

TECHNOLOGY FOR LEARNING

A New Look at Individualized Instruction

Home Study International

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public school setting have been initiated by parent demand. The Disabilities Act came about because committed parents were seeking resources for their children's special needs. When Adventist parents collectively want change, it will come. But it will take

effort and time."

Many teachers are constantly looking for innovative ways to reach learning-disabled students and those with special needs. One way Adventist educators are now finding resources is through PLATO®, a courseware curriculum library using CD-ROM technology. Based on the educational vision of Plato, the Greek philosopher and educator, this software program was founded to enhance comprehensive learning in the traditional school.

Home Study International first launched this program in Adventist schools in September 1994 in order to provide an academic tool for SDA schools and to enrich the school curriculum. More than 30 Adventist schools are currently using PLATO®, averaging two CD-ROM units in each school.

"The advantages I see in PLATO® are that the instructions can be individualized to a particular student, it is mastery based,

How do you cope with a ninth-grade foreign student who lacks basic language skills when he arrives in your school? Or a learning-disabled 12th grader who struggles with basic math skills? In many cases, such students fall behind other pupils and never fully catch up because many Adventist schools lack the tools needed to help them.

Valerie Smith, associate director of the Center for Lifelong Learning at La Sierra University in Riverside, California, has often faced this problem. "It has been said, 'Where there's a will, there's a thousand ways; if not, there are a thousand excuses.' Resources in Adventist education are often small. The bottom line seems to be that if parents and teachers want something badly enough, they'll get it. But it may take a fight. Most of the major changes in the

BY CATIA CARVALHO-MILLS

it covers the entire general curriculum, and is not only remedial but is also beneficial to the gifted and talented student as well," says Larry D. Blackmer, associate superintendent of education for the Michigan Conference. "I also feel that this software package will allow small schools to augment their curriculum with classes such as calculus. This is not, in my opinion, a novelty-type program that comes and goes, but a viable supplement to the traditional curriculum."

HSI is excited about the opportunity to help improve Adventist education by maximizing the use of technology in the classroom. PLATO[®] offers more than 2,000 lessons and 4,700 learning objectives in diverse areas such as language arts, math, science, life skills, and computer awareness. It provides a curricular approach to computer-based learning and individualized instruction. Schools currently using PLATO[®] can design it to be an enhancing tool that provides teachers with alternatives to help "at-risk," learning-disabled, and gifted students. To meet critical requirements, this curriculum library incorporates two essential components of effective computer-based education: Computer-assisted instruction presents the course content to the student, while computer-managed instruction routes the child through the lessons and tests and provides the instructor with comprehensive progress reports.

Teachers can benefit from the program in two key areas: They can maximize their effectiveness in the classroom as the computer does some of the teaching, and they can expand their lesson plans by using the PLATO[®] curriculum guides.

Eileen Pilliner is the principal and seventh- and eighth-grade teacher at Shiloh SDA School in Ocala, Florida, one of the first SDA schools to purchase PLATO[®] units in September 1994. By using an overhead computer screen, she uses the PLATO[®] lessons in her teaching. After each quiz or test, Eileen determines which stu-

dents need to be assigned to work on the computer. "The students beg me to stay after school and work on PLATO[®]," says Pilliner, "whereas before they couldn't wait to get out of the classroom. I have seen the difference it can make in the students' attitude toward learning." Shiloh SDA School now has four units, one in each classroom.

"My students are making fantastic progress because of PLATO[®]. Our best results have come from a foreign student whose English skills have greatly improved with the use of the Basic Language Arts curriculum," says Steve Dickman, principal at Harbert Hills Academy, a self-supporting school in Savannah, Tennessee. His school has been able to add to the curriculum and to help high school seniors prepare for the ACT test by taking a preparatory course available through PLATO[®].

Chester Clark, a teacher at Valley Christian Academy in southern California, is finding PLATO[®] especially helpful for at-risk students who are preparing to take the high school

equivalency (GED) test. "We are using PLATO[®] for three main areas: assessment, remedial help, and preparation for national standardized tests," says Clark.

Without question, PLATO[®] is beneficial to teachers in many areas. However, Adventist schools do face a challenge in raising the funds. PLATO[®] is sold to the government for \$10,000—which includes staging of the computer, training of faculty, travel cost, and software. However, because of various donations, the program has been sold to Adventist schools for \$3,000. In November of 1994, a Southern Union donor provided matching funds to install 30 units within the territory, making it possible for these schools to purchase the program for \$1,500. Some of the schools involved with the program are Georgia-Cumberland Academy, Greater Atlanta Adventist Academy, and Southern College of SDA.

HSI is working on grant proposals

so that donors will provide assistance in other unions. "Our goal is to make PLATO® affordable to any Adventist school that has expressed an interest," says Robert Burnette, HSI director of institutional advancement. After suc-


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cessfully installing the program in Adventist schools. HSI will help other Christian institutions to purchase PLATO®.

There is a growing demand for alternative modes of education, as many schools face the challenges of losing students because of lack of academic resources and of teaching an increasingly diverse population. As the Adventist educational system begins to incorporate alternate modes of instruction through technology and looks for new ways of enhancing traditional learning, firsthand experience will be the only indicator of how this can help students improve academically. Thus far, students and teachers are enjoying these tools, which make learning easier and assist students who need special help in order to learn. ❧

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in Columbia, Maryland, shows Kimberly Tatum some of the fine points of using the PLATO® program.