

*Out on a Lim
With Educational
Technology*

The Seventh-day Adventist educational system is the largest centrally organized parochial school system in the world, having grown from humble beginnings in Michigan to approximately 5,800 institutions worldwide. Most schools were established through the sacrificial giving of multitudes of Seventh-day Adventist church members who were committed to providing a Christian education for all those who wished to have one. Functioning for years in physical isolation from one another and connected only by a common mission, these schools have sought to provide excellent education in a faith environment and to prepare young people to fulfill the gospel commission.

However, when schools were located in close physical proximity, their relationships were sometimes marred by a competitive spirit rather than one of cooperation. Today, our mission remains the same—"Go ye into all the world" (Mark 16:15, KJV)—but now technology provides a way to bridge distance and create a cooperative consortia of Adventist schools.

The Potential of Modern Technology

In the past, the church and technology have had moments of epiphany, when the right technology was in place to spread the gospel. Roads during the Roman empire, and the printing press at the time of the Reformation brought the gospel to people around the world. Early Adventist pioneers made publishing a focus of their work—sometimes physically carrying printing presses to mission outposts.¹ Today, we are seeing the introduction of a new way to publish—via the World Wide Web (WWW) and new ways for people to be connected via satellite, video conferencing, and the Internet. Will these technologies be used to spread God's final message? Our school system is challenged to respond to the opportunities of distance education. Through it, we can work together collaboratively and share the resources that God has so richly bestowed upon us.

Collaboration Possibilities

- Imagine a single location, a WWW site, where available courses from every Adventist university, college, high school, and grade school is listed.
- Imagine students from widely separated locations working on cross-disciplinary, service-oriented projects.
- Imagine teachers being able to access professional development or academic courses wherever and whenever they need them and or even work on advanced degrees through distance education.
- Imagine a K-20 consortium where students can take distance courses that are not offered at their local school. They would enhance their learning through specialized curricula and acquire lifelong skills of collaborating, working in cyberspace, problem solving, and critical thinking.
- Imagine an Adventist education resource site where educators in school, church, and family settings could find exemplary curricula, as well as suggestions, activities, materials, and projects that integrate faith and learning.
- Imagine Adventist professionals being able to access materials that enhance their work (courses, in-services, training sessions).
- Imagine teachers collaborating with fellow experts in their fields to construct distance courses that could be taught either by a team or independently.

These "imaginings" are not just dreams, but real possibilities. Today, several distance initiatives are changing the landscape of Adventist education. AE21 (Adventist Education for the 21st Century)² is connecting small Adventist schools from North Dakota to Florida. One on-site facilitator proclaimed, "This program

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Adventist Distance Education A Vision

BY MARILYN EGGERS AND
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Through distance education, students like these at Salève Adventist University in France can be connected to Adventist schools around the world.

Adventist Distance Education A Vision

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helps students to be deep thinkers.” And a Freshmore (9/10) facilitator explained, “This program teaches structure and discipline. It also prepares [students] for college.”³ Silver State Adventist School in Reno, Nevada,⁴ offers a complete high school diploma via the Internet. Students are connected from Hawaii to Tennessee using live audio and video. Brian Hartman, the teacher facilitat-

ing the initiative, says, “This year, we used an electronic physics lab program, and students found they could manipulate the simulations on the computer in ways they couldn’t do in a real lab. In addition, they were able to experiment with wind tunnels, dangerous voltages, and expensive equipment that they never would have in a traditional classroom. These projects have deeply engaged the students in learning physics.”⁵

Making the Vision a Reality

Many people and organizations must work together toward our common goals by pooling our expertise, and with humility, expanding our vision and implementation of Spirit-filled, quality Seventh-day Adventist education. At Pentecost, the world was turned upside down by a few committed followers of Jesus. The gospel commission remains the same, “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8, KJV). Who will be the first to give—openly, freely, and without measuring the cost/benefit for individuals or institutions? Keeping the vision of a unified whole, we can move toward the mark of our high calling in Christ Jesus. ✍

This column was a collaboration between Marilyn Eggers, who is making a transition from Pacific Union Conference ATIE Director to ASI/NAD Distance Education Coordinator; Shirley Freed, Professor of Education at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan; and Janine Lim, Instructional Technology Consultant for Berrien County Intermediate School District in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For example, a recent *Adventist Review* article featured Harry Miller. See *Adventist Review* (February 10, 2000), pp. 13-15.

2. AE21 was a North American Division-sponsored three-year pilot project, with 1999/2000 being the last division-sponsored year. The Southern Union (Gerald Kovalski) has been ac-

tively directing the project with much support from the Florida Conference (Gene Brewer). Beginning next school year, it will be a Florida Conference project.

3. See <http://www.ae21.org> for more information.

4. See <http://www.silverstate.org>.

5. An outstanding example is the C.I.R.C.L.E. Project: Curriculum and Instruction Resource Center Linking Educators, <http://circle.adventist.org>, a clearinghouse of resources for Seventh-day Adventist educators, which is scheduled to begin operation later this year.

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