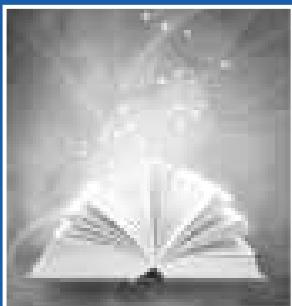


BOOK REVIEW



Reviewed by
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Blended Learning for the Adult Education Classroom

By David J. Rosen and Carmine Stewart

2015; Essential Education Corporation, Inc.

Available for free download at <http://app.essentialed.com/resources/blended-learning-teachers-guide-web.pdf>

The purpose of *Blended Learning for the Adult Education Classroom* is to provide information and resources for teachers and administrators in Adult Basic Education (ABE) to use to design and implement blended learning, broadly defined in the book as “a teaching and learning model that has a face-to-face class or tutorial component combined with an online learning component” (p. 3). The guide is practical, providing links to resources and concise explanatory text making suggestions about implementation. Written with the practitioner in mind, it draws on educational theory without being too theoretical in its presentation. Rather than offering prescribed guidelines, the authors encourage readers to consider the included resources in light of what is suitable for their own learners. As such, it is an invitation to engage in blended learning, perfect for its intended audience.

Rosen and Stewart embrace the perspective that a blended learning approach in ABE can enhance both instruction and student learning. Indeed, the book begins with a comprehensive list of potential benefits for students and programs. This perspective is evident throughout the book’s sections, which include examples of model programming and

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instruction through vignettes illustrating the strategies for using specific resources.

The first three sections define blended learning and suggest strategies for getting started in a variety of settings and with students possessing varying experience using online technologies. This “how to” shows exactly what teachers have done in specific contexts. The section also provides tools to help one better understand the technology landscape of both program site and learners, and how to use that information to make decisions.

The next sections provide guidance on the selection of online platforms that teachers might use to organize blended instruction, including both proprietary/prepackaged curricula and teacher-created webpages. Also included is guidance for teachers who need to select online resources to enrich their own instructional websites. The authors describe various ways teachers can deliver instruction in the online part of blended learning, including email, Skype, threaded discussion, and selecting instructional videos, emphasizing that the choice determines how student learning will be facilitated.

The final sections contextualize use of blended learning into broader educational innovations, for example: digital badging, integration of College and Career Readiness Standards, formative assessment, learning portfolios, mastery learning, and flipped classrooms. The authors show how adoption of blended learning can support integration of these innovations.

The guide does not claim to be a report of research on the effectiveness of specific strategies or resources included; rather, it is a survey of strategies that practitioners have found useful. The authors weave descriptions of learning technologies and online resources into different “pictures” of what blended learning may look like. This contextualization increases the guide’s utility by sharing not just tools but also how teachers might use them. I believe this to be the main strength of the guide. The resources named surely will become obsolete and the links will be broken, but the lessons about tool selection and examples of their integration into instruction should be lasting.

A shared characteristic of the recommendations is that they have the potential to support learner-centered instruction. Readers should use the publication as a guide—following the links to construct their own conceptualization of blended learning, knowing that authors were incredibly comprehensive in their survey of resources. Such an approach will ensure that the intent of the guide—that blended learning supports learners—is realized as practitioners make choices based on what they know about their learners.

The book concludes with a brief discussion of the future of blended learning and its potential contributions to positive education reform if its implementation is linked to other initiatives (i.e., technology integration, professional development, competency-based programming). This suggestion should serve as a springboard for future discussions about blended learning, specifically with respect to policy and future research.

The authors do not call for policy reform, but I think the abundance of quality resources included beg the question of the suitability of current ABE distance education policy. ABE programs often depend on proxy contact hour reimbursement to support their distance education initiatives. This policy structure privileges the use of state-approved proprietary curricula because local ABE programs may get funding based on content completion and/or student time spent using them. When teachers make use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) or create their own instructional websites based on quality resources (like those included in the guide) they may not be approved for proxy contact hour reimbursement. This potentially delimits programmatic support for use of innovative and inexpensive options for blended learning.

The guide illustrates that the nature of Web 2.0 has stretched the utility of the current funding approach; online resources have become more plentiful, teachers more tech-savvy, and learners more accustomed to self-directed and differentiated use of online materials. These realities need to be evident in blended learning instruction and the policies that define what is allowable (or fundable). To ensure the quality of more widespread implementation of innovative practice, use of OESs, and teacher-created resources, both empirical qualitative research and experimental studies are needed on the efficacy of blended learning strategies. Learning from such research can help inform new policies.

This guide is a timely, valuable contribution to practitioners and administrators in the field. The national legislation defining ABE, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, not only supports the use of technology but also allows states to use funds for new technologies to support distance education, among other applications. The impact of this new federal language is likely to be an increased demand for blended learning. Rosen and Stewart's guide can inform new blended learning initiatives through the guidance it provides to instructors and by making clear to administrators the scope and complexity of the work. This will result, I hope, in adequate support for the technologies and professional development required for innovations to

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succeed. I encourage readers to engage in the conversation this inviting guide introduces. By all means read this free book online! Follow the links, dive-in, and experiment with some blended learning.

Jen Vanek is a doctoral student in Second Languages Education at the University of Minnesota, where she teaches in the TESL Minor program. She has been working in the field of adult English language learning since receiving an MA TESOL from the University of Illinois-Chicago in 1995. She's supported learners on college campuses, at adult learning centers, and in workforce centers and factories. Jen's current work centers on research, creating online content, and supporting the professional development of teachers in the areas of ESL, digital literacy, distance learning, and adult career pathways.

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