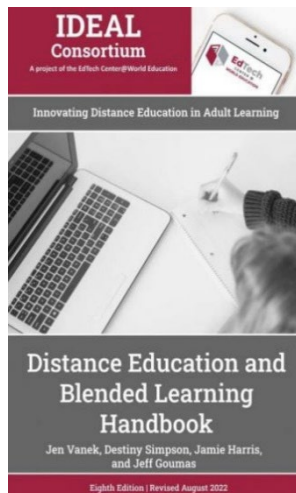


February – 2024

Book Review: IDEAL Distance Education and Blended Learning Handbook, 8th Edition



Authors: Jen Vanek, Destiny Simpson, Jamie Harris, and Jeff Goumas (EdTech Books, 2022)
https://edtechbooks.org/ideal_dl_handbook

Reviewed by: Jarwati, *First Education Center*

The eighth edition of IDEAL Consortium’s *Distance Education and Blended Learning Handbook* offers guidelines and tools to assist programs in implementing HyFlex, blended learning, and distance education. The book draws on reports from programs all around the US, as well as information from the National Reporting System for Adult Education, which demonstrates a notable rise in the use of distance education and reporting requirements for blended learning and distance education program.

The book, which is based on recent and historical research, policy directives, and effective practices compiled by the IDEAL Consortium, tackles both administrative and instructional difficulties. It provides readers with tools for constructing a proactive strategy to improve learning and increase capacity in a sustainable way.

Blended learning and distance learning are introduced in Chapter 1, which is about “Setting the Stage” and which also discusses the terminology used in the field. In this chapter, the authors also discuss synchronous and asynchronous online learning, as well as other forms of distance education. The crucial subject of recruitment is covered in Chapter 2, which instructs readers on how to find and recruit students for their program. Knowing the target audience and comprehending their wants and interests is crucial, according to the authors. This chapter offer methods for publicizing programs and enlisting pupils through associations with other organizations and word-of-mouth. Chapter 3 focuses on evaluating students’ readiness for distance and blended learning and identifying the support they require to succeed. In order to provide equal access to adult education services and technology, the authors stress the significance of evaluating students’ technological proficiency and skill gaps. Additionally, they propose techniques for boosting students’ online learning and offering entirely remote options for intake tasks. The goal of Chapter 4 is the orientation of students to prepare them for success. The authors provide suggestions for designing orientations that equip students with the skills and information necessary for a successful learning experience. They emphasise the importance of teaching digital literacy and building students’ digital resilience. These are just a few of the strategies the authors suggest for providing completely remote orientation options, along with video classes, online manuals, and virtual Q&A sessions. The initial four chapters of the *Handbook* demonstrate the need for learner-centeredness in distance education programs.

Instruction and the qualities of effective teaching are discussed in Chapter 5. The authors investigate how various education methods, such as distance learning, blended learning, and HyFlex, influence teacher participation and provide stimulating and encouraging feedback on students' work. Along with standards-aligned teacher-created courses, they also explore crowdsourcing and open educational resources. Based on instructional goals and circumstances, the authors offer methods for choosing relevant resources, such as proprietary online curricula and other learning and communication technology.

Chapter 6 emphasises the topic of assessment and monitoring of student improvement. The writers look at the numerous roles that assessment might play, including diagnostic, formative, and summative evaluation. Additionally, they provide guidance on how to include distance learners in the National Reporting System for Adult Education and how to use data to improve instruction and student learning outcomes, as well as a range of strategies for assessing learners' progress. The administrative challenges of creating and maintaining remote education programs are examined in Chapter 7. For the purpose of fostering innovation, the authors advocate using a pilot strategy and cultivating an experimental culture. They place a strong emphasis on tracking statistics, the effectiveness of online education programs, and the relationship between distance learning and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's priority of adult education objectives. This chapter offers strategies for resolving typical administrative issues like funding, staffing, and career development for teachers.

A reflective exercise that is intended to aid instructors and administrators in planning and implementing a new distance education program or bettering an existing one is included at the end of each chapter. These exercises give readers a chance to put the concepts and tactics discussed in the chapter to use in their own contexts.

For educators and administrators intending to create and administer remote learning and blended learning programs, the *IDEAL Distance Education and Blended Learning Handbook* offers helpful and action-oriented advice. One of the book's greatest assets is its practical treatment of all the important areas of distance and blended learning, including recruitment, student readiness, orientation, training, assessment, and administrative difficulties. In order to provide evidence-based advice on successful tactics and approaches, the *Handbook* draws on research and best practices in distance and blended learning. The book is simple to grasp and navigate because of the writing's clarity and accessibility, and each chapter includes reflective exercises that can be used to develop new programs or enhance current ones.

The *Handbook* could have used more case studies to illustrate how the techniques and methods covered in the book are used in actual contexts by partner institutions in the IDEAL Consortium. Furthermore, it may be noted that the *Handbook* is not about any particular tools or technologies. It provides strategic guidance and advice for planning and implementing distance education programs. It is especially targeted to the members of the Consortium, although others could also benefit from their experiences. Overall, the *Handbook* provides good guidance for quality distance education in a post-pandemic learning ecosystem.

