

Learning Technology

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The saying, *You can't teach an old dog new tricks*, continues to resound in my ears. However, I have learned that *you* can teach an old dog new tricks!! Who would have imagined that a person in their 4th decade of life, would ever accomplish what I can with technology. This is a long story, so I will start at the beginning.

Three years ago the school where I taught didn't qualify for a government grant. We were faced with closure unless we could develop a plan to boost school finances. A school board member remembered that we could obtain funding if we signed up with a Distributed Learning school that taught students via the Internet. Having no other option available, the school board decided to sign up. I never dreamed how much good would follow that initial step. *All things work together for good to them that love the Lord.*

Romans 8:28

Because of that fateful move 3 years ago, when the BC conference made a decision to start a Distributed Learning school, I was their only teacher with first hand experience. Consequently, I got the job, then started the tedious journey of learning the nuts and bolts of launching a Distance Learning school.

There were several technologies that needed to be learned immediately, including running a website, working in a virtual classroom and maintaining a learning platform. To complicate matters each of these areas offered several choices!!!

The first task was to decide what the website should look like. I needed it simple for me to update as well as user friendly for parents (kids have no problems with websites). Finally, we opted for the program, *simple-updates*. I was surprised to learn the program is almost as easy to operate as a word processor. Anything in the white areas of the website I can change without having to use *html* codes. It did not take long to have this user friendly website in operation. The next important task was to make sure the website was always updated. To get a picture of what this site looks like check out the West Coast Adventist School website. - adventistdlbc.org

The second challenge was to find a program that would display student work, quizzes, and other class info on the web. Again there were several options to choose from that varied in price from free to very expensive. One of the best options was a program called *Desire2Learn*. If you have taken a course from *AVLN* you have used *Desire2Learn*. It works well. Other good programs were *WebCT* and *Blackboard*. They all have different features and you get to decide what features are right for your school. However, we were cutting cost so we chose to use *Moodle* for our start up year because it is free on the Internet and works well. For me, however, it was still a steep learning curve to uplink tests, videos, class assignments, chat rooms, forums and other student learning material. You will see *Moodle* on the school website, however, it is password protected for student material privacy and copyright laws.

Finally, I was faced with the challenge of deciding what to use for *real time* communications. Another list of complicated choices now faced me, so I decided to attend a seminar that featured several of those choices. It all came down to deciding what features are important for your school. I chose to go with *Elluminate* because of its capability of feeding slow connections and fast connections together without having to have 2 separate phone lines for the dial-up connections. Some of the virtual classrooms require students on dial-up to have two lines, one for the computer (to see inside the classroom) and one for the telephone (to communicate inside the classroom).

Inside the virtual classroom you have an interactive whiteboard, text messaging center, and student control center. The interactive whiteboard can show power points, flash videos, and web tours. The students enjoy interacting with power point programs by using pointing tools and writing tools. This makes it easy to point out an important fact or to ask questions about a particular detail. The text-messaging center can be used during the session and there is no need to interrupt the presenter. The students can text each other or the teacher (the teacher sees all messages) with questions or insights. The student control center is a fun thing to have and I know teachers would enjoy having this in their classroom. In the student control center the teacher can see who is text messaging, who is writing on the whiteboard, who is talking and who is using the webcam. The most amazing thing about this center is that with a click of your mouse you can take privileges away from a student. If they are talking too much, you can mute them, or if they are writing silly statements on the whiteboard, you take away that privilege. This doesn't happen often, but I do have a Kindergartener who enjoys drawing on my power point presentations. One click in the control center takes care of that. He can continue to draw, but nobody else can see it.

In today's fast paced high tech world, learning must not stop here. There are always new programs to choose and new technologies to learn. Never in the world of Education have students had so many choices. We need to be on the cutting edge of technology to encourage our students to choose an Adventist Christian Education. For many Adventist parents and children, especially in areas where there are no traditional Adventist Educational options, Distributed Learning is the answer! Let us all do what we can to offer and utilize this option. You will then agree with me, that you can teach an *old* dog new tricks!!