

Making Change for the 21st Century—AE21

BY ELAINE PLEMONS AND GREGORY THOMPSON

What would you do if you could actually make changes [in education]? What would [it] look like? Sound like? Feel like?

Teachers often talk about changing education. But what would you do if you could actually make changes? Suppose you could develop the ideas and see them carried out: What would education look like? Sound like? Feel like? Adventist Education for

the 21st Century (AE21), which originated in the Potomac Conference in 1993, grew out of just such an opportunity.

AE21 is a curriculum initiative designed to produce systematic change in curriculum, instruction, and design. Initially, two objectives were set forth for the AE21 committee:

1. To anticipate the challenges of the last part of the 20th century and the needs of the 21st century in order to develop curriculum for Adventist education.

2. To explore creative, innovative teaching methods that take advantage of new technology suitable for all schools, but particularly ones that are small and isolated from centers of Adventism.

In the four years since it was established, AE21 has far surpassed its initial goals. This past spring, the North American Division Futures Commission released its final report, FACT21, which calls for a rethinking of Adventist education at its conceptual level. Building on the best of Adventist education's past and looking forward to the demands of the next century is an essential component of the FACT21 report. AE21 offers a model for implementing FACT21's goals.

AE21 updates the principles and philosophy that have always formed the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist educational system. (See Figure 1.)

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Greg Thompson (standing), distance-learning teacher in the Florida Conference (and co-author of this article), and Larry Burton, of the Andrews University School of Education, in Berrien Springs, Michigan, work on correlating the AE21 competencies and the 78 essential core elements of the North American Division's FACT 21 report.

AE21 seeks to help students develop a dynamic, transforming faith relationship with Christ and to display mastery of the essential competencies and core skills that are fundamental to Christian education.

AE21's mission statement leads naturally into an educational system built on the harmonious development of the four domains spelled out by Ellen G. White: physical, mental, spiritual, and community. Each of the essential elements of FACT21 is represented in the competencies established for the four domains. (See Figure 2.)

Content skills (published in NAD curriculum guides) are restructured into AE21 units of study. These skills will provide the pathways teachers can use to lead students to achieve the competencies of the four domains. This will ensure that our students are equipped to meet the rigors and demands of the next century.

A Classroom of the Future

What might Adventist classrooms look like if this happens? A scenario from an article in the October 1996 issue of *Bulletin*, a publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, provides some insight:

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Students participating in a project on the Mississippi River might chart a section of the river and compare it to how the river looked 100 years ago (math and history), examine the effects that erosion has had on the river (science), develop a history of the people who lived along the river (social studies), and address issues like water rights (political science). Students would research the various topics and prepare a report to share their knowledge with others (language arts).

There are ways to develop this scenario and make it distinctly Adventist. Students become involved in the local community, thus affirming their fellow human beings amid cultural diversity (Christian

witnessing). Students might consider the issue of environmental stewardship (Bible and Christian ethics), and their personal responsibility to take care of the planet (ecology). Researching the work of Edson White and the *Morning Star* would help them understand the history and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (denominational history).

In preparing for assessment, students might choose from several options: preparing a traditional written report, presenting a computer-animated presentation, or giving a speech to classmates, family members, or neighbors. They might choose to make a video presentation and submit it to local news networks for evaluation. Regardless of the approach, the entire class's work could be made available to local newspapers and professional journals, as well as Home and School/PTA meetings and school assemblies.

Focus Areas

How do we transform today's classroom into an AE21 classroom? Seven focus areas have been developed to help fulfill AE21's vision:

1. *Preparing AE21 units of study to promote harmonious development in the*

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Dianne Hancock, principal and lower-grades teacher at the Cocoa Seventh-day Adventist School in Florida, facilitates live interaction between her students and world-renowned heart specialist Dr. Leonard Bailey via the AE21 Satellite Network.

Figure 1

AE21 Four Domain Competencies

Physical Domain

P1. The learner will commit to a balanced, healthful lifestyle, recognizing the benefits of sound physical health.

P2. The learner will understand both the physical and psychological functions of human beings, including their interconnectedness.

P3. The learner will incorporate the principles of health into daily living, as demonstrated by Christ. The principles include: exercise, fresh air and water, healthful food, rest, self-discipline, trust in God, and work.

P4. The learner will attain appropriate habits of grooming and conduct that harmonize with Seventh-day Adventist values.

P5. The learner will develop the certainty of his or her own value as a human being who was created and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and will develop an appropriate attitude of self-confidence.

P6. The learner will demonstrate Christian principles in activities that require: cooperation, teamwork, and sportsmanship.

Mental Domain

M1. The learner will continue to pursue academic excellence and mental acuity through lifelong learning experiences.

M2. The learner will exhibit mastery of language skills, including speaking, reading, writing, and listening in English and in a second language.

M3. The learner can reason from cause to effect, make appropriate, independent decisions, will demonstrate complex and creative thinking skills to analyze component elements, and will solve problems effectively.

M4. The learner will show capability in core skills, including mathematics and science. In addition, the learner can acquire useful information and have a system for organizing it.

M5. The learner will have both a sense of responsibility and a positive attitude toward work. The learner will demonstrate efficient work skills such as the ability to follow instructions, to improve existing skills, and to develop new skills. As a result, the learner will provide quality service and products.

M6. The learner will recognize the role of useful work in achieving and maintaining self-worth and self-development.

M7. The learner will demonstrate an understanding of human developmental processes of personality, temperament, and learning styles, enabling the enhancement of strengths and improvement as needed.

M8. The learner can set and achieve realistic goals.

M9. The learner will develop aesthetic appreciation.

M10. The learner will develop skills in future thinking and technological application.

M11. The learner will experience the power in studying God's Word to develop and broaden the intellect.

Spiritual Domain

S1. The learner will develop a transformational relationship with Jesus Christ through study, prayer, reflection, and interaction with others that result in self-worth and the assurance of personal salvation.

S2. The learner will take personal responsibility for his or her own actions, integrating the core dimensions of faith and life; trust in God's saving grace, and the divinity/humanity of Jesus Christ and their application to day-to-day experiences.

S3. The learner will choose to function as a Christian in whatever environment is present, and will value and affirm fellow human beings amid cultural and religious diversity.

S4. The learner will demonstrate the ability to articulate Christian concepts based upon Scripture, and can differentiate between moral principles and cultural standards.

S5. The learner will possess an understanding of the history and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, including Ellen G. White's role as God's messenger shown through her inspired writings.

S6. The learner will reveal a desire to participate actively with a community of believers in support.

Community Domain

C1. The learner will develop skills for achieving and maintaining economic well-being.

C2. The learner will develop and use his or her understanding of congregation, community, and world economy systems to actively support social and global change.

C3. The learner will comprehend the principles of group dynamics and can participate both as a follower and a leader.

C4. The learner will effectively process and use pertinent information to improve the quality of life in the community.

C5. The learner will comprehend and participate in government processes.

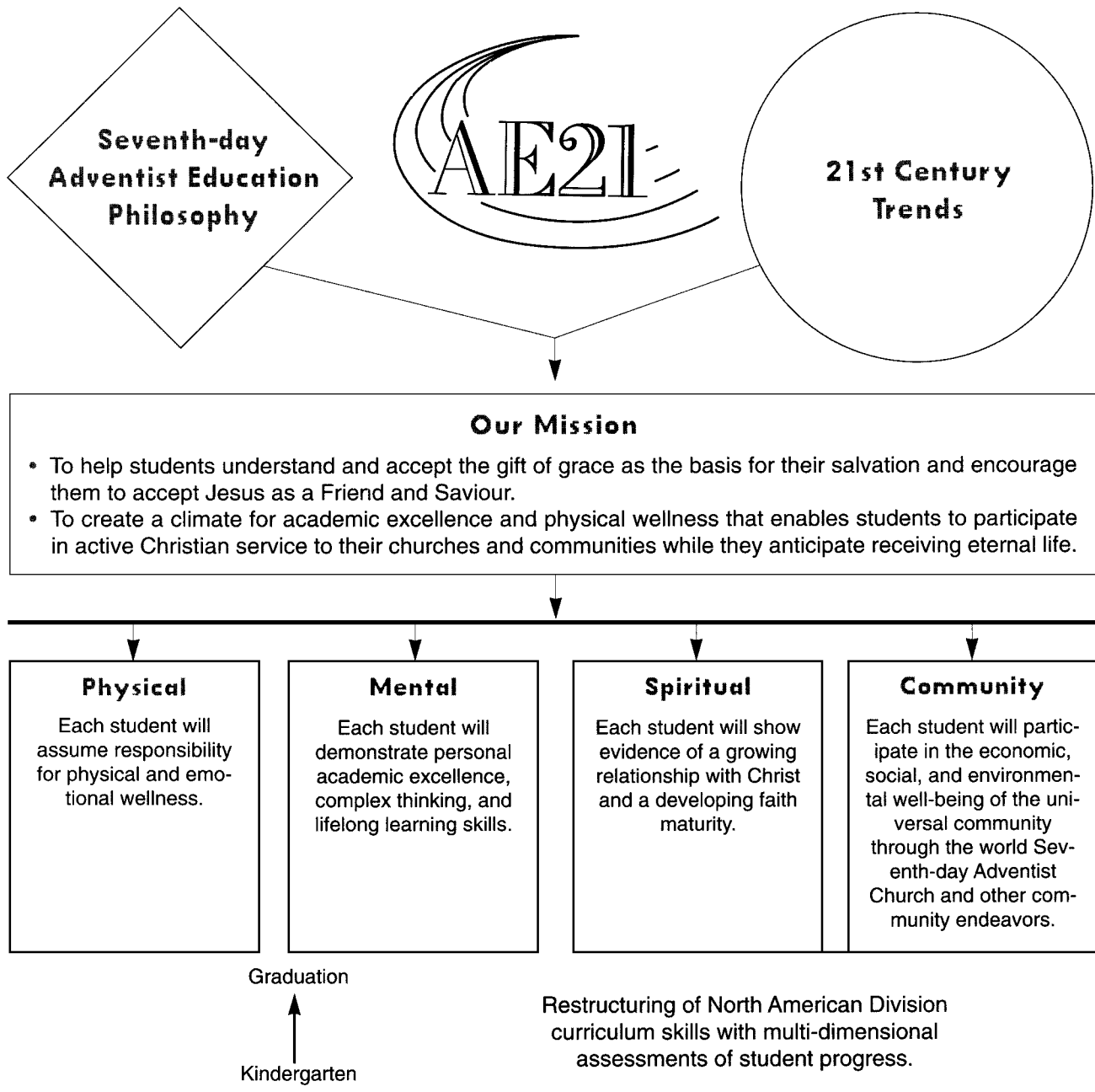
C6. The learner will demonstrate fluency in a non-birth [secondary] language.

C7. The learner will assume an active role in nurturing and preserving the ecological balance of our planet.

C8. The learner will make life choices that reflect God's ideal for the family.

Figure 2

Adventist Education for the 21st Century



four domains. Each unit will combine several academic disciplines in an integrated project or problem-solving-based structure. To integrate faith and learning throughout, service and outreach will form both the starting point and natural culmination of each unit of study.

2. *Interweaving technological advancements throughout AE21.* It is criti-

cal that Adventist schools develop plans to acquire and use technology in their classrooms. Technology must be used on its own terms to transform education, rather than being tacked on to traditional approaches to teaching. Students need to be able to use a multitude of communication technologies to improve productivity, acquire and manage information,

display knowledge and understanding, and spread the gospel to the world.

Using services available through the Educational Management Group (EMG), schools in a number of conferences in the southeastern United States have begun to redesign their curriculum, classrooms, schedules, and structures. Using technology to rethink education has brought

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many positive changes. Here is what has happened in one school, which jumped into the opportunity with both feet:

West Coast Junior Academy (WCJA), in Bradenton, Florida, began working with EMG satellite technology in January 1997. The teachers reworked existing teaching plans from the bottom up. As they used electronic field trips and live interactions with experts in the fields of hydraulics, space exploration, physics, history, and

art, the curriculum began to grow in new ways, connecting with the students on a very personal level. Often, the interactions led directly to learning experiences on the Internet and other activities using several different types of technology. One of the most exciting interactions was a discussion between a prominent American geneticist and students about the ramifications of current advances in cloning.

Acquiring and using technology requires a serious commitment. Once embarked upon, it cannot be reversed. In the words of Peggy Flynt, principal of West Coast Junior Academy, "We have given our students the world. We can't take it back."

3. *Developing every aspect of students' lives, including their characters.* Cooperation between home, school, and church will help each student to attain the highest standards of moral and scholastic excellence. The home and church must also understand the crucial balance that is needed among these three influences on our young people's lives. All three share a sacred responsibility for developing each student's moral character and Christian

values.

4. *Ensuring the integrity of the vision of AE21 by addressing individual student needs.* As teachers develop integrated units of study, they must consider how students learn. By effectively utilizing the strengths and intelligences of each student, they will ensure that within each unit, students can shine in their preferred learning style. At the same time, teachers must help students learn in ways that are not as easy or comfortable. This approach produces multi-dimensional problem-solvers who develop the essential competencies of the four domains.

Within AE21, teachers will build inclusive classrooms, consciously adapting the learning environment and lesson design for special-needs students, whether learning disabled or gifted. All Adventist children should be welcomed and nurtured in an AE21 classroom.

5. *Achieving the goals of AE21 through dynamic and realistic assessment.* To ensure that students, teachers, and parents get an accurate picture, students will be tested in some traditional ways. They will also engage in performance/demonstration assessments and prepare standard or electronic portfolios. Assessment will be designed to measure higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as objectives in the affective and psychomotor areas of the four domains. Students will be encouraged to establish personal goals to use in striving for mastery of the various competencies.

6. *Emphasizing staff development, which is crucial to the success of AE21.* Teachers will need permission to change. Some may also need encouragement to begin the process. People often resist change because they misunderstand its goals or receive inadequate time and support to achieve it. Time is paramount. Teachers need to be given realistic amounts of time to be trained, to practice new models and methods, and to receive coaching from colleagues and experts. They also need freedom and support to bring the changes into their classrooms and to develop them successfully.

Administrators need to encourage change and to participate in the process of redesigning education. This includes adopting policies that support and provide resources (especially time) for staff

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Judy Anderson, of the Andrews University School of Education, works on units of study. The competency matrix chart is behind her.

development. They can encourage innovation and creativity by allowing teachers to make professional decisions about their classrooms. Resources will need to be redirected toward active, dynamic learning opportunities for students.

7. *Establishing educational partnerships that provide an emotional foundation for the mission of AE21.* A critical three-way partnership between the home, the school, and the community will provide the personal support for students to achieve their goals. Strong partnerships between the business community (including Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries) and our schools will bring indispensable benefits to AE21 in equipping students for the careers of the future.

How do we achieve the goals proposed by AE21? Change is never easy. It takes place in a number of significant areas: vision, constituent support, teaching and learning, administration, and policy. Each area changes at a different rate. However, they all need to be brought along at relatively the same speed, or the change process will stall. AE21 has given special attention to the movement of change in all of the affected areas.

Unless Adventist education begins now to prepare for life in the 21st century, many of our students will leave our system ill-equipped to meet the physical, mental, spiritual, and community demands of a world that is changing at a blinding speed. God has led in the development of the AE21 vision from the very beginning. He has blessed the work of those who have maintained a focus on the harmonious development of the four domains of each student's life.

During these last days of earth's history, we can prepare our students to "finish the work" given to our church. By following the path set out by AE21, we can fit them for the 21st century and for eternity. ✍

Note: To obtain the working documents used in the development, contact Elaine Plemons at the Florida Conference Office of Education, P.O. Box 2626, Winter Park, FL 32790-2626, U.S.A.

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the AE21 Small Schools Distance Learning Pilot Project, the prototype or first model of the vision of AE21, which will operate during the 1997-1998 school year. His "school" extends from Oregon to Florida (with stops in South Dakota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia). He writes from Winter Park, Florida.

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The AE21 curriculum development team, which includes principals, teachers, education professors, and conference superintendents of education, works to integrate the North American Curriculum Guide skills into the new units of study.