BIBLE LEARNING THROUGH BIBLE TEACHING

Multimedia as a Tool for Witnessing

BY MARLAN KNITTEL

I nvolving 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.

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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*,[1] 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,[2] 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

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projects: 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-

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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 on-line 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

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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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 lead-

ership, 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

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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."[4]

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 local church.

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.[3]

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

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The author and his students work on multimedia presentations for the Revelation Seminar.

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The author (third from right) makes a presentation at the 1994 North American Division Principals and Bible Teachers Conference.

again. It would be much easier to require book reports and papers, and give quizzes and tests. Yet I am convinced that students were better motivated and learned more through their direct involvement. 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 elsewhere.

At the beginning of the year, I let students choose their multimedia topics. 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 convinced that the Bible does not speak about Sunday being holy. Another student regularly talks with a non-Adventist 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 member 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 advertising and materials. Several have attended 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 presentations 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 requirements, contact the Editor, THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600, U.S.A.

Cross-Curricular Implementation of Multimedia

• *History.* Early in the year, have students take a section of history that will be covered during the second quarter and prepare a multimedia introduction. Later, they become the teachers. They could include video clips of events, maps with moving arrows (showing invasion routes, etc.), laserdisk information, and pictures of famous people.[5]

• *Math.* Have students prepare teaching materials for the teacher to use with accompanying narration. Moving arrows, tumbling numbers, sounds, and video clips could make the dullest of math classes not only entertaining, but also highly educational.

• *Music.* Theory can be taught using animated notes appearing on the screen while the notes are sounded out by the computer. For an interdisciplinary link with history, students could produce multimedia presentations on composers of different periods, including photographs and music playing in the background. Further, they could include a discussion about the ways different historical periods influenced musical styles.

• *English.* Have students write, narrate, and illustrate their stories using animation and sound. Have them produce a video essay or a hypermedia project instead of turning in a paper.

• *Geography.* Have students produce a multimedia travel report or hypermedia travel brochure.

• *Design or Construction.* Have students use a 3-D modeling program. Ideas for subjects include different parts of Bible events or scenes such as Solomon's temple, the city of Jerusalem, or the beasts and events of Daniel and Revelation.

TIPS FOR VIDEO PRODUCTION

1. Bold colors such as dark blue, yellow, purple, and chartreuse show up well with a video projector.

2. Use high-contrast colors. We found that yellow letters on a brilliant blue background were strikingly readable.

3. Test colors ahead of time to see how they will appear on the video device you'll be using. Some tints will be excellent, while others will be muddy and hard on the eyes.

4. Use large text. We found that 40-point body text and 60-point title text were minimums.

5. Use bold, shadowed text to make the text stand out from the background.

6. Stay away from thin-line art (two pixels or less) and text with thin serifs. The computer screen will cause them to vibrate.

7. Keep text or graphics away from the edges of the screen.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Microsoft Corporation, One Microsoft Way, Redmond, WA 98052-6399; (800) 633-4239.
2. I used material created by Cindy Tutsch, director of Seattle Youth Challenge at the Washington Conference. Contact her about her book *Teens on the Witness Stand*, 917 Military Road E., Spanaway, WA 98442.
3. Harry Robinson, *Methodology Manual* (Candler, N.C.: Revelation Seminars, 1984), p. 19.
4. Roger L. Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1992), pp. 285, 286.
5. Thanks to Max Kalkoffen for his help with this.