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INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS IN ADVENTIST DISTANCE EDUCATION:

OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

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Introduction

It has been estimated that there are currently around ten million
students taking degree courses at a distance in the world, and a similar
number using distance education methods for other areas and levels of
study. In the USSR alone, it is reported (Kaye, 1988) that there are
about 1,200 distance-teaching institutions catering for over 1.5 million
students (30% of USSR's tertiary education enrolment) taking higher
education courses at a distance. An even greater percentage - 40% or one
million students - of China's university population were, in 1988,
taking courses at a distance. And, according to Babcock (1988, 37),
"more than 70 million Americans have studied by mail" since 1900, and
there are currently in the United States some seventy conventional
universities that offer courses at a distance to around 150,000 students
each year.

The above information indicates that Distance Education is being accepted
more and more around the world as an alternative to the conventional
face-to-face method of teaching. Laverty (1988, 202), for example,
reports that "distance education is (today) considered by many
educationists and governments, not only to be an alternative mode of
tertiary education, but also to be a mode which fills a particular niche
in the national education system". Kaye (1988, 44) makes a similar
observation when he states that "distance education is now seen as an
effective, appropriate, and acceptable method of extending educational
opportunities in a wide range of countries and contexts". Many examples
can be cited of the success of distance education in both developed and

developing nations around the world, and its acceptance in government

and academic circles. However, for the purpose of this paper it will

suffice to point out that distance education is a recognized alternative

teaching method, one that is rapidly gaining favor as governments and

educational institutions face the realism of budgetary restrictions.

Distance Education In the Adventist School System

If distance education has come of age and gained acceptance and

repectability in different countries and universities, it is commendable

that the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church as an education system

recognizes the real potentials this alternative teaching method has in

meeting the desperate need of educating the thousands in Third World

countries that are joining the ranks of the SDA church every week.

"Because of the high cost of traditional education," says Babcock,

former President of Home Study International based in the United States,

"the only hope for an Adventist education in these countries lies in the

creation of cost-efficient and fully accredited distance education

programs." (1988, 37).

In discussing the growth of distance education in the SDA church in the

United States, Babcock points out that there are three SDA colleges that

currently offer degrees entirely at a distance, except for short residen-

tial components each year. The three institutions are South-western

Adventist College, Columbia Union College, and Atlantic Union College.

In the South Pacific Division of the SDA Church, Pacific Adventist

College (PAC) in Papua New Guinea presently offers distance education

courses at grade 11/12 level to help church workers (and others) who had

not done Grade 12, to matriculate and thereby gain entrance to PAC.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is (1) to outline the unique role that

distance education can play in integrating faith and learning, and, (2),

to point out where Adventist distance educators may need to take caution

in their attempt to bring about this integration through the use of

instructional materials. A few actual examples of how PAC has attempted

to integrate faith and learning in its distance education program are

included in the Appendix. But firstly we need a clarification of the

term distance education.

Definition

Distance education refers to a method of formal teaching that is

characterized by little or no face to face interaction between the

teacher and the learner, and by the use of carefully prepared and highly

structured instructional materials. Communication between the learner

and the instructor is usually through the mail. Typically, course

materials are sent to the student, who goes through the material and

does the assignment/s, and then sends the assignment/s to the instructor

or tutor for marking. Detailed comments are written on these by the

marker before posting them back to the student. Instructor comments are

usually phrased to give positive reinforcement and encouragement to

students, who sometimes come together for group instruction, but who, on

the whole, work on their own.

Distance Education and Integration

Distance education presents Adventist educators with a unique

opportunity to integrate faith and learning by offering students Christ-

centred instructional materials. The uniqueness of this opportunity lies

in the manner in which the elements of faith and learning are 'packaged' in the printed and recorded materials. Usually in conventional classroom teaching, the integration of faith and learning, if it happens at all, is done in an ad hoc and incidental fashion. This is not meant to be a criticism of this method of integration of faith and learning. In the conventional high school/college classroom, religion that comes over as planned and orchestrated will often sound phony and insincere - it tends to put young people off! Thus, teachers are not left with too many options but to integrate faith and learning in this incidental manner. So much of what teachers decide to do or not do in the classroom is decided by the attitude, the mood, and readiness or otherwise of students. This means, in effect, that teachers bide their time - and the opportunity might not eventuate lesson after lesson, sometimes day after day!

However, this is not a problem with distance education. By its very nature, distance education demands that instructional materials be closely structured, appropriately sequenced, and clearly presented. In their comparative study of classroom and correspondence students, Kahl and Cropley (1986) report that distance learners "have a strong preference for teaching and learning materials which are clear, explicit, and highly structured". Says Kaye (1988, 47):

> There is a world of difference between a teacher preparing handouts
> and overheads for classroom use, where problems of comprehension
> can be dealt with on the spot, and the development of mediated
> learning materials for people studying in isolation, where there is
> no help immediately available.

In many cases the instructional material is practically all that the student really has. Thus the need for a deliberately planned and structured design.

If the integration of faith and learning in the conventional classroom is ad hoc and incidental with the concomitant risk that it might not happen at all for long stretches of time, the same cannot be said of distance education where it can be deliberately planned into the writing of instructional materials. In distance education, course writers are urged to "weave in humor, cartoons and wit" so that study materials will take on a new color (Dewal, 1988: 68). For the Christian course writer in distance education this is his golden opportunity to plan well so that he can also weave in Christian "messages" at appropriate times and places in the course boolets, tapes and other study materials.

Whereas the classroom teacher has to bide his time and look for opportunities which may or may not present themselves, the distance educator's opportunities for Christian witness are virtually unrestricted. His desire and opportunities to drop a seed here and another there are not delimited by the mood of the class, or teacher-student relationships. While he may not be forceful or formal in his attempt to integrate faith and learning, seed sowing is nevertheless planned and deliberate. And it actually happens. The "Note" in Appendix 1 (third paragraph), and the fifth paragraph in Appendix 2 (both pages come from two different PAC courses) may serve to illustrate this apparently casual but nevertheless planned Christian witness. Distance education is one area in pedagogy where the planned lesson and the delivered lesson are identical. This is very rarely achieved in regular face-to-face teaching where much of what the teacher plans or wishes to get across is often sabotaged by student reactions and other unforeseen circumstances.

In the conventional classroom situation the class is largely in control of the "opportune times" for Christian seed sowing. In distance education, on the other hand, the course writer is in complete control of the situation, and can therefore create the mood and the climate for his Christian witness as part of the entire plan for each course unit he writes. Appendix 3, and Appendix 4, pages from two different PAC distance education English courses, will help clarify this point.

The examples above also point out another feature that adds to the effectiveness of the distance education (DE) medium in integrating faith and learning. I refer to the fact that DE instructional materials are generally in a form that permits constant and ready review. There may be a re-reading of a text, or the replaying of a casette. DE courses thus have the potential to reiterate -- time and time again and for any new interests who may become exposed to the materials -- such aspects of Christian faith and living as have been woven into the courses.

Other ways in which distance education can enhance the integration of faith and learning include the following:

* DE materials have the potential to reach a larger audience than the original target group, and to continue doing so for long periods. Whereas the intended target group may be those who are actually doing a course, DE materials have the potential to get read or heard by many others who may get exposed to them. This potential exists as long as the materials are readable/audible.

* DE instructional materials are rarely linked to any particular person or teacher, and so there is little likelihood that the personality of the teacher will adversely affect the presentation of the

material, as may occur in the conventional classroom if the teacher is perceived by his/her students to be inconsistent and/or insincere.

* A person working through DE materials usually does so alone, a situation that is perhaps more conducive to the working of God's Spirit and to a close, personal reflection.

* DE materials tend to convey something of the prestige and ethos of the institution behind them. There is much in the name "Seventh-day Adventist" that can convey a positive impression.

* DE instructional materials are readily edited for scriptural soundness and Seventh-day Adventist orthodoxy.

Clearly distance education has unique ways to integrate faith and learning. Many of these opportunities are tied to the fact that DE instructional materials are under the complete control of the distance education course writer who deals with the material in almost any way he chooses, depending on his philosophy of life. This, then, becomes a real strength for distance education.   However, let me sound a note of warning here. The greatest strength of distance education in relation to the integration of faith and learning can well also become its greatest weakness. The fact that the course writer is in complete control of the "what", as well as the "how" and the "how much", and the "when" and the "why", of Christian witness, calls for the exercise of the highest form of responsibility and sensitivity.   Hence the use of "responsibility" in the title of this paper. Overwork and overeating can kill just as surely as no work and starvation. Similarly intemperance in one's attempt to integrate faith and learning even in DE instructional materials, can be as disastrous as or more so than the neglect to do this Christian witness.

My point is that while distance education affords excellent and unique opportunities for the integration of faith and learning because of its inherent nature, there exists also a potential pitfall we must guard against or we can be accused of indoctrination. In this connection, the words of Ian Ramage (1967, 15) seem particularly relevant. He points out that:

> there are methods of 'evangelism' and ways of trying to bring about conversions, that are not very different either in principle or in basic technique, from brainwashing and indoctrination. ...What we urgently need ...is some clearer understanding of the principles involved, so that we may distinguish confidently between legitimate and illegitimate methods of evangelism, and know how to use the one without fear of falling into the other.

The following elements may be helpful thought material for the Adventist distance education course writer as he considers what may be legitimate methods of evangelim (in the context of integration of faith and learning), and as he aims to be responsible. They are balance and appropriateness, naturalness, sensitivity and moderation. All of these require subjective evaluation and the course writer must necessarily rely on his own discretion and good judgment. However, he should not try to make a decision on these matters until he has made it a matter of prayer so that the Holy Spirit will guide him in his attempt to integrate Christian values into his course writing.

Balance and Appropriateness

How much Christian witness should become part of a course in Accounting or English or Geography etc? Is it really appropriate in this context?

Naturalness

Is my Christianity natural or artificial? Does my Christian witness in this page have a 'natural fit' or does it appear stark and intrusive?

Is there a smooth integration of faith and learning? Is it sincere?

Sensitivity and Moderation

How will students react to this form of Christian witness? How many might get offended by it? Have I been intemperate and overdone it?

These and similar questions may be helpful as the course writer prayerfully considers the best strategies in integrating faith and learning.

Conclusion

Distance education has been around for centuries. However its acceptance by academics and other educationists in a worldwide context is a new phenomenon. It is envisaged that this alternative method of teaching will become more prominent in Adventist education in the future. Distance education presents some excellent and unique opportunities for integrating faith and learning, opportunities that are often denied the regular classroom teacher because of circumstances often beyond his control. These valuable opportunities to feature and integrate Christian values in the construction of course materials must be handled with care and responsibility, and with prayer. Treated thus, we can look forward with confidence to the fulfilment of the words, 'Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and they who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever' (Daniel 12:3).

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2 **ESTABLISH YOUR OWN READING PROGRAM**

A useful reading program that you may care to follow
is outlined in four steps below:

A suggested
Reading Program

1 <u>Make a list of suitable books to read.</u> The number of titles
that you include is up to you, and will depend on what books
are available to you. An initial list of ten books or so is
adequate. You can always add to the list later on.
Is there a public library near you? If so, visit it and
discuss your program with the librarian. The librarian will
be able to suggest certain books that might suit you, and you
can add them to your list. Your friends may be willing to loan
books to you and you can also add these titles to your list.
The purpose of the list is simply to have a reference of titles
that are available to you. The list will also encourage you
to keep up with the reading program.

NOTE: When you select books for your reading program,
you should be careful that the books are suitable.
Christians should always be careful about what they read.

2 Plan to read at least one book a fortnight. Begin TODAY.

3 While reading each book you should do the following:

* When you come across an unfamiliar word, first try to
establish its meaning from the context. Then check your
dictionary to confirm the word's meaning. Write any new
words and their meanings into a notebook. This will help
you to remember these new words.

* Choose an interesting person from the story and be prepared
to write a few comments about this person after you have
finished the book.

* Choose at least one major or exciting event from the story
and be prepared to describe it briefly in your own words
after you have finished the story.

* Be thinking about your own reaction to the story and to how
it is written. When you finish the book you should be able
to say whether you enjoyed it or not, and give your reasons.

A Book Review
form will guide
your reading

4 After you finish a book you should complete a *Book Review*
form on which you will write about the important character,
the exciting event, and your own reactions to the story.
You should then post the completed form to PAC for marking.
Try to read at least one book for each unit of this course.
In this way you will be able to post your Book Review form
at the same time that you post your regular EFM exercises.

NOTE: You will have received a number of Book Review forms
with your course materials. If your supply gets low, please
let us know and we will send you some more.

4   From: Preliminary English

THE RHETORICAL FACTOR

Rhetoric is the art of speaking or writing effectively; it is the
art of persuasion. You already know a great deal about rhetoric
for you are using it all the time. Let me give you an example.
Imagine that a young child -- a relative of yours -- has fallen
down and hurt himself, and you go to comfort him. Your words are
suitably soothing and your voice reflects a tender concern for
the child as you hug him warmly. Now imagine that the same child
has just disobeyed you, deliberately and wilfully. Although your
love and concern for the child is unchanged, will you use the
same soothing words and soft tone as before? I somehow doubt it!
There will be a new firmness in your words and voice that wasn't
there earlier. [And that warm hug might give way to a warm pat
on the backside!]

In a sense, rhetoric must see before it can speak. It will first
assess the particular situation (the accident; the disobedience),
the audience (the hurt child; the naughty child), and your role*
in relation to the situation and audience (comforter; reprover).
Only then can it speak purposefully, appropriately, and clearly.

The ultimate purpose of rhetoric is to convey, as CONVINCINGLY as
possible, a specific message to a specific audience for a specific
reason. In your imagined contacts with the child you used rhetoric
to modify and sharpen the meaning of your words so that a precise
message was delivered and, hopefully, received. The keener this
rhetorical factor, the more certain and comprehensible the message.

We asked you earlier to jot down a few thoughts in answer to the
question: What are the basic qualities of good writing? Well,
if good writing results from good rhetoric, then I would suggest
that the most significant quality of good writing is CONVINCINGNESS.
Writing may be clear and polished; it may be stirring and grand;
but if it fails to convince <u>and move you</u>, then as far as you are
concerned it has failed as good writing. Good writing will reach
out and touch its audience and effect a change in that audience.

A thought has just occurred to me: Jesus, who has reached out and
touched countless people and brought changes to their lives, is
also known as the Word of God. He is the living, convincing, and
convicting Word, God's rhetoric made flesh.

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* The role adopted by a writer in relation to any particular
  writing situation is sometimes called the writer's "persona".
  "Persona" comes from a Latin word for the masks worn by actors
  and actresses in ancient classical drama. These masks identi-
  fied the particular roles being assumed by the actors and thus
  helped to guide the audience's understanding of the action.

LESSON 1   READING, READING, READING

Lesson 1 stresses the importance of words as the basis of language and encourages you to build a wide vocabulary and to establish a habit of reading. A suggested reading program is outlined, and the lesson concludes with a discussion on dictionary usage.

Your objectives for this lesson are:

☐1 to appreciate the value of wide and frequent reading;

☐2 to begin, and to be determined to follow, a reading program;

☐3 to establish the habit of consulting a dictionary whenever you come across an unfamiliar word.

☐1   THE IMPORTANCE OF *WORDS* - THE IMPORTANCE OF *READING*

'In the beginning was the Word.' With these words John opened his account of the life of Christ, words which form a suitable title for the first unit of your English course. The comparison between Christ the Word and the words of language is a strong one. Just as Christ the Word is the beginning of all things, as well as the basis of all revelation, so words are the beginning and basis of language.

Build a strong vocabulary

As you continue your studies, especially in this English course, you should become familiar with as many English words as you can. KNOW them; know their different shades of meaning; know where and how to use them. A happy discovery awaits you. The more words that you know, and the more sure your use of them, the greater your understanding of new material will be, the clearer your own thinking, and the more confident and fluent you will be as you communicate your ideas and thoughts to others.

Establish the Reading Habit

An excellent way to increase your vocabulary is to read widely and frequently. If you are not already in the habit of reading, you should quickly develop that habit. Here are five hints that may help you acquire the reading habit:

1 Be CONVINCED that reading will help you to master English.
Have you heard of the writer, Joseph Conrad?
His writings are among the finest in the English language, and yet his own language was Polish.
He knew no English until, as a young man in the navy, he began to read English newspapers and books.
Through constant reading he became fluent in English.
If Conrad could do it, then so can you.

2 Approach all reading with PURPOSE.
Your main purpose in reading is to become fluent in English, but you should also have a particular purpose for each piece of reading that you do.

1

From: Preliminary English

A 'Amidst the tumult about the cross, as the two thieves writhed
   in agony and a mob railed below, the centurion lunged forward
   and thrust his spear into the side of the now dead Christ.
   Some who watched jeered even louder, while others averted their
   faces and wept within. A darkness, the darkness of the grave,
   descended over Calvary.'

B 'Men and women, soldiers and citizens, gathered around the crosses
   where Christ and the two thieves hung. A soldier raised his spear
   and pierced the side of Christ, and this aroused the mockery of
   some and the pity of othersd. A dark shadow seemed to hover over
   them all.'

Note: This excerpt, and the illustration opposite, are from a
       section in the English course which deals with tone in
       writing. Students are asked to identify the emotional
       mood of the picture and then to say which of the two
       paragraphs (either A or B) best conveys the mood of the
       picture. An audio cassette accompanies this section,
       presenting various pieces of music, each in a different
       mood. The basic aim of the section is to illustrate mood
       in language by comparing it with the mood in pictures and
       music.

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