

Institute for Christian Teaching
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**PROMOTING BIBLICAL LITERACY IN THE
ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM**

by

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Introduction

Biblical truths and Christian values underpin all genuine Christian education. If we are to educate resilient and committed Christian young people who have developed the skills, techniques and moral courage to use this knowledge in an informed and practical way, it is imperative that teachers convey and transmit these truths and values in an engaging and realistic manner. Because children are most susceptible and impressionable during the early years of their schooling the earlier these concepts are conveyed by committed and knowledgeable Christian teachers, the greater the opportunity for positive outcomes.

In recent years as a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, Avondale College, I have noticed with some concern a subtle decline in the biblical literacy levels of pre-service teachers. So I was intrigued to read in the August 1999 edition of *Christianity Today*, an article titled, *I love to tell the story to those who know it least*. Written by Lillian Daniel (1999), a minister in the New England district of the USA, the article discussed her parishioner's lack of biblical literacy. She then listed what she saw as the main reasons for a biblically illiterate congregation. Her first concern was the perception that discussions of "cultural relativism" and "situational ethics" had replaced Bible study. Secondly, she found that many young people had been taught how they should feel about God, but had little information about their Creator. Thirdly, she realized that biblically illiterate parents were inadequately prepared for the responsibility of educating biblically literate children. In an attempt to rectify this situation in her congregation she outlined several recommendations. Pivotal to them all was the need to encourage her parishioners to engage in meaningful private as well as corporate Bible study.

Interestingly, a number of recent articles (Hutchens, 2001; Knox, 2000; Robson, 2001) share her concerns regarding the subject of biblical illiteracy. Other surveys seem to be unearthing similar concerns and issues. In 2004 a study, *National Study of Youth and Religion* (Smith, 2004) found that less than a third of USA protestant teenagers read their Bible privately and then maybe only once a week. Conversely a study conducted by *The Barna Research Group* in Californian reported that there had been an increase in the number of adults reading the Bible, from 37% in 1994 to 44% in 2004 (The Barna Research Group, 2004a). Other statistics included in this report suggest that the older generation read the Bible more frequently than the teenagers.

The Adventist Church has become increasingly aware of similar issues in its own congregations. As early as 1993, the South Pacific Division became interested in researching and studying the faith development and value formation of adolescents and youth aged 12-18 years. A report of the study, *Valuegenesis-Study 1*, indicated that approximately two-thirds of all adolescent and youth respondents agreed that personal devotions were important in the development of personal faith. However, only 24% respondents reported consistently finding time for private Bible study. Interestingly, findings of a more recent report, *Valuegenesis 2: Adventist Church in Canada* (Gillespie & Smith, 2002), also indicated that only 37% of students in grades 9-12 read their Bible once a week or more. Again, another recent global Adventist study indicated that a low involvement in daily Bible study was one of the "areas of

concern” for the Adventist Church (Adventist News Network, 2002). Supporting anecdotal evidence from a retiring Faculty of Theology lecturer at Avondale College mentions changes he has noticed since his arrival on campus in 1973. He commented that Biblical discussion and doctrinal analysis were very evident in the 70’s but “a matter of spiritual warmth and meaningful relationships” had now replaced it (Young, 2004).

Results from a number of surveys and research studies thus leave us with the distinct possibility that our church community, like many other faith communities, is becoming biblically illiterate. This possibility has serious implications for the Adventist Church.

Biblical Literacy Defined

Biblical literacy is more than Biblical knowledge. One definition that elaborates this concept is found in the Lutheran Bible Ministries Mission Statement.

- *The foundation of biblical literacy is factual knowledge - knowing all the people, places, events and teachings in the Bible.*
- *A second and higher level is that of assent - accepting this knowledge as truth, and believing that the Bible is the word of God.*
- *The third and highest level is knowing the God of their Bible personally through a life changing commitment (Lutheran Bible Ministries, 2002).*

As Adventist educators we would concur with this definition because our aim is to encourage our students to reach the highest level of biblical literacy. Also, Adventist educators have been given insightful instruction regarding effective Bible teaching strategies that should encourage our students to become biblically literate. Under the section titled, *The Bible as an Educator*, in the book *Education*, (White, 1952), topics such as *Bible Teaching and Study* are filled with challenges and ideas that we can share with our students whether they are in an elementary, secondary or a tertiary school setting. One very important aspect of biblical literacy, that we seem to gloss over many times, is the intellectual benefits it affords the reader. “There is nothing more calculated to energize the mind, and strengthen the intellect, than the study of the Word of God” (White, 1943, 460). Other benefits of Bible study are a balanced life style as well as engendering a resilience of character and the discernment of truth (Brown, 2002; White, 1943).

As teachers we want our students to become literate in their first language and we spend dedicated time each day in the elementary classroom to ensure that this skill is learned early in life. Biblical literacy is the “language” of Christianity. It also needs a specific, dedicated, allocated time slot, each day, in the classroom. However, biblical literacy, as compared to language literacy, has eternal consequences and therefore should have a high profile and priority in each Christian classroom. Consequently teachers need to capitalize on these early introductory biblical literacy experiences because children are most susceptible and impressionable during the early years of their schooling and the earlier these biblical literacy concepts are conveyed by committed and knowledgeable Christian teachers, the greater the opportunity for positive outcomes.

Reasons for Biblical illiteracy

There are complex reasons for the decline in biblical literacy among Christians. One of the biggest challenges currently facing the Adventist Church is that few Adventists engage in any regular Bible study (Greenwalt, 1996). The Bible is not meant to be a difficult book only catering for the intellectually gifted. It has been written so that it reaches every age group, intellectual ability and interest level (White, 1952). With the illumination of the Holy Spirit, all can properly understand the Bible. “The simplest soul and the youngest child, if they are open to God, can get as much as anyone else from reading the Bible” (Dewey, 2001). Consequently even the youngest student needs the opportunity of experiencing this relationship with their Creator through His written word. However, not everyone agrees with these observations and comments. Recently the statement was made, during an Adventist church sermon that the Bible was not written for children but that it was a book written for adults.

Another apparent reason for biblical illiteracy involves the perception that young adults are discussing matters of spiritual warmth and meaningful relationships as an alternative to engaging in biblical discussion and doctrinal analysis (Young, 2004). If this is occurring then the Bible probably is not being discussed, studied or read regularly. Not surprisingly then, basic information such as the names of Bible books and the number of books in the Old Testament and the New Testament, are unfamiliar facts to some Avondale College pre-service elementary teachers.

Brunt (1994) wrote that the younger generation find the Bible irrelevant and are becoming biblically illiterate because they cannot see any connection between Bible study and their daily life. This is a valid concern that needs addressing but Daniel (1999) warns that in our quest to make the Bible relevant we need to be careful that we don't replace Bible stories with situational ethics. This quote is most pertinent:

Raised in the church in an age of cultural relativism, some end up like a football player who graduated from high school without learning to read, sent into the world biblically illiterate (Daniel, 1999, 50).

Ironically, even though there is a proliferation of Bibles, fewer and fewer are being read (Hutchens, 2001).

Some reasons listed for biblical illiteracy by young people include: (1) that they were raised on sermons that used little scripture; (2) that a working knowledge of the Bible was not important for them; and (3) that they had been raised devoid of any parental, religious training (Burge, 1999; Daniel, 1999; Poe, 2004).

Biblical illiteracy may also be the result of an overemphasis on the process of justification to the detriment of an understanding that the process of sanctification incorporates a developing faith informed by Bible theology (Burge, 1999). The Bible needs to be central to all our thinking and faith development (Knight, 2000; White, 1952).

Biblical Literacy – Informs a Christian Worldview

Everyone's values and belief systems are under constant bombardment from current socio-cultural attitudes in this post-Christian era. As Christian educators we therefore

need to know why and what we believe. In Deuteronomy 6:5 we are encouraged to “Love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength”. Consequently each of the three levels of biblical literacy, as outlined previously, is relevant and extremely important, because each has a unique role to play as each informs and underpins the development of all Christian values and biblical beliefs. Also a Christian worldview is informed and shaped by biblical truths and values gleaned from biblical literacy (Sire, 1990). If biblical illiteracy is left to continue unchallenged, our children will be left without an authentic Christian foundation on which to build their essential Christian values, biblical truths and worldview. History shows that ignorance can be expensive and destructive. Christian education therefore needs teachers who are reflective, creative thinkers and not just a mirror of another person’s thoughts (White, 1952). Reading about the Bible is not enough. It has to become its own expositor (Taylor, 1992).

The present generation takes for granted the availability of the Bible. History, however, shows that widespread access to the Bible came at a high human cost. Contemporary Christianity is indebted to the many martyrs, who, because of their compelling commitment to the translation of the Bible, willingly sacrificed their lives to make the Bible available to the common people in their vernacular - the English language. It was because of their strong biblical belief and Christian values that they were prepared to die for what they believed. Access to, and availability of the Bible for everybody was the goal, motivation and conviction that eventually lead to the development of the printing press and the prospect of the Bible obtainable via the printed page (Reynolds, 2003). This example from history demonstrates that people who have a Christian worldview and a commitment to their values and biblical beliefs can change the world. It’s a well-known fact that our underlying values and beliefs are the basis from which we draw information to make choices and decisions, and therefore the lack of a solid grounding in biblical literacy can leave children vulnerable and exposed when the need arises to make value-based decisions.

Biblical Truths and Christian Values

The Adventist belief system includes the viewpoint that in the Bible God has proclaimed absolute truth and essential values. This however is at odds with many non-Christian Australian educational institutions. They don’t believe in God or absolutes so their philosophical beliefs state that all truth is relative and no absolute values or truth exists. Therefore, all education should be values free.

Christian educators must address this philosophical issue because the basis of the Christian philosophy and belief system is diametrically opposed to this viewpoint. Educators recognise that values and truths are taught and caught in the family cultural setting as well as in institutions, especially schools (Poe, 2004). Therefore the significance of biblical literacy is once more highlighted when we realise that all Christian decisions and choices are based on our values, our values are based around our understanding of God and our understanding of God is obtained from God’s truth in the written word, the Bible. Consequently, biblical literacy, of necessity, must become the foundation for all Christian thought and action. Because values and truths define who we are, they are more than a personal preference or feeling. They provide a sense of purpose and direction in life, inform decision-making, recommend

standards of conduct and offer an anchor against the prevailing non-Christian philosophies (Habenicht, 2000).

Without an understanding of the scriptures it is impossible for the youth to understand what is truth, or to discern between the sacred and the common (White, 1943, 427).

Interestingly, even though the current prevailing educational culture and philosophy shies away from a Christian worldview, there is an increasing interest and push for values education to become an important component in many national and international government institutions. Some reasons given for this include the fragmenting of society due to the breakdown of the home, anti-social behaviour, youth suicide and youth substance abuse. These issues are recorded as leaving students feeling disconnected and alienated in society. Values education in Australia is seen as the answer to these cultural evils. Likewise, core social values are now being taught as part of the national curriculum in the United Kingdom while many local education districts in the USA have adopted the “character education” movement (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003). Examples of what are considered to be basic or core social values in Australian society include:

tolerance and understanding, respect, responsibility, social justice, excellence, care, trust and inclusion, honesty, freedom, being ethical (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003, 7).

To ensure that the government funded values education program is being implemented across all key-learning areas, the Australian Government commissioned a *Values Education Study* forum in 2002 (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2004). This shows how determined they are to ensure that this program reaches all government schools.

Looking at this list of values it would appear that they are very similar values to those espoused by Christianity. However, these programs are based on a very different philosophical rationale. For example, one reason given for teaching values education in the government school is to strengthen “self-esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfilment” so that students can “exercise ethical judgement and social responsibility” (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003, 3). This reason may be interpreted to be a self-centred statement that merely talks about personal, selfish considerations. Similar sentiments are found in a statement that points out that the school is to “help students develop personal and social responsibilities”. The underlying philosophy of this values education program can be summarized as: “Values begin with *me*, not God” (Habenicht, 2000, 22). As Christians, in contrast, we begin with *God* and consequently God’s values involve not just an outward action but also an inner quality of the soul, or character. Therefore the Christian philosophy regarding values education can be seen to be fundamentally different in purpose and direction to the philosophy espoused by non-Christian programs.

Biblical truths and Christian values are the basis for a Christian worldview (Holmes, 1987). The Adventist worldview is informed by what it considers to be basic biblical truths or 27 fundamental belief statements (doctrines) and these help believers to make sense of the world from an Adventist perspective. The Bible curriculum, as set

out by the Department of Education, South Pacific Division, has listed them as part of the teacher's information section and they are an integral part of that curriculum (Department of Education, Curriculum Unit, South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1999). If we are to know why we believe, we first need to know what we believe!

It would appear from recent research that Adventists are not quite sure what they believe and we don't seem to fare much better than many other denominations (The Barna Research Group, 2001). However, according to Hill (2001) many denominations are addressing this perceived problem of biblical illiteracy by publishing curricula that focus on Bible content and encourage engagement in personal Bible study and reflection. Adventist educators have the responsibility and challenge of developing a healthy attitude and curiosity about this lost book.

Biblical Literacy Teaching Issues

For many children the thought of studying the Bible elicits responses such as boring, dull, irrelevant and a waste of time. Consequently it is a real challenge for teachers in the twenty-first century to effectively and actively engage children in relevant and participatory age-appropriate Bible study. Children live in a fast-moving, stimulating, electronic and "instant-gratification" age. So Bible teaching needs to be innovative, creative and activity-based, if it is going to be seen as relevant, informative and important.

Habenicht (1994) points out that classroom Bible teaching is fundamentally different from any other subject. This subject has eternal consequences. Bible study engages Divine power. It can create intellectual stimulation and increased energy levels. Even angels are sent to impress the mind and enlighten the understanding (White, 1943). With all this Heavenly and Divine aid at our fingertips, how can Bible teaching be labelled "dull and boring"?

According to White (1952), an effective Bible teacher is one who has thoughtfully and prayerfully prepared participatory presentations that engage the students in innovative, dynamic, creative and life-changing Bible discoveries. Why are many Bible lessons still perceived by some children as being dull and boring when there is a plethora of readily available, practical Bible resources that can assist the teacher in reaching this goal? Maybe part of the answer lies in the fact that many teachers themselves have had little exposure to life-changing relevant Bible lessons and teaching.

Castle (1993) states that if children are to discover the dynamic nature of God's Word then they need to interact individually with the Bible so that the Word of God can speak to them and teach them. If this is to happen each student will need access to his/her own copy of the Bible. White (1952) states that before the age of seven most of the character development and learning of children has taken place. This means that before the age of seven, while still impressionable, these students need access to their own Bible, preferably a large print version, so they too can interact with and discover God's word on a personal level. Available resources, reviewed later in this paper, indicate that we tend to wait until children are competent readers before we give them their own copy of the Bible. Perhaps we are missing out on the most impressionable

years of a child's life. Why not use the Bible as an authentic reading text in the teaching of early language literacy skills? It is a given fact, credited to the work of the Bible Society, that the Bible can be used to teach language literacy skills. If the Bible can be used to teach language literacy to the illiterate in a variety of non-English speaking countries surely the Bible has a place in early language literacy education where English is the first language?

After interviewing 1000 adults across the USA, the Barna Research Group (2004c) showed that most adults felt that children were being well prepared in every aspect of life except their moral and spiritual development. Also this research stated that parents expected the "village to raise a child" and that this was seen as an acceptable excuse for negating their responsibility (The Barna Research Group, 2004c, 3). This issue has significant consequences for educational institutions. It would appear that biblical literacy has now been passed from parents and the home to the school. Therefore whatever happens in Christian schools will have a great impact on making the Bible relevant or irrelevant to the younger generation (Brunt, 1994). A recent study entitled *Valuegenesis 2: Adventist Church in Canada* (Gillespie & Smith, 2002) found that in the 6th grade, 60% of all respondents found the Bible interesting, while in 11th-12th grade approximately 20% found the Bible interesting! As Adventist educators, we need to understand what is happening in Bible classes in our schools in an attempt to remedy this decreasing interest of students in the Bible.

Ready access to literacy and the Bible are taken for granted by the present generation. Why then do our young people rarely read or know so little about the Bible? One writer points out that perhaps teachers are so busy preparing children for tests and exams that they have forgotten that "teaching to transform the world involves transformative lessons" (Aldridge, 2004, 52). Yob (1996) points out that these transformative lessons are connected with Someone greater than ourselves. These are lessons that go beyond the mundane and ordinary, and challenge students' thoughts and minds to explore, reflect and grow spiritually as well as intellectually. These are all relevant ingredients for a cogent Bible lesson.

Do not think the Bible will become a tiresome book to the children. Under a wise instructor the work will become more and more desirable. It will be to them as the bread of life, and it will never grow old (White, 1954, 514).

The earlier the concepts and skills of language literacy and of biblical literacy are taught concurrently the greater the potential for well-informed, knowledgeable, resilient Christian young people. While it is true there are parts of the Bible that only adults can comprehend the following thoughts need to be considered.

Our Heavenly father, in giving His word, did not overlook the children. In all that men have written, where can be found anything that has such a hold upon the heart, anything so well adapted to awaken the interest of the little ones, as the stories of the Bible? (White, 1952, 185).

Such thoughts indicate that there is an inherent power in the Bible. Thus teaching age-appropriate biblical literacy skills is one way that teachers can develop in children a greater interaction with, love of and positive attitude towards the Bible, while they are still very impressionable. Hopefully, this biblical basis will then inform and underpin

children's developing moral and spiritual values, with the goal of nurturing well-balanced, moral and spiritually minded, biblically literate, resilient young people who embrace a Christian world-view and life style. The Barna Research Group (2004b) highlights this responsibility.

Our studies consistently show that the habits formed while we are young are the behaviours that define us when we are old (The Barna Research Group, 2004b, 4).

Teaching Age-appropriate Biblical Literacy

Teaching age-appropriate biblical literacy, though challenging, should not be an impossible task because there are a variety of available resources that outline the unique age-specific developmental needs of children, the different levels of faith development and the processes of spiritual growth and maturity that children experience at different stages (Habenicht & Bell, 1983; Heathfield & Smith, 1997; Korniejczuk, 1993; Murk, 1999; Roehlkepartain, 1993). The current Australian Adventist Bible Curriculum (Department of Education, Curriculum Unit, South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1999) is one example of how these available resources can be applied and utilized in the Bible class. Its framework outlines three strands that are organised into three age levels that support and facilitate faith and spiritual development. This Bible Curriculum is designed around a relational theme: God's relationship with us, our relationship with God, and our relationship with others (Roy, 1999). Faith development is seen in the context of, and supported by, a maturing faith and attitude towards biblical literacy and a personal relationship with Jesus.

Regrettably there are very limited resources that mention how to engage young children in a dynamic and active experience with the Bible. Most practical Bible resources mention relevant ways of teaching Bible stories, how to have innovative Bible lessons, ways of engaging in lively and relevant discussions and many more ideas and these are all necessary, but there is a noticeable lack of resources actually showing how to use the Bible or where to use it in a Bible lesson. Furthermore, strategies for encouraging age specific and appropriate personal Bible study habits for the elementary school child appear to be almost non-existent. Only a limited number of resources could be found that contained any practical ideas or strategies that could involve the daily engagement and interaction of the young elementary child with a Bible. Most resources appear to talk about teaching the Bible and Bible stories but without suggesting any actual "hands-on" experiences for using a Bible.

Resources for Encouraging Personal Bible Study

However, a number of resources were discovered which do encourage personal Bible study and devotions for children who are literate. One such resource is the following web site: *Kingdom Construction Company*. Designed especially for children in elementary school it encourages children to develop a personal, independent daily Bible reading and prayer program. This resource can be shared in an elementary school classroom to encourage children who are independent readers to commence this habit while they are still young and impressionable.

The Adventist *GraceLink* study guides for Kindergarten and Primary age groups also mention using the Bible with young children. The *GraceLink* Kindergarten study guide includes *A Letter to Parents* that encourages parents to introduce their child to the Bible and then suggests a suitable child's version of the Bible along with activities that are appropriate for this stage of development. At the Primary stage of development parents are encouraged to help their child learn to use the Bible.

The third resource suggests age specific activities for encouraging Bible study with children. As seven to nine year old children are starting to read more independently the authors encourage the children to place tabs on the books of the Bible in order to facilitate finding the books more easily (Dillon & Smith, 1997). This is a great idea to facilitate the location of the books of the Bible, and hopefully by the time children are eight or nine, they have the skills to read actual stories from their own Bible.

The fourth resource encouraged seven to eleven-year-old children to read the Bible "as a faith-strengthening exercise" (Calkins, 1997). This is a sound practical idea but how is this skill of Bible study to be implemented? How can we ensure it is more than just a reading exercise and actually does become a "faith-strengthening exercise"?

The final example of available resources is a series of lessons for the under five-age group. The lessons could be used as an introductory activity in the elementary classroom to provide pre-biblical literacy experiences. The series includes a section of introductory activities that introduce the Bible to the young children in a tangible way by touching it, hearing verses read from it, looking inside the Bible, etc. (Gaukroger, 1996).

The following original biblical literacy strategies and techniques, designed by the writer, have been created, produced and trialled in an attempt to support the Christian teacher in his/her quest to encourage biblical literacy development in the elementary classroom. The first strategy is for children aged five and six years and involves a fun way of interacting with and learning from the Bible. It uses the simultaneous teaching of early biblical literacy skills along side early language literacy skills. This method can become part of the daily Bible lesson because it uses word recognition skills to read the Bible. The Bible can then become one of their readers. The method is outlined below:

- Firstly, students need access to their own copy of a large print version of the Bible and a highlighter pen.
- Then, the name of the current Bible character from the Bible lesson is identified.
- Next, the teacher writes that particular Bible character's name on the board and then reads the Bible character's name aloud so the child associates the **sound** of the Bible character's name with the Bible character's **written** name. (Basically this is a word recognition skill.)
- Following this, the child opens his/her Bible to a stated page number and the child identifies the Bible character's name on that Bible page.
- Finally, the child says the Bible name as he/she identifies and highlights it in his/her Bible.
- After repeating this procedure a few times over the next week the child should then be able to independently identify and "read" this Bible character's name.

It has been discovered that the children who are involved in these learning experiences often choose to “read” their Bible during free time because the Bible has become an interesting and accessible book for them.

Another original technique created by the writer involves the use of the *HA Principle* of Bible lesson preparation and teaching. This technique is a way to structure a biblically based Bible lesson. It is one way of checking that all the relevant

ingredients of a successful Bible lesson are covered. It includes the essential daily reading and interaction of each student with his/her own copy of the Bible. The **H-History** covers the historical setting of the Bible story, the Bible reference, and the actual details and facts of the story, while the **A-Application** section encourages a personal application and response to the Bible story (see appendix 1).

Teaching scripture songs is another creative strategy for teaching Bible reading and a fun way of engaging and interacting with the Bible. This idea requires each student to find and then highlight the scripture songs as found in his/her Bible. The writer includes these songs as part of the early literacy development program. The method is outlined below:

- Firstly, turn to Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV) and highlight the words, “*The joy of the Lord is your strength*”.
- Next, the children repeat these words after the teacher.
- Then the children are taught the song.
- Finally, each child can open his/her Bible to read and sing these words straight from the Bible as part of the daily worship program (see appendix 2).

The reading of the Bible in the elementary classroom is often seen as tedious and boring so the following selection of original, age-appropriate, fun Bible reading strategies and ideas were developed by the writer in an attempt to change these attitudes. All these Bible activities require each student to have access to their own copy of the Bible.

Lower School:

As the Teacher reads a stated passage from the Bible:

- The children look for a *given word* (sheep) in their Bible and raise their hand every time they hear the word read aloud from the passage.
- The children look for a *given word* (fish) in their Bible and do the actions every time they hear the word read aloud from the passage.
- The children look for *several words* (Jesus, sheep, Shepherd) in their Bible that are written on cards and given to different class members. Every time he/she hears his/her word each child holds his/her card up.
- The children read along together from their own Bible as the teacher reads a verse aloud from her Bible.

Middle/Upper School:

- Read the Bible story from the Dramatized Bible in Reader’s Theatre format.
- A group of children read a stated passage together from their Bible.
- Listen for a special word that it is read aloud and write a mark on a piece of paper to keep count.
- Individually read the passage silently and complete a sheet listing the number of times selected words are found in the passage.
- Read his/her favourite section of the passage aloud to the rest of the class.

- The Teacher reads the passage and the students have to listen for the incorrect words that are read. They then state the actual correct words from the passage.
- Give different students a speaking part to read and the rest of the passage is read by the class or a narrator.
- The Teacher reads the passage and leaves out words. The children then orally state the words that were missed out or write them down.
- Conduct a Bible chase to see how quickly the children can find a given verse.

Teaching age-appropriate Bible study skills is a challenge because the available resources are almost non-existent. It is a unique challenge because it can assume an evangelistic role in the nurturing of Christian values and biblical truths in the Adventist elementary school. Outlined below is one simple Bible study method that the writer has adapted for any age group. The program is entitled “MY QUIET TIME” (see appendix 3). It is a simple technique that can be used to help a student establish a personal devotional time. The only requirement is access to a Bible and the ability to read independently. At school the children are given a specific passage related to the Bible lessons for that week. They are encouraged to follow the guide taught in class and then complete the activity at home. Several times a week small group sharing is encouraged in a non-threatening atmosphere. As the student’s faith matures more sophisticated methods and programs can be discovered, introduced and implemented. Personal devotions and Bible study go hand-in-hand and therefore can assist in the development and formation of biblical truths and Christian values.

Conclusion

If the next generation of Adventist young people is going to embrace Christian values and biblical truths in a meaningful way we need a generation of church members who from infancy have learnt to know and love the scriptures. Teaching age-appropriate biblical literacy skills is one way of developing in children a greater interaction with and love of the Bible while they are still very impressionable. Hopefully this will then inform and underpin their developing moral and spiritual values with the goal of nurturing well-balanced moral and spiritually minded, biblically literate, resilient young people who embrace a Christian worldview and life style. The prevailing attitude, that Bible study and Bible lessons are boring, dull, irrelevant and outdated, needs to be challenged, researched and remedied. It is a well-known maxim that we can’t give what we don’t have, therefore children need teachers who are committed to modelling their faith in an engaging and realistic manner and who are energized by their own contact with the Bible and their Lord.

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APPENDIX 1

THE *HA PRINCIPAL*

An original idea created by Barbara Fisher

One approach to teaching and preparing Bible lessons is to follow the *HA Principle* of Bible teaching and lesson preparation

History-(His Story)-What are the Bible facts of the story, the setting, the reference?

Application-What does this story mean to me in my environment?

An Example of how to use the *HA Principle* in a Bible Lesson

Story-

H- history facts of the story cover:

1. Bible reference
2. Setting of the Bible story
3. Story from the Bible
 - Bible characters involved in the story
 - Sequence of events
 - Climax of the Bible story

A- application of what the story means to me .

Following are just a few examples that demonstrate how to encourage your students to be involved in a personal response to the Bible story (more examples are given later).

- How does this story affect my (the student's) life?
- Which character in the story would remind me of Jesus?
- What have I learnt about God from this story?
- How can I share this story with others?

See below for more examples

CHECKLIST FOR *HA PRINCIPLE* BIBLE LESSON PREPARATION

This checklist is designed to facilitate Christian Teachers in the preparation of Bible lessons based on the *HA Principal*. (H-history, A-application)

Include in your Bible Lesson Plan:

- A list of the spiritual concept/s that is/are to be taught in the Bible lesson. (**A**)
- A vibrant introduction to the Bible Story. (**H**)
- A selection of resources to add interest to the Bible Story. (**H**)
- A dynamic presentation of the Bible Story. (**H**)
- A section of the Bible Story to be read from the Bible, its Biblical reference and the method to be used. (**H**)
- An activity to add variety to the learning experience. (**H**)
- A personal involvement in the application of the spiritual concept/s that is/are taught in the Bible Story. (**A**)
- A quick revision of the facts of the Bible Story. (**H**)

- A short conclusion that gives the children an opportunity to restate, in their own words, the application of the Bible Story. (A)

APPLICATION SECTION (A)

EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGING SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN

- How does this story affect my (the student's) life?
- Which character in the story would remind me of Jesus?
- Which character in the story would NOT remind me of Jesus?
- What character in the story am I most like and why?
- What choices do I (the students) have to make in my life today that shows that I am becoming more like Jesus?
- In my environment Jesus can help me when/to/if_____.
- How can I show the love and compassion of Jesus to my friends/enemies?
- Why do I think this story is included in the Bible?
- How can learning about people in the Bible help me to be more like Jesus?
- Why is it important to learn about Bible people and their stories?
- How does this story indicate that Jesus wants to be my friend?
- What part of this Bible Story shows me how to be a Christian?
- What have I learnt about God from this story?
- How can I share this story with others?

ONE EXAMPLE OF A BIBLE LESSON PLAN USING THE *HA PRINCIPAL*

STORY: *THE TWO SONS (MATTHEW 21:28-32)*

AGE GROUP: 8 & 9 YEARS

(A) Spiritual concepts to be taught:

What you do is more important than what you say.

(H) Introduction:

Have food in box. Students guess what is in the box Show food and ask for Bible stories that mention food in the Bible. Discuss.

(H) Resources:

Bible, food, box

(H) Presentation:

1. Pray
2. Narrate story from perspective of Son Number 1.
 - Harvest time and father asks Son Number 1 to help.
 - Son Number 1 says too busy.
 - Father asks Son Number 2 who says he will help.
 - Son Number 1 repents and helps father.
 - Look for Son Number 2 who has forgotten his promise.
3. Activity-suggest a change to the ending to the story.

(H) Bible reading:

4. Read Matthew 21:28-32 and count the number of times the Son is used.

(A) Application of the spiritual concepts:

- Which character in the story reminds you of Jesus? Why?
- What is this story trying to teach you?
- Why do you think God wants you to hear this story?

(H) Revision:

Retell the story in Round-Robin groups.

(A) Conclusion:

1. How is this story going to change my life today?
2. Sing "Into my Heart".

APPENDIX 2

EXAMPLES OF SCRIPTURE SONGS THAT CAN BE USED AS PART OF THE BIBLICAL LITERACY LESSON

1. Nehemiah 8:10

The joy of the Lord is your strength

2. Psalm 47:1

Clap your hands all ye people
 Shout unto God with a voice of triumph
 Clap your hands all ye people
 Shout unto God with the voice of praise
 Hosanna

3. Psalm 63:3

Thy loving kindness is better than life
 My lips shall praise Thee
 Thus I will bless Thee
 I will bless Thee while I live

4. Psalm 89:1

I will sing of the goodness of the Lord forever,
 I will sing, I will sing.
 I will sing of the goodness of the Lord forever,
 I will sing of the goodness of the Lord.

5. Psalm 118:24

This is the day that the Lord has made
 We will rejoice and be glad in it

6. Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always
 And again I say rejoice

APPENDIX 3

MY QUIET TIME GUIDE

Adapted by Barbara Fisher

PRAY: Ask God to:

- help you understand the passage you are going to read
- help you learn something about Him from this reading.

READ: Read the selected passage from the Bible.

THINK: I think this passage is saying:

I think this passage means:

I have learnt this about God:

I think God is telling me:

WRITE: I still don't understand:

I would like to share this with others:

My favourite verse today is:

PRAY: Today I will: