Abstract: CVO Antwerpen-Zuid is a center for adult education near Antwerp, Belgium. With 4800 students and a staff of 120 it is one of the larger learning centers for adults in the Flemish part of the country, offering secondary and higher education in the context of Lifelong Learning. In this poster we present the mistakes we made during a first implementation of a hybrid course (contact + e-learning) to train our teachers of programming languages in implementing VB.NET as a programming language in their courses. The students in this course as well as its teacher viewed their experience taking the course as a first step towards offering e-learn courses themselves. Based on our analysis we present a number of recommendations. The first one? “Attending conferences on E-Learning is a good start but doesn’t guarantee success.”

Learning from failure

For several reasons—good ones as well as bad ones—the management of the center for adult education (first author of this poster) decided to lead the school onto the path of distance education. Everything started out “by the book” as we picked it up during numerous AACE conferences. Financing was secured, legal obstacles were cleared, all levels of staff were involved from the start, even including the attendance of an E-LEARN conference by a delegation of upper and middle management as well as teachers.

It was decided to offer a first course exclusively to the teachers of programming languages of the center, assuming this would allow us to avoid the well-documented hurdle of insufficient computer skills.

About 10 teachers decided to enroll in the course. Just a few weeks into the program, it became clear that the program would turn out to be a real disaster. The students had a good time during the contact hours, but it was obvious that this course could not serve as a prototype for courses offered to a more realistic student audience.

A closer look showed that about everything that could go wrong did indeed go wrong, from the students expectations to the preparation of the course, its organization, the tools, etc. But we were lucky, for taking this closer look actually saved the course, as it made the participants as well as the management of the center more aware of the real difficulties an institute faces when starting to offer distance leaning.

In this poster we analyze the different factors we believe to have contributed to the failure of the course. Next we match those to recommendations found in the relevant literature.

Could we have avoided our mistakes? Perhaps in part, but definitely not all. We hope others may learn from our mistakes, just as we have learned from the mistakes of others … and ours.