

10 Current and Emerging Trends in Adult Learning

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What Do Harvey and Irma have to do with learning?

When (what we thought were) once in five hundred year storms hit every other week, it suggests there is something new going on--and another sign that we live in a world where the unexpected is the norm.

As more of us move into cities, connect and trade with people around the world, and take advantage of automation, the result is the clash of natural and man-made systems in ways that we don't understand.

[Urbanization, automation and globalization](#) are resulting in unprecedented waves of novelty and complexity. The only thing we can be sure of is that change will occur more rapidly and more unexpectedly in the future. And that means we all need to learn fast and keep learning.

While that thought is daunting, there's never a better time to learn--or teach. Five years ago in *Getting Smart*, I argued that the EdTech revolution would power customization, motivation and equalization--that new tools would boost personalization, engagement and expand access. We're starting to see that play out--first in corporate training and development, then alternative HigherEd (think motivated adults with specific learning needs) and now in K-12 personalized learning models.

In many cases, it's the power of relationships that is critically important. New learning models may leverage new tools, but they often facilitate sustained relationships--and that's better than the best gamified learning system.

What does all of this mean for adult learning? What about young adults who didn't finish high school? What about the more than 30 million Americans that earned some college credits but not a complete degree. What about adults new to speaking English who need job skills--fast. We see 10 trends in this adult learning.

1-3. Online, mobile and blended are foregone conclusions. As the [NMC Horizon Report](#) said, "If institutions do not already have robust strategies for integrating these now pervasive approaches, then they simply will not survive."

4. Broader aims. Like leading K-12 schools, adult learning programs are adopting growth mindset (effort matters) and social and emotional learning (self and social awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making).

5. UI/UX. Adult learning programs are beginning to rethink user interface (UI) and the full user experience (UX). They are becoming more mobile responsive and beginning to think about how to incorporate augmented and virtual reality. [WalMart uses VR](#) to train employees for new roles.

6. Better Feedback. Adaptive learning systems and platforms are providing real-time feedback, and digital curriculum usually includes embedded assessments. Leading degree completion programs, like [College for America](#), are incorporating project-based learning with authentic performance tasks.

7. Learner supports. Access to support services is key to success. For learners who have struggled, these services often go unused unless activated through an advisory relationship.

In high schools, academic monitoring and connections to support services are often managed in an advisory period ([see 5 core and 10 optional functions](#))

In HigherEd, it's important to have well-trained advisors who engage in active dialogue with adult learners about their aspirations and limitations in order to aid them in assessing various pathways to their chosen field. Platforms like [Fidelis Education](#) support learning relationship management including monitoring, coaching and tutoring.

Based on the successful tutoring program of the [Match Charter Public School](#) in Boston, [Match Beyond](#) combines the benefits of online learning with coaching and tutoring. Match features AA and BA degrees in business, healthcare and public service.

8. Employer partnerships. College for America, a program of Southern New Hampshire University, is a good example of a HigherEd completion program positioned as an employee

benefit. A sequence of applied projects can be completed quickly by experienced learners and more slowly by workers that need more time and support. A partnership between [HYPER LINK TEXT HERE](#) ASU Online and Starbucks provides full tuition reimbursement for staff members.

9. Mix & Match + Support. Want the fastest and cheapest path to a degree? [Guild Education](#) creates "education as an employee benefit" partnerships. Academic coaches work with adults to assemble fast and cheap degree pathways.

10. Collaboration is key for scaling effective solutions. Personalized learning is promising, particularly for older learners who have struggled academically. However developing a sophisticated learning model supported by an integrated set of tools remains very difficult. Working in networks--from informal learning communities to comprehensive models-- is a promising response to complexity.

The NMC Horizon Report said, "Communities of practice, multidisciplinary leadership groups and open social networks can help spread evidence-based approaches."

Source: [Vander Ark on Innovation](#), September 20, 2017