

BOOK REVIEW

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THE ONLINE TEACHING GUIDE: A HANDBOOK OF ATTITUDES, STRATEGIES, AND TECHNIQUES FOR THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM ***by Ken W. White and Bob H. Weight***

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The Online Teaching Guide: A Handbook of Attitudes, Strategies, and Techniques for the Virtual Classroom, by Ken W. White and Bob H. Weight; (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2000, 192 pages, \$32.00)

The Online Teaching Guide: A Handbook of Attitudes, Strategies, and Techniques for the Virtual Classroom is a book designed to address the questions and needs posed by

teachers who are new to teaching online. Online course offerings are increasing at a phenomenal rate. From 1995 to 1998 the number of distance education courses offered at higher education institutions doubled in number (Phillips, 1999). Accompanying that growth is a large number of instructors who have never taught online courses. *The Online Teaching Guide* does an excellent job of identifying the concepts that are important in the

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online teaching environment as well as presenting useful ideas and techniques for the new online instructor.

The majority of the 14 chapters were contributed by faculty from the University of Phoenix Online Campus. Although there are frequent references to the University, the concepts discussed are applicable to any online instructional environment. Overall, the book emphasizes that effective online instruction requires an interpersonal communication approach. In the Preface the authors state that "...the book presents attitudes, strategies, and techniques that are socially based (p. vi)." From interpersonal communication to online activities that promote active learning, the book provides detailed information on the elements an online course should include in order to enhance learning and maintain student interest.

Chapter One stresses the importance of choice and effective online interpersonal communication strategies. Ken White outlines how new online instructors can choose to be either interpersonal or impersonal in the online classroom by "mutating communication metaphors" and provides guidelines for making the choice. According to Stewart (1990), there are three reasons for making the choice to be more or less interpersonal in communication situations: to focus on what makes the other person unique, to show respect for a person's ability to think and make choices, and to pay attention to relevant feelings and the whole human being (p. 5). When communication needs to be more efficient and impersonal, one should choose to focus on the general characteristics of people, ignore the issue of thinking and choice, and stay away from wholeness and emotions (p. 7). Instructors need to be concerned with "person-building" as well as course content.

In Chapter Two, Chad Lewis identifies four differences that exist between online and face-to-face communication and then recommends the WRITE way to communicate online. The differences are: (1) individuals in computer-mediated groups are relatively more

uninhibited, (2) status differences play less of a role in an online environment, (3) interaction in online groups tends to be more evenly distributed among group members, and (4) online consensus decision making takes significantly longer than when group members interact face to face. The WRITE way to communicate online involves Warmth, Responsiveness, Inquisitiveness, Tentativeness and Empathetic components (p. 17). The acronym is a catchy way of remembering the method Lewis recommends for online interaction.

"Talking the Talk" is the title of Chapter Three, written by Arlene Hiss. Like the first two chapters, this article emphasizes the importance of communication. Hiss discusses how online facilitators (instructors) should communicate with their students using components of "teacher talk" she refers to as control talk, humor, special language, and an andragogical approach. Her top ten hints for success include sending something to the students daily.

The first three chapters of this book effectively identify not only the importance of communication in an online course but also how to set the tone of the conversations and when to make them interpersonal. The fourth chapter was written by Lorraine Priest, a student who obtained a bachelor's degree and a master's degree via online instruction. Although it was good to provide a student's perspective of the requirements for good online teaching and learning, the chapter reads somewhat like an advertisement for a specific university.

In Chapter Five, Bill Pepicello and Elizabeth Tice describe their view of the role of liberal arts in online education. Specifically, the authors discuss how the University of Phoenix (UOP) developed an online proficiency assessment system to assess writing and math skills of online learners and to tutor students who need remediation. Additionally, UOP developed a course entitled "Skills for Professional Development" that is used to introduce students to the liberal arts as well as to aid their development of critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills.

Anita Bischoff, contributor of Chapter Six, provides the reader with an overview of the four elements of effective online teaching (p. 57):

1. visibility,
2. feedback,
3. instructional materials, and
4. student retention.

The author provides vignettes to illustrate several components of each element, which could be useful to new or prospective online teachers.

In Chapter Seven, “Managing Time,” Marilyn Simon identifies the factors that affect time management in an online environment. From keyboard skills to online student expectations, the author addresses how an online instructor can manage his/her time most effectively. One of the best tips offered applies to both instructors and students: log on and deal with messages daily.

“Cooking Up a Successful Class” is the title of Chapter Eight, written by Shelia Porter. Using a recipe format, Porter identifies the steps to follow when developing an online course. Although the author provides good advice on how to develop an online course, from selection of course content and software to financial considerations, the use of recipe jargon was somewhat distracting.

Marilyn Fullmer-Umari does an excellent job of laying out exactly what the online syllabus should contain in Chapter Nine. In the author’s words, “the syllabus establishes the course guidelines and is the basis for a successful learning experience. The first contact that the online student will have with the instructor is the online syllabus (p. 96).” In addition to providing the key elements for an effective online syllabus, the author redefines lecture and provides step-by-step instruction on how to develop an online lecture. She also effectively demonstrates how the syllabus can help students manage their time in the online course.

In Chapter Ten, “Online Facilitation: Individual and Group Possibilities,” Patricia Adesso effectively discusses how an instructor can facilitate learning in an asynchronous environment. The author does this by comparing use of the facilitation guidelines in a traditional setting and in an online setting, providing examples of each. Carl Rogers’ (1969) guidelines for facilitation are described and adapted for online instruction. Adesso uses examples throughout the chapter to further clarify concepts for the reader. Effective methods for dealing with problem students are also discussed.

Al Badger authored Chapter Eleven on “Keeping it Fun and Relevant: Using Active Online Learning.” This chapter continues the discussion of how the instructor is the facilitator in an online course. Additionally, Badger identifies the importance of daily pacing to keep students participating. To provide an active learning environment, the author uses online activities such as a field trip through the Web or an information search. He also describes a very interesting, attention-getting game called “space colonists,” which he uses for an exercise in debating and decision-making. Very practical, yet fun, online activities are described in detail throughout the chapter.

In Chapter Twelve, Ken White discusses conflict in an online environment. The approach he takes is based on this philosophy: “... online conflicts are neither inherently negative nor positive; rather, it is what one makes of them (p. 143).” The key to handling conflict is responding, not reacting. Responding involves thinking and choosing whereas reacting is more reflexive—it is fight or flight (p. 143). White lists five of the principal causes of conflict and then discusses the potential benefits of online conflict including: (1) opening up hidden issues, (2) clarifying subject matter, (3) improving the quality of problem solving, (4) increasing involvement in learning, and (5) increasing cooperation and interaction.

In Chapter Thirteen, Jim Farrar discusses teaching the online quantitative course. The primary difficulty lies in the need to use ASCII

plain text that is compatible with whatever software the students are using. This causes the online equations to look very different from the equations in the textbook and results in increased anxiety levels in the students. Farrar includes a sample lesson about measures of central tendency to illustrate how he breaks the equations up into components to help the students connect the online instruction with the textbook material. He suggests that students participate in small groups to help them learn by communicating mathematically.

Fred Schwartz and Ken White discuss the importance of giving and getting online course feedback in Chapter Fourteen. Feedback is a priority in reducing the inherent isolation of online courses and is instrumental in student retention. "Formative feedback modifies a student's thinking or behavior for the purpose of learning while summative feedback assesses how well a student accomplishes a task or achieves a result for the purpose of grading" (p. 168). Feedback should be multidimensional, non-evaluative, supportive, student controlled, timely, and specific. Student comments regarding feedback are presented in detail for several different categories for each type of feedback. They emphasize the point that that feedback should be supportive and should not arouse defensiveness. This is accomplished by focusing on behavior rather than on the student, taking student needs into

account, and directing feedback toward behavior that can be changed. Students should also be encouraged to evaluate themselves. Student feedback regarding the course can be an invaluable tool for creating more effective online courses. The authors present a detailed plan for soliciting midcourse feedback.

In the Epilogue, Bob Weight and Terri Bishop agree that the key to success in online education is the attitude of the faculty members and the willingness to interact with students daily.

The Online Teaching Guide: A Handbook of Attitudes, Strategies, and Techniques for the Virtual Classroom is an easy-to-read, comprehensive guide for anybody who is considering teaching an online course. Because the focus is on communication issues rather than specific content or software, this book is appropriate for all online instructors, regardless of previous teaching experience.

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