

## Virgil Notes

**Bonnie Elbaum, Cynthia McIntyre, Alese Smith (2002). Essential Elements: Prepare, design, and teach your online course. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.**

This book centers on the Concord Consortium e-Learning Model for Online Courses. There is a lot of experience embedded in the information presented in this book. What they have written will work, but you have to keep in mind that it will work if you have an organization that fits the paradigm and an instructor that wants to use this paradigm. Because this works does not mean that something else won't work better in a given situation. That said, the information presented is very valuable to anyone though, if only to expose you to new ideas of how things can be done well. No matter what paradigm you choose, this book is valuable for the ideas it presents and is a good read as well. At times it is redundant, but sometimes this serves to reinforce important points. A few items seem out of place as I have noted. On final note, this book is strictly set for a facilitated and paced course type.

Before going into the notes, here are the actual Essential Elements listed out as shown in Appendix C.

### **Section 1: prepare the course**

1. Prepare to teach online
2. Build a course outline
3. Create a course schedule with clear deadlines
4. Plan for ongoing quality assurance
5. Ensure support from your administration
6. Provide technical support.

### **Section 2: Design your course**

7. Format your course so that students can focus on the content
8. Design a learning community that is collaborative, engaging, and inclusive [this one falls in a clear paradigm]
9. Find and use appropriate course materials and resources
10. Develop rich, relevant activities to support your learning objectives
11. Include a balanced mixture of individual and group learning activities [in case you don't see that from my notes below, I would argue that this balance is tilted toward the individual side, while this book tilts it the other way]
12. Recognize that pacing in an online course is different

### **Section 3: Teach the course**

13. Provide for equal accessibility
14. Provide a comprehensive set of informational materials.
15. Facilitate discussion
16. Engage but don't over-engage your students
17. Assess student work and provide feedback

## **Introduction, 7-16**

As I began reading, I thought, the main disadvantage of a model that this one displays is that of constraint. In this model, words like most importantly are often used around collaboration and discussion.

I'm not sure why 9 characteristics are turned into 3 sections having 17 elements, but here are the 9 characteristics of the Concord Consortium eLearning Model

1. Asynchronous collaboration
  - a. at one point it is mentioned that asynchronous discussion forums are more thoughtful than synchronous. I think that it is more a matter of what is done with them.
  - b. Collaboration presupposes this as part of your learning paradigm. As will be seen, other characteristics sometimes are derived as a result of this one.

2. Explicit schedules
  - a. To maintain collaboration, everyone has to be on the same schedule.
3. Expert facilitation
  - a. Doesn't give all the answers or ask too many questions.
  - b. A trainable skill
4. Inquiry pedagogy
  - a. Not sure why this should be the only way, even within the rest of their framework. It also seems contrary to then saying that you should have specific objectives. Specific becomes a relative term.
5. High quality materials
6. Community building
7. Limited enrollment
  - a. their number is 12 to 25, and from experience I would agree that this range works well for this paradigm.
8. Purposeful virtual spaces
  - a. just calling it a space rather than an environment presupposes a philosophy
  - b. The idea here is to present necessary discourse arenas, such as a student lounge forum.
9. Ongoing assessment

#### Things to consider before beginning

1. What are the goals of the instruction? [In my book, this should be asked before you decide on a paradigm. Here we will see how the given paradigm fits best to the given goals.]
2. What are the instructor requirements? [More than just competencies, but also the personal elements]
3. Technical requirements and administrative support.

#### **Section 1: Prepare your online course, 17-42**

1. Prepare to teach online
  - a. Take an online course
  - b. Be excited
  - c. Do your homework – they say that you should be knowledgeable about online pedagogy, but what about pedagogy in general, and why should we stick with a single paradigm.
  - d. Learn to express yourself in text
2. Build a course outline
  - a. This part of the book seems to forget about early instructional design steps such as knowing your audience and determining your capabilities. They skip to the items here
  - b. List objectives and develop a course outline. The text seems similar to what should be included in a syllabus.
  - c. Create a timeline – I don't know if this is so necessary as much as understanding that it will take time to develop the course and you should have it all developed before you begin teaching it.
3. Create a course schedule with clear deadlines
  - a. When will week begin and end
  - b. Avoid daily due dates
  - c. What will the pace be (they are working on an instructor guided pacing)
  - d. How many students (they are working on a 12-25 number, although they say that they have been successful with 8 to 28.
  - e. Will you have synchronous meetings? [not sure why this is here though]
    - i. for quick decisions, not for deep discussions [not sure that I agree]
    - ii. save and publish any transcripts [as this is the planning stage, plan to be able to do that]
    - iii. Schedule different times and days. [very important to meet various student schedules.]
    - iv. advertise

- v. provide alternate asynchronous solutions [or use the synch. as a supplemental or non-required activity]
  - vi. Pros of synchronous chat
    - 1. quick response time
    - 2. [the rest of the items listed are dependent on the first one and give ideas for how to use them such as office hours or brainstorming. I'm not convinced that they work best for brainstorming since there is no reflection time unless the idea for the storm is given prior to the actual synchronous session.]
    - 3. Suggest useful for technical help, but only in cases where they can still use the synch tool in spite of the technical problems.
  - vii. Cons
    - 1. [lurkers by choice in the absence of teacher motivating aspects]
    - 2. excludes those that can't make it. Reasons could be as mundane as time zone differences. [that why you have more than one and make them optional]
    - 3. Possibility of inappropriate content. [but that can happen anywhere without proper moderation]
    - 4. [information overload] Can be hard to find and respond to all questions. [Loss of normal conversation cues can lead to] discourse chaos.
    - 5. Technical and security issues, such as firewalls.
    - 6. exclusion of poor or slow typists.
    - 7. Staying on topic [always a problem though]
    - 8. Harder to measure and grade participation [actually, you probably shouldn't even grade synchronous chat participation strictly if at all because of the difficulties in getting non-dominant technolites into the fray.]
4. Plan for ongoing quality assurance
    - a. Create standards
    - b. Get student feedback [on how well those standards have been met] Provide an opportunity for such feedback to be anonymous.
    - c. They suggest that you keep a journal of your online teaching experience, but I think in the mode they discuss, it is simply too much work.
    - d. Host an open forum [such as a pub forum where anything can be discussed. I'm not sure that this is so much quality assurance though but rather pedagogy and community building]
  5. Ensure support from your administration
    - a. Develop policies and procedures [we have the same policies as a f2f classroom, and then some such as netiquette, posting guidelines, etc.]
    - b. They list a bunch of backside items that the instructor has no control over, but should want before going into online education such as a good registration and payment system, good ta's, course content support [although this is rare outside of specialty services like video outside of big institutions].
    - c. Supply of materials needs to be handled. [Although I disagree with the use of invariably adjective to describe the need, as there are many successful online courses that use nothing more than the Web.
    - d. Need for training of faculty in this new mode.
    - e. Need for student support. They are speaking about personal support, but they also need financial support, advising, etc. which are not mentioned here. Technical support is given its own element.
  6. Provide Technical support
    - a. Nice that they include the aspect of patience in this requirement
    - b. They do give know your audience here, but that should have been taken care of earlier in the design steps.
    - c. Give good directions, really good directions.
    - d. Provide time for learning the technology

- e. don't use technology just because you can. [these last two are so important from what I have seen in avoiding misuse of technology]
- f. Advertise how to get help. yes, you have it, but how do the students access it. Make sure that it can be accessed in multiple ways too.

## Section 2: Design Your Online Course, 43-71

7. Format Your course so that students can focus on the content [not the technology, perhaps leaning towards transparency]
  - a. Use clip art where appropriate. [I agree that you need to keep the course looking nice. Try to find clip art metaphorical to what is being discussed though.]
  - b. Avoid animations [unless they are to parlay content]
  - c. Consistent, sensible layout
8. Design a learning community that is collaborative, engaging, and inclusive
  - a. [If that is the paradigm of instruction you are going for.]
  - b. State community expectation. [Better wording would be to create expectation that would yield the community involvement.]
  - c. Build relationships. Use an orientation and icebreakers
  - d. Include a social forum for any topic
  - e. Model behavior but do not dominate the discussion.
9. Find and use appropriate course materials and resources
  - a. All of your materials do not have to be online [but they can be]
  - b. Find new online resources [and keep them up-to-date]
  - c. Apply appropriate copyright rules.
  - d. Use a set of supplemental resources
10. Develop rich, relevant activities to support learning objectives.
  - a. [seems obvious]
  - b. 55 – “Consider using a predictable learning cycle, such as introduction, lesson, activity, and discussion. This effective pattern can prepare students in advance for the next step in their learning experience, and should always culminate with sharing their learnings with their classmates.”
  - c. Create weekly overviews [I recommend NOT doing these in advance but rather bring in what they have learned from the week and pull out some major student quotes.
  - d. Chunk the information.
  - e. 57 – “Include extremely detailed instructions for how to complete each assignment.”
  - f. Provide assignment expectations. Using a grading rubric when appropriate.
  - g. They tell us that variety is the spice of life 4 pages after telling us to use a predictable cycle.
  - h. Advertise the due date. [I'm not sure that I agree with having to remind student frequently about due dates. I don't want to be a nag.]
11. Include a balanced mixture of individual and group learning activities.
  - a. [But do NOT overdo group, which I think they may be pushing for more group, but they do keep the word appropriate in mind.]
  - b. Provide prompt feedback [not sure that this fits here though]
  - c. About 5 pages are spent on group work. Here are some highlights
    - i. Divide activities up.
    - ii. Use an activity that can easily be collaborative.
    - iii. Consider a group slightly larger than in f2f. This helps when problems do and will arise.
    - iv. Clear instructions should include exactly what is expected of group members, when they need to start, tell them to select a leader, assign individual roles if the group isn't forming them, rest as with any activity
    - v. Allow for extra time for an online group. 66-“Acknowledge that group work can be hard to do online, but by accomplishing it, students are learning how to succeed in the real

world where working on a team is a part of life.” [I agree with the first part, but feel that the second part of that argument has been overstated.]

12. Recognize that pacing in an online course is different
  - a. Begin slowly so that students can develop skills needed for online classroom first.
  - b. Provide check-in points to make sure that everyone is moving forward
  - c. Rest as any course
13. Provide equal accessibility to all students

### **Section 3: Teach your online course, 73 – 92**

14. Provide a comprehensive set of information materials.
  - a. Includes advance information on whether they are right for online learning. [including contact information and orientation materials in this message]
  - b. Community technology requirements [and where to get the required technology]
  - c. Participation requirements including how many logins per week and how many posts, etc.
  - d. Use a welcoming email
  - e. Course information packet including things I put in the syllabus – welcome letter, syllabus, reading list, grading policy, communication plan, student expectations
  - f. Keep in mind the tone of the text so that it is not hampered by loss of paralanguage.
15. Facilitate discussions in a way that keeps students on-task, promotes full participation, and encourages peer collaboration
  - a. [not sure if I would use the word collaboration above, perhaps interaction is a better word since you don't always have to be collaborative, but you should try to be interactive at all times in their model.]
  - b. Include minimum posting requirements [already stated before]
  - c. Remind students of the learning support agreement [learning contracts of this type were mentioned under 14 above, but I see this step as just being a jerk of an instructor]
  - d. The amount of discussions mentioned next seems a bit overbearing. The weekly check-in threads would be better served if they are a reflection thread, and in that case maybe not in the discussion forum but as a journal or blog. Topical thread and social forum as discussed already are important.
  - e. Mentions sending special purpose emails. These can be form letters used in each course.
  - f. Encourage collaborations through redirecting, requiring, encouraging, etc.
  - g. Respond quickly to questions [but not so quickly that the students are given the opportunity to answer it for themselves]
  - h. Let students direct learning
  - i. Avoid letter writing.
16. Engage your students without over-engaging.
  - a. Don't dominate the discussion. Be patient. Teach by example. Avoid 'good jobs'.
  - b. Some of the items here are not in agreement with other parts of the book, but the point is that what has already been discussed in the book are good ideas, just don't overdo them. Remember student-centered.
17. Assess student work and provide feedback
  - a. State your expectations [they seem to be going with absolute scales, but relative scales with more advanced rubrics or holistic rubrics could be used]
  - b. Keep feedback consistent and frequent. [use the feedback as an opportunity to teach]
  - c. Quote students [I do this in my module summaries]
  - d. Use the assessment tools you have available as appropriate.
  - e. use self-assessments
  - f. Fully explain how things will be graded and how the course as a whole will be graded.
  - g. Use a grade-book online

- h. Think differently about assessment. Move away from quiz and test. Make use of the tools that the virtual classroom affords you.