Call for Papers: Adult and Continuing Education’s Response to the Global Covid-19 Pandemic

M Cecil Smith
West Virginia University

Jeremy Bohonos
Buffalo State College

Editors

The Covid-19 global pandemic has quickly become a catastrophe that threatens millions of lives and the livelihoods and well-being of people throughout the world. Few persons alive today can recall the last great global pandemic and its aftermath during the years from 1918 through 1920. While epidemiologists, medical scientists, and public health specialists warned that a pandemic was inevitable (Shah, 2016), few countries were prepared for the rapid onslaught of the corona virus that caused the Covid-19 outbreak. No vaccine currently exists to ward off infection and it is likely that an effective vaccine will not be available for as many as 18 months. When the outbreak first occurred in Wuhan, China—likely late in 2019 and certainly in the early
weeks of 2020—it was largely kept under wraps by the authoritarian Chinese government. But, even after the serious nature of the Wuhan outbreak became apparent, few national leaders took necessary steps to minimize the inevitable occurrence of infections within their own countries. While nations such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore implemented widescale testing to identify, isolate, and treat those infected by the virus, other countries—including the United States—lagged woefully behind in their testing capacities due to the lack of test kits. Italy’s health care system, at the time of this writing, is on the verge of collapse due to an overwhelming surge of Covid-19 cases, and a lack of hospital beds and respirators and personal protection equipment for physicians, nurses, and other front-line health care providers. The number of confirmed cases in New York state has now exceeded that of China (New York Times, 2020).

Despite the late response that has, unfortunately, resulted in many needless deaths, a growing number of countries are putting into place measures that are designed to “flatten the curve” of the infection trend. These measures include quarantines, shelter-in-place directives for entire cities, the closing of schools, universities, restaurants, entertainment centers and public events, and the implementation of “social distancing” behaviors that encourage people to limit the number of persons with whom they interact and maintaining a 6-foot space of physical distance. The best available evidence illustrates that these measures will result, over the long term, in fewer and fewer infections (Maragakis, 2020). It is hoped that, if the number of infections can be reduced to a manageable level, this strategy will buy time to develop a vaccine. The corona virus itself is likely to mutate and may become less virulent over time, but this is a great uncertainty.

Social distancing practices aimed at decreasing the spread of Covid-19 have led to the temporary cessation of traditional “brick and mortar” educational delivery around the world and
to temporary work-from-home measures being implemented in a variety of career fields. This has forced many adult educators and human resource development practitioners to make rapid changes in the ways they conduct their work. From corporate trainers and university faculty who are moving educational content online for the first time, to instructional designers who are being called upon to provide unprecedented levels of support to clients moving to online delivery, to HRD staff in medical contexts helping their organizations cope with the impact of Covid-19 on their staffs, to community-based educators who can no longer safely engage with their communities, professionals in our field are facing unprecedented levels of uncertainty, stress, and anxiety. The stresses on adult learners, trainees, and students are likely even greater, as many adults may lack access to computers or smartphones at home, do not have quiet places for study, thought, and writing, and may be caring for their children who are now at home throughout the day rather than in school.

As one kind of response, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) has issued guidance for adult basic education programs as they necessarily adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic. The memorandum to States’ directors of adult education confirms that the U.S. Department of Education will not make any determination regarding the success or failure of programs during the current FY19 period. As programs have closed physical facilities and moved classes online, States can demonstrate that their program participants have achieved the required minimum 12 hours of instruction through telephone, video, teleconference, or online communication (Bergson-Shilcock, 2020). It is telling, however, that this adjustment to bureaucratic policy does not acknowledge the reality of many adults’ lack of access to such communication tools. Such gaps further complicate how adult education professionals are responding to their learners’ needs.
As our scholarly and professional communities are developing and testing ways to respond to the present challenges, we have a great need to share emerging effective practices. For this reason, *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* is announcing a Call for Papers in an upcoming themed issue. Among the concepts that we would like to see explored in this issue are the following:

- **What are the potential strengths of and challenges for adult and continuing education during times of national crises?**
- **In what ways is the field of adult and continuing education contributing to the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States and in other countries around the world?**
- **How have your institutions, agencies, programs, and staff responded? What strategies have been implemented to continue delivery of adult education programs to serve student needs?**
- **How is adult and continuing education likely to be affected over both the long- and short-term by the Covid-19 pandemic? What steps should be taken to mitigate the damage so that the field can continue to provide education and training to meet adult learners’ needs in the post-pandemic world?**
- **What can we learn about the purpose and value of adult and continue education as an enterprise and a resource for responding to a global pandemic? How has adult and continuing education assisted adult learning during this time?**
- **How will the field need to adapt and change to prepare for the next inevitable pandemic or other global or national crisis?**

Taking a broad view of our field we encourage submissions on a variety of topics not limited to:
• Case-study descriptions of how institutions are responding to Covid-19;
• Our fields’ roles in providing education and training related to Covid-19;
• Reviews of literature exploring the connections between our field and public health or other medical sciences;
• Historical analysis of past pan/epidemic events and their effect on education and the workforce;
• Emerging communities of practice focus on fighting Covid-19;
• Social movement organizing in an age of social distancing;
• Artistic and musical responses to Covid-19;
• New applications of learning technologies;
• Social justice, equity and equality issues emerging as a result of Covid-19 including labor organizing of frontline workers and differentiated death rates of historically marginalized groups.

Given the need for timely and relevant dissemination of this research, we are welcoming manuscripts ranging in length from 2500-7500 words. We are also inviting relevant perspectives papers of between 1000 and 3000 words. All submissions will be peer reviewed. Deadline for submissions of papers for this themed issue is June 15, 2020. While submitted papers need to make this deadline for full consideration for this themed issue, any papers on these topics received after the deadline will be considered for future editions of the journal.

References

