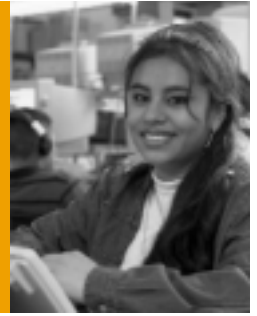


A Variety of Educational Applications: A Principal's Vision for PLATO Learning

by Ian Jones, Principal, Milton District High School, Milton, Ontario



My experience with PLATO Learning began with the extensive work I did as a resource teacher at North Albion Collegiate Institute in Etobicoke, Ontario. I have seen PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware in action, and I am confident it is applicable and flexible in many different educational situations. My experiences led me to develop an outline for a district's pilot project with PLATO Learning.

Regular school day

The first application of PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware is during the regular day school. School districts have the choice of delivering the software to their schools via a server or the Internet, giving 24/7 anytime anywhere access to students. Teachers can use the courseware as an extra resource to support students' daily class work or to assist students in content areas where they are experiencing difficulty or in specific topics they may have missed in class. Teachers can also use PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware in a resource lab setting to augment class lessons one to two days a week. Students always have access to the system on their own time.

Special education

PLATO Learning is an excellent choice for Special Education, and this is where I have the most personal experience with the system. Many school districts are increasing class size. At the same time, the number of special education teachers is decreasing, and the number of students with special needs is increasing. PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware can be a key application for special needs

students. Special Education teachers who have visited schools using PLATO Learning courseware in this way are impressed with what the students can do and the progress they are making.

Home-based instruction due to disciplinary issues

PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware is also useful in situations where students are excluded from school due to disciplinary suspensions or expulsions. Schools can utilize the Internet so students can access courses from home. This enables students on long-term exclusions from the classroom to continue their studies. There are many occasions on which I would like to have been able to tell parents that while their son or daughter could not come to our building for a specified number of days, he or she could keep up with the coursework using PLATO Learning software over the Internet. By working with teachers, districts can set up independent study courses that go a long way toward keeping students connected to school and earning credits. Much of the

research on school dropout prevention indicates that, whatever interventions are put in place, earning credits is the most important facet. PLATO Learning courseware can enable districts to meet this goal without putting huge expectations on the teacher – both for delivery, assessment and evaluation.

Home-based instruction due to medical reasons

Right now, school districts spend a significant amount of money providing home instruction for students who are absent due to medical reasons. Often, sending a teacher to visit the home is not the best solution to this issue. Last year in my district, a high school junior was diagnosed with leukemia just before Christmas. He underwent treatment in early January and was very ill as a result of intense chemotherapy and radiation treatments. We arranged for home instruction for thirty weeks with two sessions per week. Unfortunately, when the teacher arrived for the scheduled instruction the student was often too sick to do anything. Yet his parents told me that many times he was in much better condition later in the evening, and quite prepared and willing to do his school work. However, obviously the teacher was not "on call" to return when he improved. Had this student been able to access his coursework online, he could have continued his home instruction when he was feeling well, saving the district the cost of a visiting teacher program while improving his learning opportunities.

Literacy issues

PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware is an excellent resource for students having difficulty passing the Ontario

Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), a high stakes province-wide test students must pass in order to graduate. As staffing pressures increase, it is becoming more and more difficult to run a separate course for students who need intensive remedial courses. However, by connecting them to the resource lab, they can work through the programs provided by PLATO Learning that are specifically written to target these students. Students can spend as much time on the course as they need, working at home as well as at school, and at their own pace and comfort level. This situation helps avoid the stigma of being in the "dummies" class, since no one but the student and teacher know what is on the computer screen and why.

Learning continuity

PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware is ideal for creating and maintaining learning continuity between the elementary school and high school. A PLATO Instructional Solutions program can begin as a stand-alone system in an elementary or middle school computer lab. Students working on reading and math skills in elementary school can continue where they left off when they get to higher grades. There is no greater way to increase the flow of information and build a better link between elementary and secondary education than around a student's learning. Students have a seamless transition to high school.

When several departments at the school district level work in conjunction with the efforts at the school level, PLATO Learning courseware can be as a significant tool in the hands of educators.