Because of its focus on improving work performance at the individual, group, organizational, and interorganizational levels, the field of human resource development (HRD) is affected by—and responds to—trends in work, organizations, and the global economy. A review of literature, including the annual proceedings of the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD), reveals recurring themes: work force diversity, cross-cultural issues, the learning organization, technology in work and learning (Marquardt 1996), increasing numbers of older workers (Allen and Hart 1998; Beatty and Burroughs 1999; Rocco, Stein, and Lee 2000), informal learning (AHRD 1997-2000; Garrick 1998), and spirituality in the workplace (Fenwick and Lange 1998; Kahnweiler and Otte 1997).

HRD practitioners are debating a set of core issues related to the professionalization of the field, including certification (AHRD 1997, 2000; Rowden 1996), ethics and integrity (AHRD 1997, 2000; Burns et al. 1999), and the role and university preparation of HRD professionals (AHRD 1997-2000; Johnston 2001). Cultural differences in HRD roles have been identified (AHRD 1997, 1999; Nijhof and de Rijk 1997; Streumer et al. 1999; Valkeavaara 1998). Research has been criticized for lacking a strong theoretical basis (AHRD 2000; Garavan et al. 1999; Holton 1999). Qualitative methods and stronger links among theory, research, and practice are a continuing focus (AHRD 1998-2000).

Another set of issues involves the relationship between adult education and HRD. Adult education claims a humanistic, learner-centered, self-directed focus on transforming individuals; HRD is oriented toward bottom-line, behaviorist performance improvement aimed at organizational goals (Kuchinke 1999; Peterson and Cooper 1999; Peterson and Provo 2000; Rowden 1996). Commonalities and complementarity in the two fields are being identified, especially as many universities merge and integrate these programs (Grubb et al. 1998; Peterson and Provo 1998, 2000). At the same time, a trend toward aligning vocational education and HRD is emerging, in recognition of their common endeavor of work force education (Gray 1997; Holton and Trott 1996; Masri 1999). The following resources provide more information on trends and issues in HRD.


Beatty, P. T., and Burroughs, L. “Preparing for an Aging Workforce: The Role of Higher Education.” Educational Gerontology 25, no. 6 (September 1999): 595-611. Given population trends and societal views on aging, academic programs preparing HRD professionals should address competencies needed for dealing with an aging work force.


Grubb, R. E.; Hemby, K. V.; and Conerly-Stewart, D. L. “Adult Education and Human Resource Development: A Symbiotic Relationship?” PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning 7 (1998): 57-66. Top-ranked competencies for graduate education in HRD identified by practitioners were adult learning, presentation, facilitation, needs assessment, and human relations. Seven of the top 10 were allied with adult education graduate program content.

Holton, E. F., III. “What Does Applied Field Really Mean?” Human Resource Development Quarterly 10, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 301-304. If HRD is to advance practice in significant and substantial ways in the future, it may require that some HRD researchers become less connected to practice in the short term.

as the HRD World Churns. Challenges arise from contested perspectives of HRD, complexity of workplaces, and divergent research findings profiling the field. The role, working knowledge, and skills required of practitioners are broadening.


Examines the concepts of soul and spirituality and how they apply to the HRD field in terms of values, beliefs, and motivators. Considers ways to nurture the soul of the field.


Presents three views of adult development—person centered, production centered, and principled problem solving—and discusses their applicability to the HRD profession.


Technology is increasingly crucial in HRD. The Internet, intranets, multimedia, virtual reality, distance learning, and electronic performance support systems are some of the technologies with which trainers must become familiar.


Vocational education and training should be considered within the more comprehensive concept of HRD. To ensure that both the human and the professional aspects of vocational education are addressed, two major dimensions should guide the design of HRD: education and work.


The following trends have implications for HRD: (1) the nature of work is changing, (2) the pace of change is accelerating, (3) the Web is a structural model of team rather than pyramid organization, (4) the bargaining power of the work force is rising, and (5) value exchanges are direct.


Responses from HRD practitioners in Belgium, England, Northern Ireland, and Italy were compiled into a profile of roles and competencies that was then compared with similar surveys in the United States.


Explores the practices and philosophies of adult education and HRD, so that integrated communities of practice may be created by understanding the ways in which adult education theory informs the field of HRD.


A survey of 113 members of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education and 50 AHRD members found few differences except in age, rank, and salary. The two faculties are compatible and could be integrated.


Integration of adult education and HRD faculties required the resolution of andragogical, philosophical, and theoretical differences and identification of places where the fields converge and diverge. The realignment links theory and practice and enables the disciplines to complement each other.


Discusses worldwide HRD trends that were identified in a study of the HRD practices in 35 countries. Outlines four steps for working with the trends.


HRD in organizations can be used as a coercive tool that reinforces existing power structures. The emerging postmodern organization must consider individual wisdom, values, and knowledge; recognize differences; remove inequalities; and create opportunities for all voices to be heard.


Different policy, career development, and training strategies are needed for older workers who decide to retire from, remain in, or return to periods of part- or full-time work.


Presents debates over (1) the purpose of HRD (improving individual or organizational performance); (2) whether HRD is part of adult education; (3) origin of the knowledge base (theory and research or practice); and (4) certification of HRD practitioners.


Compared to a U.S. study, Dutch human resources professionals rated the following trends affecting the future of HRD as most important: integration of learning and work, importance of organizational innovation, and measurement of business results using consumer-relevant criteria.


Comparison of trainer surveys in England, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Finland showed the culture-bound nature of HRD. English and Finnish practitioners perceived themselves as change agents, Germans as trainers. HRD practice did appear to have a common core of competencies.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0013. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. Trends and Issues Alerts may be freely reproduced and are available at <http://ericacve.org/fulltext.asp>.