BIBLE LEARNING THROUGH BIBLE TEACHING

Multimedia as a Tool for Witnessing

BY MARLAN KNITTEL

Involving students in Bible seminars through multimedia computerized programs can be a learning and a witnessing experience.

I looked nervously over the groups in the crowded auditorium. Each person was clutching a Revelation Seminar folder, and each group had a teenager moderating the discussion. The fate of the seminar, the people who came, and the $13,000 spent all lay in the hands of inexperienced teenagers. Some weren’t Adventists; a few weren’t even Christians. But all were academy Bible students.

Like Hans, for example. He was in 10th grade. His mother is a Buddhist. His father is a Catholic. He isn’t anything—yet. But he was a group leader. A group member read an answer from the lesson, to which Hans responded, “Is it the Revelation of the Beast? The Revelation of 666? No, it’s the Revelation of Jesus Christ!”

I had started the evening by reviewing the previous night’s topic and then turned the time over to the student facilitators, who talked about the lesson with the people at each table. When they were done, I emphasized a few key points and then introduced our student-presenter for the evening. Carly walked to the front, and smiled nervously as the lights dimmed. She pointed a remote control at a computer linked to a video projector at the front of the room. As a title appeared on the screen, she said, “Hi, my name is Carly, and my presentation tonight is ‘Jesus, the Center.’”

As she talked about the places in Revelation where Jesus is mentioned, text and graphics appeared and left at her command. She finished with a gripping picture of Jesus on the cross. Following the amens, I gave a quiz, called for a decision, and closed with prayer.

Called to Teach

Six months earlier, Jack Carey, the principal of the local junior academy in Santa Cruz, California, had asked me to teach the ninth- and 10th-grade religion classes for the 1994-1995 school year. I felt both honored and overwhelmed. I’d been pastoring for more than seven years but had no training in teaching.

Jack didn’t seem too concerned about my lack of training. What intrigued him was my use of computers in ministry—especially with youth. In the past, I’d conducted Revelation lessons and taught doctrinal seminars to young people, using computer graphics and Microsoft PowerPoint, a multimedia computer program.

I accepted the teaching assignment. As part of my instructional objectives, I wanted my students to know why they were Seventh-day Adventists. I wanted to stimulate the non-Adventists in my class to wrestle with their own beliefs in the light of the Bible. I found some excellent material already available, and decided to add computer graphics to make the classes more creative.

My students were less than thrilled with the course requirements. They had to create and present two multimedia
project: one telling their peers why they were Christians or why Christianity might appeal to them if they were not; the other a Revelation topic such as “The Mark of the Beast” or “The Millennium.” They also had to teach at a Revelation Seminar scheduled in a local church.

The first project familiarized them with Microsoft PowerPoint, layout and design principles, graphic scanning and manipulation, and presentation skills. The second forced them to wrestle with the Bible evidence for their topic and to synthesize it into a form that could be understood by an audience. To do this, they used several tools:

- Online Bible, a computer Bible-study tool for research;
- PowerPoint’s drawing tools and capability to include slides and text transitions;
- Illustrations from clip-art collections, some of which included video and animated clips; and
- Digitized evangelistic slides from Seminars Unlimited.

I also introduced the students to online sources of information, sounds, and graphics and had an attorney-evangelist, Norman Reitz, demonstrate PowerPoint presentations he’d given.

When the students weren’t in the computer lab assembling their project, in class selecting slides, or learning multimedia techniques, they were
learning to speak in public. After all, a fancy graphics show was only a part of the whole. I was convinced that anyone could speak effectively, given plenty of practice, proper guidance, and constructive praise. I had students prepare and give at least one and generally two speeches each week. It was thrilling to watch even the most timid blossom into effective speakers.

A Sense of Accomplishment

Students enjoyed a sense of accomplishment as they showed their “Why I Am a Christian” presentation to the class. They appreciated public speaking so much that many offered to give more than the required number of speeches. But they were not enthusiastic about the Revelation Seminars. They would have to give up three hours one night each week—and sometimes two nights—to take part in an event they’d never attended before—teaching people with difficult or even hostile questions. They felt only slightly consoled to learn that the seminar would replace other, more traditional class requirements: tests, quizzes, and long research papers.

I had some misgivings, too. How would the non-Adventist students react to teaching our church doctrines? Most of them took it in stride as just another class assignment. After all, they had chosen to attend an Adventist school, and this assignment wasn’t just about doctrine. It gave them training in leadership, public speaking, graphic design, and presentation skills.

There were a few problems. One Catholic parent spent an hour yelling at me over the phone after she had found the Mark of the Beast lesson in her son’s packet—I assigned him an alternative project. A conservative Adventist mother thought her son was already out too many nights of the week and didn’t have time for this. He managed to work it into his schedule.

Getting the Seminar Going

The students prepared for the Revelation Seminars by going door to door for about three hours one Sabbath afternoon, inviting people who had already bought Adventist literature. In spite of the students’ fears, many people were friendly and accepted their invitation.

On January 11, four-color brochures were mailed to 62,000 homes in Santa Cruz County, with an invitation to one of the seminars. Student nervousness increased with each passing day.

The students had been assigned to fill out the seminar lessons before January 17. That morning in class, we began reviewing the night’s lesson. As we did so, they jotted down questions to ask participants and points to help make the lesson clearer.

On the opening night of the seminar, I spoke for about 20 minutes, laying the foundational principles for the course.

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**Working With a Local Church in a Revelation Seminar**

The Valuegenesis study report states, “If we would retain our youth, we must be intentional about involving them in the lives of our congregations. Every youth should sense that he or she is indispensable to the body of Christ and that the life of that body depends upon his or her carrying out those tasks for which he or she is uniquely gifted.”

Here are some suggestions for school and the church to work together in conducting Revelation Seminars.

1. **Plan at least a year in advance.** This will give the church time to raise needed funds. Emphasize the benefits of the program: student growth in Bible knowledge, a closer walk with God, a love for soul winning, a witnessing experience.

2. **Gain school board support well ahead of time.**

3. **Involve the local pastors.** They know the subject and they know how best to appeal for decisions. Invite them to your Bible class to summarize each lesson so the students will be ready to teach it.

4. **Ask the local church to be responsible for funding, advertising, and setting up the hall.** Make sure they have the necessary audio-visual equipment.

5. **Ask that the church assign an adult to each table as a “backup” person in case the student-facilitator gets into difficulty or doesn’t show up.**

6. **Pray.** (Hard!)

7. **Offer a “reward” to students for participating.**

8. **Take pictures.** Your local union paper will want to run a feature about your students’ activities.

9. **Have the students share with local churches what they’ve done.** Church members will be excited and students will feel validated.
introducing the student-facilitators at each table, and emphasizing that all of us would be learning together. Then I turned the time over to my students. Each student-leader would read a question and ask the class for answers. Then, depending on the location in the lesson, the student would either ask a question, have the participants look up a text, or make a point.

**THINGS I' D DO DIFFERENTLY**

1. I'd give students two options: (1) tests, quizzes, papers, and reports or (2) multimedia creation and participation in the Revelation Seminar. If they chose the Revelation Seminar, this would eliminate some of the complaints about it being required.

2. I'd arrange for multimedia graphics ahead of time. Pictures for doctrinal themes are difficult and time-consuming to find and get into a computer format. Copyright laws are also a problem. While one copyright attorney told me that “fair use” allows home and educational use, yet the use of pictures from books and magazines without permission is unethical. If in doubt, get permission. Seminars Unlimited in conjunction with the Adventist Media Center plans to release shortly a CD-ROM set of Adventist evangelistic pictures.

3. I’d make sure that the computers in the lab had at least 100-megabyte hard drives and eight megabytes of RAM. I’d also make sure that the necessary software was installed before the school year began.

4. I'd make sure the school allotted enough computer lab time.

5. I'd have the students work in pairs to enhance learning.

6. I'd have presented my ideas for Bible class to the school board prior to the beginning of the year and asked for their support. Further, I would have let parents know precisely what their students would be involved in before registration.

When the students weren’t in the computer lab assembling their project, in class selecting slides, or learning multimedia techniques, they were learning to speak in public.

On the second night, following the discussion and review, the students began to give their multimedia presentations. Participants were impressed. They repeatedly wrote notes to the students, or told them how much they appreciated their work.

The students themselves actually felt relieved. They said, “Hey, this isn’t too bad. I actually enjoyed this. The people were nice.” However, as attendance declined over the following weeks, students tended to blame themselves and had to be reminded that the participants were not leaving because of them, but because of the message. In fact, studies have shown that students have virtually the same baptism rate as pastors presenting Revelation Seminars.

As I write this, the seminar has just finished. We have had one baptism so far, and a number of people are attending Sabbath morning services and continuing to study.

**Would I Do It Again?**

Looking back, I wonder if I'd do it again.
again. It would be much easier to re-
quire book reports and papers, and give
quizzes and tests. Yet I am convinced
that students were better motivated and
learned more through their direct in-
volvement. They also knew what they
believed and why; the biblical material
became real to them. They learned to
speak publicly and lead out in group
discussions. They became proficient in
computer technology and graphics.

Several said they learned more about
computers in Bible class than else-
where.

At the beginning of the year, I let
students choose their multimedia top-
ics. To my chagrin, I discovered that
two students who chose the harlot of
Revelation 17 were Roman Catholics.
The one who took “Sunday in the New
Testament” was not an Adventist—but
as a result of his study, he became con-
vinced that the Bible does not speak
about Sunday being holy. Another stu-
dent regularly talks with a non-Advent-
ist relative about clean and unclean
foods (her topic was the “Eight Laws of
Health”).

There have been surprises. At our
most recent board meeting, one mem-
ber said, “Even if nobody is baptized,
this seminar has been a success. Our
youth have been involved in it and they
have learned.” Overall, the local church
has been supportive. They’ve prayed
unceasingly for the seminar and have
provided thousands of dollars for adver-
tising and materials. Several have at-
tended every night, helped set up the
hall, and hand out the materials.

Yet the real test is the program’s
effect on the students. One Friday
evening, they were giving their presen-
tations at a local academy to show other
students what was possible. One of my
10th-grade girls clicked through her
presentation and then said, “We were
the teachers at the Revelation Seminar,
but what really happened was that we
learned, too.”

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For information about hardware re-
quirements, contact the Editor, The
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Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike,
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600, U.S.A.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Microsoft Corporation, One Microsoft Way,
Redmond, WA 98052-6399; (800) 633-4239.
2. I used material created by Cindy Tutsch, di-
rector of Seattle Youth Challenge at the Washing-
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3. Harry Robinson, Methodology Manual
19.
4. Roger L. Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie,
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5. Thanks to Max Kalkoffen for his help with
this.