, and the list goes on and on" (Bryan, 2013, p. 10).

As pointed out earlier, technology cannot be separated from globalization and the knowledge society. However, it is important to note that "although some may say the digital divide has been bridged, visiting impoverished inner-city, small rural, and violence-torn areas around the globe reveals scores of people who do not have access to electricity, technology, and the outside world" (King, 2010, p. 426). Further, it has been estimated that only 12% of the people in the world have computers, and of that, only 8% are connected to the Internet (http://www.miniature -earth.com). There is still much to do to address the basic needs of marginalized people and nations before all can benefit from participation in this digitalized, globalized, knowledge society.

Changing Demographics

Globalization and all that it entails has enabled people everywhere to see the diversity of the world's seven billion people. It is much more difficult for certain societies to be inward-looking and ethnocentric, that is, seeing themselves as the center of, and superior to the rest of the world when we see the diversity of the world on our televisions and computer screens and indeed, even as we are out in our local community. It is enlightening to look at the statistics through an analogy of presenting the world as a community of 100 people, keeping all of the proportions the same as in our world of seven billion. For example, if the world consisted of 100 people, 61 would be Asian, 14 North and South Americans, 13 Africans, and so on. Table 1.1 presents some of these statistics.

Of particular interest to our field of adult education, is the fact that 16.3% of those over 15 years of age would be illiterate, and only seven would have a secondary education, and one a college education. And in reference to our discussion of technology above, 12 out of the 100 would have a home computer (http://www.miniature-earth.com; http://stats.uis.unesco.org; https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world -factbook/). A UNESCO (2008) report concluded: "Equalizing opportunities in education is one of the most important conditions for overcoming social injustice and reducing social disparities in any country . . . and is also a condition for strengthening economic growth" (p. 24). Further, global illiteracy continues to plague the world, especially among women

who make up two-thirds of the 774 million adults lacking basic literacy skills (UNESCO, 2009). So, back to the analogy of 100, almost 11 of the 16 illiterate would be women.

There are other demographic shifts that are of particular interest to adult educators. Many countries, for example, are experiencing a dramatic growth in their aging population. Due to a decline in fertility and an increase in longevity, it is estimated that "in less than 10 years, older people will outnumber children for the first time in history" (Withnall, 2012, p. 650). In 2010 older adults comprised 11% of the world's population and are expected to grow to 22% in the year 2050 (World Economic Forum, 2012). As can be seen in Table 1.2, this growth is uneven but all

TABLE 1.1 IF THE WORLD CONSISTED OF 100 PEOPLE

61 Asians	21 live on less than $2 (U.S.) a day
14 Americans (North and South)	14 are hungry or malnourished
13 Africans	16.3 are illiterate (15 years of age and above)
12 Europeans	
1 Australian (Oceania)	Only 7 are educated at the secondary level
70 Non-White	Only 1 would have a college education
30 White	If you keep your clothes in a closet and food
67 Non-Christian	in a refrigerator, you are richer than 75%
33 Christian	of the entire world population
8 are 65 years and above	
12 are disabled	
30 are Internet users	
12 have a home computer	

Source: http://www.minature-earth.com; http://stats.uis.unesco.org; www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/

TABLE 1.2 PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION AGED 60 AND OLDER

	2010	2030	2050
World	11	17	22
More Developed Regions	22	29	32
Less Developed Regions	9	14	20
Africa	5	7	10
Asia	10	17	24
Europe	22	29	34
Latin America & Caribbean	10	17	25
North America	19	26	27
Oceania	15	20	24

Source: World Economic Forum, 2012.

regions are experiencing growth. And while the *percentage* of the population over 60 is greater in developed countries, the actual number of older adults is greater in developing countries such as China, India and Brazil (WHO, 1999). There were 171 million older adults in China in 2010, for example. Even more dramatic are the top 10 countries experiencing the greatest growth in their elder populations. As can be seen in Table 1.3, Japan currently leads the world with 22% of its population 60+, rising to a projected 45% by the year 2050.

This worldwide demographic trend presents both opportunities and challenges to nations and communities, and education is coming to play an important role is meeting these challenges. International bodies such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the European Commission, nation states, and even local communities are developing educational policies and programs in response to global aging. The European Commission has identified five challenges with regard to older adult learning and stated that "there is a need for better insight into the benefits of adult learning and the barriers to its uptake, and for better data on providers, trainers, and training delivery" (European Commission, 2006, p. 10). And in line with this 21st century context of globalization, information, and technology, computer-based, online delivery systems have been successful in improving access (see Swindell, 2000). Further, computer literacy and social media are also topics of interest to older adult learners (Kim & Merriam, 2010).

Another worldwide demographic trend is the movement of people across borders, usually related to employment opportunities, but also in

TABLE 1.3 THE TOP 10 COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGES OF 60+ POPULATIONS IN 2011 AND 2050

2011		2050	
Japan	31	Japan	42
Italy	27	Portugal	40
Germany	26	Bosnia & Herzegovina	40
Finland	25	Cuba	39
Sweden	25	Republic of Korea	39
Bulgaria	25	Italy	38
Greece	25	Spain	38
Portugal	24	Singapore	38
Belgium	24	Germany	38
Croatia	24	Switzerland	37

Source: World Economic Forum, 2012.

search of a better life, and in some cases escaping war and violence. With regard to work, we have already mentioned the "brain circuit" phenomenon created by the knowledge society wherein people with specialized training are in demand, irrespective of national borders. Due to low birthrates in many developed countries, workforce shortages are being addressed by importing immigrants to fill low-skilled jobs. Singapore, for example, has had to bring in immigrants from China and Southeast Asia to fill service and construction-industry jobs. China itself is struggling with a huge flux of internal migrants moving from rural to urban areas.

The U.S. experience with the growing diversity of today's immigrant population mirrors what is taking place worldwide. As Alfred (2004) explains, the immigration pattern reflects an hourglass: "There are those immigrants who are quickly achieving upward mobility, primarily through education and high-tech jobs, while on the opposite end of the hourglass, large numbers of low-skilled workers find themselves locked in low-wage service jobs." As a result, "planners of adult and higher education programs face a challenging task as they attempt to meet the variety of needs and expectations that immigrants bring to the new country" (p. 14).

As with the global aging phenomenon, the growing cultural and ethnic diversity of most countries presents both challenges and opportunities. For example, according to the latest U.S. Census (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011), between 2000 and 2010 the Hispanic population accounted for 43% of the total population growth, Asians about 43.3%, and African Americans 12.3% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012). Another measure of growing diversity in the United States is something called the USA TODAY Diversity Index (Nasser, 2013). This index measures on a scale of 0 (low diversity) to 100 (high diversity) the probability that two people chosen randomly are of different races or ethnicities. In the 1990 census the probability was 40; in 2000 it was 49; in 2010 the Diversity Index rose to 55. Such demographic changes as these create tension between how much a group's culture and language is to be preserved versus adopting the norms of the dominant culture. And of course such diversity presents challenges for adult education in terms of aligning learning needs and learning styles of different ethnic and cultural groups with the design of curriculum and instruction.

In summary, in drawing the context of adult learning, we have only touched on several major trends, any one of which has dozens of book-length treatments and will elicit millions of hits on Google. Globalization, the information society, technology and changing demographics are so interrelated it is difficult to consider one without reference to the others.

The learning that adults are engaged in both reflects and responds to these forces.

The Adult Learner and Learning in Adulthood

Adult learning is at the heart of our practice as adult educators. Whether we are offering training on new equipment at the workplace, designing continuing professional education for accountants or nurses, enrolling adults in a college course, or teaching adults English, our practice is enhanced by knowing as much as we can about who our learners are as well as how they learn. While of course our entire book is about learning in adulthood, it is important to first review what we know about adult learners themselves, including participation data, and the types of learning activities in which adults are likely to be engaged.

The Adult Learner

A discussion of the adult learner often begins with defining what it means to be an "adult." Of course this may seem obvious to most of us, but for funding and policy guidelines it may not be so clear. If, for example, we use age, say 18, which is a legal definition of adult in the United States, then what about high school dropouts who enter adult education programs to complete their secondary education? Typically, age 16 is the minimum for engaging in adult secondary education programs. If we define an adult as one who has assumed the social roles and responsibilities expected of an adult, what about adults who are institutionalized, incarcerated, or in the fulltime care of family? Perhaps the only way out of this maze is to broadly define adult as Merriam and Brockett (2007) have as part of their definition of adult education—"activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among *those whose age, social roles, or self-perception, define them as adults*" (p. 8, italics added).

More important than defining what constitutes an adult is understanding how an adult's life situation typically differs from that of a child and what implications this has for learning. An adult is in a different position in the life span than a child. A child is dependent on others for care, learning is a child's major activity in life, and much of this learning is in preparation for assuming the tasks and responsibilities of adulthood. Going to school is a child's full-time job! Adults, in contrast, have many other roles and responsibilities. They may be going to school, even full-time,

but they *add* the role of student onto their other often full-time roles as caretaker, worker, and citizen. Another dimension that differentiates adult learners from children is an adult's life experiences. Observers going back to the beginning of the field of adult education have noted this as a key characteristic of adult learners. Lindeman (1926/1961) is often quoted as saying "the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner's experience" (p. 6). Experience becomes "the adult learner's living textbook" (p. 7). Kidd (1973) was even more explicit in writing that "adults have more experiences, adults have different kinds of experiences, and adult experiences are organized differently." It is these experiences that set adults "off from the world of children" (p. 46). And of course one of the major tenets of Knowles's andragogy (1980) (see Chapter 3) is that adults' life experiences not only define who they are as adults, but these life experiences are also a rich resource for learning.

A third way in which adults differ from children that has implications for learning is that adults are developmentally at different stages in the life cycle. Children of course are also developing, but much of this development is biological, both physical (as in learning to walk) or cognitive (learning to communicate). Adult development has more to do with social roles (learning to be a parent or a worker) and psychosocial tasks such as establishing intimacy in young adulthood, or generativity in middle age (Erikson, 1963). Theories of cognitive (Kegan, 1994; Perry, 1981), moral (Kohlberg, 1973), and faith (Fowler, 1981) development all posit qualitatively different stages of development for children and adults. Interestingly, the social context of our world today may be fostering a new stage of adult development, that of "emerging adulthood." According to its main proponent, Arnett (2000; also see Arnett & Tanner, 2006), emerging adulthood is neither adolescence nor young adulthood, but that period between 18 and 25 years of age when young people in America are allowed a "prolonged period of independent role exploration" (2000, p. 469).

Because an adult is in a different position in the lifecycle than a child, and because adults' life experiences are greater and more varied than those of children, adults' learning needs and interests vary from children. This difference is reflected in the research on what motivates adults to participate in learning activities (see Chapter 8). Briefly, adults participate in learning for a number of reasons, all of which link back to their position in the life cycle as adults. Adults are motivated by wanting to improve their situation in adult life, whether that situation is work-related, personal (such as improving their health, dealing with family issues), or social/community-related. Some adults like to learn for the joy of learning of

course, but even what they choose to learn "for fun" most likely has something to do with their life stage and previous experiences.

Participation in Adult Learning Activities

Participation in adult education has grown some, yet remains "unacceptably low" in most countries according to a 2009 UNESCO *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education.* The percentage of adults 25 and older who have not finished primary schooling or its equivalent speaks to the large unmet demand for adult basic education. According to the report, "at least 18% of the world's adults have not completed primary schooling or ever been to school. This rate reaches 30% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 48% in the Arab States, 50% in sub-Saharan Africa and 53% in South and West Asia. Given that for many of the poorest countries in the world, no data are available at all, it is certain that were these countries to be included in the estimates given . . . average rates of adults not completing primary schooling would be even higher" (p. 62).

In Europe and North America where participation data are tracked, the percent of adults who participate in various adult education activities has increased over the years. For example, Finland saw a doubling of participation between 1980 and 2000. U.S. data have shown a slight increase from 40% in 1995, to 46% in 2001. U.S. participation decreased slightly in 2005 to 44% (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2007). Participation in Europe varied widely by country in its inaugural European-wide adult education survey from 2005 to 2006, covering 29 countries. Results showed a variance in participation from the European average of 35.7%, with Sweden having the highest participation rate at 73.4% and Hungary having the lowest at 9.0%. The UNESCO report identified four different levels of participation as depicted in Table 1.4.

Research in the U.S. has also given us a sociodemographic profile of the adult learner, so that we do have a picture of the typical adult learner, especially those who participate in formal educational programs. Participation in formal adult education can take many forms: English as a second language (ESL), adult basic education (ABE), general education development (GED), credentialing and apprenticeship programs, work-related courses, continuing professional education (CPE), continuing education, higher education, and personal development courses. This list does not include the range of informal and nonformal learning adults engage in such as self-directed learning projects. The first national study of participation in adult education was conducted by Johnstone and Rivera (1965).

TABLE 1.4 COUNTRY GROUPINGS BY PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZED FORMS OF ADULT EDUCATION IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR, POPULATION AGED 16–65

Group	Participation Rate	Description
Group 1:	>50%	Nordic countries, including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.
Group 2:	35–50%	Countries of Anglo-Saxon origin: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. A few of the smaller Central and Northern European countries, including Austria, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as the Caribbean archipelago of Bermuda, are also among this group.
Group 3:	20–35%	Northern European countries including Belgium (Flanders) and Germany as well as Ireland. Also among this Group are some Eastern European countries, namely Czech Republic and Slovenia, and some Southern European countries including France, Italy and Spain.
Group 4:	<20%	Southern European countries, namely Greece and Portugal, as well as some additional Eastern European countries, Hungary and Poland, and the only South American country with comparable data, Chile.

Source: Adapted from UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2009). Global Report on Adult Learning and Education. http://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/AdultEducation/en/GRALE_en.pdf

This historic study provided a baseline to measure adult participation in the United States for decades since. During the 1961–1962 study period, it was estimated that 22% of American adults engaged in learning and that their learning was practical and skill-oriented in its focus. Johnstone and Rivera offered a profile of the adult learner: "The adult education participant is just as often a woman as a man, is typically under forty, has completed high school or more, enjoys an above-average income, works full-time and most often in a white-collar occupation, is married and has children, lives in an urbanized area but more likely in a suburb than large city, and is found in all parts of the country, but more frequently in the West than in other regions" (p. 8).

While the rate of participation has grown from Johnstone and Rivera's 1965 estimate of 22% to 44% in 2005 (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2007), the descriptive profile of the typical participant has remained fairly constant. As with all previous participation studies, educational level

predicts participation (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2007). Non-high school completers participated 22.1% of the time as compared to 62.5% of those possessing a bachelor's degree. Employment status and occupation of adults also impacted participation. Adults working for pay during the survey period were more likely to participate than those not working (51.7% versus 25.5%). Adults working in professional or managerial roles were most likely to participate (70.2%) as compared to occupations such as service, sales, or support occupations (48.3%) and trade occupations (34%). Work-related courses were the most common (27%), followed by personal interest courses (21%) (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2007). Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) revisited adult participation data to develop a 21st century understanding of participation and access:

> The sheer numbers [of adult participation in formal learning] are startling: mega transnational universities such as the University of Phoenix with adult student enrollments well beyond 350,000; online students in distance programs totaling nearly 1.5 million as of 2006 and tripling from 483,113 in 2002 (Romano, 2006); more than 360 colleges and universities offering accelerated programs created especially for working adults (Commission for Accelerated Programs, 2008); and an estimated 90 million adults participating in formal and informal education including basic education, English-language learning, workplace learning, and personal development classes (Paulson & Boeke, 2006). (p. 25)

Further, though the field is awaiting an up-to-date participation study to confirm the above trends, it is highly likely that now "more than 50% of all adults in the U.S. between the ages of 25 and 55 [are] involved in some form of adult education" (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2010, p. 25).

Settings Where Learning Occurs

This book is devoted to what we know about *how* adults learn and in subsequent chapters we explore different theories, models, concepts and insights into the phenomenon of learning. All learning takes place in a social context and it is this context that we have been exploring in this opening chapter. We have already looked at the larger socioeconomic context and the adult learner's life context which differs from that of children. Now we turn to the settings where learning occurs, and conclude

with brief descriptions of the concepts of lifelong learning and the learning society.

Learning settings are most often divided into formal, nonformal and informal settings (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973). While this is not a perfect typology and there are instances of overlap and intersection, it is a framework that resonates with most adult learners' and adult educators' experiences. Briefly, formal learning settings are those sponsored by educational institutions, whereas nonformal settings are organized learning opportunities sponsored by institutions, agencies, and community-based groups whose primary mission is other than educational. Informal learning activities are embedded in one's everyday life.

If asked about their learning, most adults will refer to a formal classroom situation. Indeed, we have been so conditioned to thinking of learning as something that takes place in an educational institution that our learning at work or in our everyday life does not seem to count as part of our learning. Formal learning sites are equated with educational bureaucracies going from preschool to post-graduate studies. In adult education we would include adult basic education programs, adult high schools, English as a Second Language programs, or professional training programs. We also think of the growing numbers of adults in post-secondary educational institutions. In fact, it has been estimated that adults aged twenty-five years and older account for 36% of students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities (Sandmann, 2010). In a provocative article on "post-traditional learners" Soares (2013) makes the point that "today traditional students represent only about 15 percent of current undergraduates. They attend four-year colleges and live on campus. The remaining 85 percent, or about 15 million undergraduates, are a diverse group that includes adult learners, employees who study, low-income students, commuters, and student parents. Unpacking this 85 percent a little further, . . . 43 percent of all undergraduates attend community colleges. And, adult learners make up as much as 60 percent of all community college students" (p. 6).

In contrast to formal learning organized by educational institutions, nonformal learning is sponsored by organizations, agencies, and institutions whose primary mission is not education, though education might be a secondary mission employed to carry out the main reason for existence. Think for a moment about a training session you attended at work, or a study group at your local library, or even a two-hour clinic on "How to lay floor tile" sponsored by the nearby home improvement store. These are all examples of nonformal education. Educational opportunities spon-

sored by business and industry, indeed, all workplace training and educational programs are in the service of the business, and education is a secondary concern. So too, is the case for religious (churches, mosques, synagogues), cultural (museums, art galleries), health (hospitals, Red Cross), and recreational (parks, sports associations) organizations' sponsorship of educational programs.

Nonformal learning is further distinguished from formal learning by the activities typically being short-term, voluntary, often occurring in public places. There is usually a curriculum and often a facilitator, but both of these components are quite flexible. While it is much harder to gather enrollment figures for nonformal sites of learning, it is widely assumed that most adults are engaged in learning in these venues—it is just that most adults do not recognize these as learning events. Taylor (2012), who has studied nonformal learning, especially that which takes place in public places like museums, parks, and consumer education sites, comments that it is "mind-boggling to begin to try to make sense of the level of participation" (p. 6), when you consider, for example, just cultural institutions alone where:

> Millions of adults can be found gathering every day in libraries, parks, zoos, aquariums, and museums across North America. For example, each year more than 287 million people visit the 391 units of parks, monuments, national recreation areas, battlefields, wild and scenic rivers, and seashores of the national parks in the United States (National Park Service, 2007). During these visits, many adults often meet a park interpreter and participate in local nonformal education programs, such as a trail tour of park vegetation and wildlife, a discussion on land management practices, or a hands-on exploration of the geology in the park. (p. 5)

If it is hard to estimate participation in nonformal adult learning, it is impossible to do so when speaking of informal learning, the third form of learning proposed by Coombs (1985). By its very definition as "the spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighborhood, behind the school and on the playing field, in the workplace, marketplace, library and museum, and through the various mass media" (p. 92), informal learning is by far the most prevalent of the three forms of learning in the Coombs typology. Illeris (2004a) calls it "everyday learning" because it "takes place in all the private and non-organised contexts of everyday life" (p. 151). Because it is so embedded in our lives, to recognize "everyday learning" as learning we do have to stop and think

about it as learning. For example, most of us have encountered a health problem that has sent us to the Internet, the library, and health professionals to learn all we can about this problem, its cause, treatment, and perhaps lifestyle changes required to cope with it. Relocating to a new area requires us to learn about housing, transportation, and community resources. Think about your workplace. Interacting with coworkers at lunch, in the break room, informally at your desk, perhaps on the company's intranet, often involves learning. And presumably most Internet searches are by people wanting to learn something. The magnitude of this type of informal learning is astounding, given for example, that in 2010 there were 88 billion searches a month on Google (www.searchengineland .com). Informal learning is endless, boundary-less, and ubiquitous in our lives. And as King (2010) points out, in this fast-paced world where "knowledge is increasing at lightning speed, . . . formal learning is inadequate to meet these lifelong learning needs: people do not have time to enroll in formal classes at every new life stage and for every decision they must make" (p. 421). She goes on to note that the "virtual and digital ages" of today "have opened new possibilities as adults can engage in learning outside the constraints of time and place" (p. 422).

Indeed, research on informal learning points to how widespread and embedded it is in our lives. A study of Canadian adult learners, for example, found that 90% were engaged in informal learning activities (Livingstone, 2002). And although billions are spent each year on formal training in the workplace, it has been estimated that upwards of 70% of learning in the workplace takes place informally (Kim, Hagedorn, Williamson, & Chapman, 2004; Kleiner, Carver, Hagedorn, & Chapman, 2005). Just what constitutes informal learning in the workplace and how to access it has been the topic of lively discussion in the literature. Billett (2002) recommends rejecting the notion of "informal learning" as it actually constrains our understanding of how learning occurs through work, a process he conceptualizes as "inter-dependent between the individual and the social practice" (abstract). Sawchuk (2008), in a comprehensive review of theories and research on informal learning and work, comes to a different conclusion, suggesting that we think of formal and informal learning as a continuum, rather than as dichotomous categories.

Informal learning often includes several other types of learning. Self-directed learning, an area of research and theory-building in adult education (see Chapter 4) is considered to be largely informal, although one can certainly choose to take a class as part of a self-directed learning project. And if one regards self-directed learning projects as a form of

informal learning, there is substantial research suggesting that "upwards of 90 percent of adults are engaged in hundreds of hours of informal learning" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 35). Other conceptions of informal learning include incidental learning which has been defined as an accidental by-product of doing something else. "Incidental learning happens outside the learner's conscious awareness, while informal learning involves a conscious effort on the learner's part such as learning how to play the guitar or taking a self-guided tour of a museum" (Taylor, 2012, p. 14). In incidental learning, one becomes aware that "some learning has taken place" after engaging in some experience (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 4). For example, say you are on your way to a meeting and you need to quickly make a copy of a handout. The copy machine jams and you rush to get someone to help you. This person fixes the problem but in so doing, tells you what was wrong and what to do if it happens again. You learned something as a by-product of doing something else. This is incidental learning. Finally, tacit learning—that which occurs at a subconscious level, but which we regularly draw upon in negotiating our daily lives—is perhaps the most subtle form of informal learning. We know, for example, not to bring up particular topics in the presence of certain coworkers or family members; this is tacit knowledge.

Informal learning is indeed most difficult to capture and understand. Some interesting theorizing in this area is being done by Bennett (2012) who has proposed a four-part model of informal learning. Three parts we are familiar with—self-directed, incidental, and tacit learning. She adds a fourth component, integrative learning which she defines as "*a learning process that combines intentional nonconscious processing of tacit knowledge with conscious access to learning products and mental images*" (p. 28; italics in original). She explains how integrative learning might occur:

> Integrative learning may be responsible for creative insight, intuitive leaps, and moments of sudden understanding. Because implicit processing deals with memory fragments, images, and sensory data, it would not occur in a linear and rational fashion . . . For example, adults who are working on a problem—that is they have identified an important learning gap they intend to fill, but have gone as far as they can with conscious thought—may find the solution when they turn their attention *away* from the problem so that integrative learning takes over. This might happen during sleep or exercise and activities that distract the conscious mind so that implicit processing can occur. (p. 28)

Before we conclude this section on learning contexts, we thought it would be useful to briefly mention the notion of the "learning society" which is part of the global concept of "lifelong learning." The learning society (or in some places, learning regions, communities, cities, towns or villages) is a place-bound application of the concept of lifelong learning designed to promote economic, social and cultural development, often with the goal of competing globally (Walters, 2005). China, with its growing social class stratification for example, has instituted a countrywide learning society program designed to maintain and foster a "harmonious" society (Chang, 2010). Of course all types of learning—formal, nonformal, and informal—are fostered by and take place in learning cities.

Learning societies is one manifestation of the concept of lifelong learning. By the early 1990s, lifelong learning had supplanted the earlier concept of lifelong education. As Hasan (2012) explains, "the word 'education' was replaced by 'learning', to signal an emphasis on the learner, the learning processes and outcomes, as opposed to a focus on imparting education" (p. 472). UNESCO and OECD took the lead in conceptualizing the concept and "coverage was extended to all purposeful learning activity" across the lifespan, and "learning activities in all settings (OECD, 2009), from formal education to informal and non-formal learning" (pp. 472–473). Indeed, the notion that lifelong learning should not only be lifelong, from cradle to grave, but "'lifewide'—recognizing the interplay of informal, non-formal and formal learning in different life domains—and 'life deep'—incorporating the religious, moral, ethical and social dimensions that shape human expression—have led to richer and more pluralistic interpretations of the scope and possibilities of learning throughout the lifecourse" (Aspin, Evan, Chapman, & Bagnall, 2012, p. liii).

A number of international organizations and countries have adopted the concept of lifelong learning as an overarching concept to guide policy, research, and learning programs. While the United States has no official policy on lifelong learning, the concept is framing some of our thinking and writing particularly in the field of adult education. In the United States at least, lifelong learning is used usually in reference to adults and the need to continue learning past formal schooling. Often this application results in an emphasis on learning to meet labor market expectations or as a rationale for mandatory continuing education. As Crowther (2012) writes, "There are few educators who would disagree with the principle that lifelong learning is a good thing, but the important questions are about the types of learning that the concept promotes, the life that it

encourages us to lead, who benefits from this and the nature of the society that it upholds" (p. 801).

Chapter Summary

With this discussion of lifelong learning and the learning settings of formal, nonformal, and informal, we bring this chapter on the context of adult learning to a close. We know from research studies and our own personal experiences that adults are extensively engaged in learning whether or not this learning is formally recognized. Finally, this learning is firmly embedded in the greater social context characterized by globalization, the knowledge society, technology, and changing demographics.

Linking Theory and Practice: Activities and Resources

1. Describe a learning activity you have been recently engaged in. To what extent did the activity relate to the global context? Did your learning involve technology? For example, if you attended a session on "planting a resource-friendly garden" sponsored by the local botanical garden, did climate change or water preservation come up as topics? Did you become familiar with the botanical garden's website? Use the Internet to find out more about certain plants and shrubs?

2. With regard to changing demographics, informally survey your immediate community for learning opportunities designed for immigrants, English language learners, or older adult learners. Have these opportunities increased over the last five years? What about participation?

3. Consider the institution of higher education where you are perhaps taking a course in which you are using this textbook on adult learning. What proportion of students is over the age of 25 across the institution? In this program? In this course? What are the other demographic characteristics that describe these adult students?

4. Take any topic of interest to you. Describe the nature of the setting, the curriculum, and the instruction if this topic were explored in a formal setting, a nonformal setting, or an informal setting.

5. Keep a log of your activities over the period of a week. Which ones involved informal learning?

6. Springer has just published a two-volume handbook on lifelong learning. The 55 chapters are divided into four sections on (1) History,

Theory, and Philosophy; (2) The Policy Challenge; (3) Programmes and Practices; and (4) A Critical Stocktaking. Aspin, D. N., Chapman, J. Evans, K. & Bagnall, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Second International Handbook of Lifelong Learning, Parts 1 & 2*, New York: Springer.

7. Reports and Web Links:
    a. UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) "promotes life-long learning policy and practice with a focus on adult learning and education, especially literacy and nonformal education and alterna-tive learning opportunities for marginalized and disadvantaged groups" (http://uil.unesco.org). Both the UIL and OECD (Organi-sation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (www.oecd .org) have numerous documents on adult education and lifelong learning.
    b. For interesting information and videos on globalization see the websites on the "miniature earth" (http://www.miniature-earth.com) or one of the many "Did you know?" sites (Google "Did you know videos" for multiple websites). Also, there are numerous short YouTube videos on globalization such as one that uses Friedman's work (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg5EerKh0L4).
    c. See the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) National Household Education Surveys Program of 2005—the most recent report detailing adult education participation in the U.S. http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006077.pdf

Chapter Highlights

- Globalization is the movement of goods, services, people, and culture across national boundaries. The intensity and speed of this movement characterizes globalization today.
- The knowledge society wherein knowledge and education are com-modities of value has eclipsed the industrial society where labor and machines were of greatest value. Both globalization and the knowl-edge society are powered by communication technologies and the Internet.
- Changing demographics, particularly with reference to cultural and ethnic diversity and an aging population characterize most societies today.

- Due to their position in the social context and in the life cycle, the adult learner has qualitatively different learning needs and interests from children.
- Learning takes place in formal and nonformal settings, and informally as part of an adult's everyday life.
- Lifelong learning is an overarching concept often applied to adults to capture the all-encompassing nature of learning in adulthood.