

Understanding Those You Teach

"Lesson 2: Understanding Those You Teach," *Part B: Basic Principles of Gospel Teaching—Love Those You Teach*, ()

1- Consider the last lesson you taught. As you prepared and presented the lesson, what did you think about? Did you think about the lesson material? Did you think about those you were teaching? How much did you really know about the individuals you were teaching? If you did not know them, how might knowing at least something about each of them have made a difference in your lesson?

2- An Aaronic Priesthood adviser shared the following insight:

3- "As a deacons quorum adviser, I have learned some things about 12- and 13-year-old boys. I understand the challenges, opportunities, experiences, and questions young men that age share in common. I understand that each of these young men has recently received the priesthood and is learning what it means to exercise it worthily.

4- "I also know each of the deacons individually—their likes, dislikes, talents, concerns, and what is happening in their lives right now.

5- "As I prepare lessons and teach the boys, I try to teach gospel principles in a way that will relate to their understanding and experience. To engage one boy, I might ask a question that relates some point in the lesson to playing soccer. To help another young man participate, I might relate an experience from a recent campout that helps illustrate the application of a gospel principle. By understanding these boys, I am better able to find ways to relate each lesson to them."

Learning the Common Characteristics and Experiences of Those You Teach

6- Although each individual is unique, all the people you teach, whether adults, youth, or children, share many things in common. First and foremost, each is a child of Heavenly Father. Each has divine potential. Each wants to feel loved. Each wants to feel the support of others and be appreciated for his or her contributions.

7- In addition to these common characteristics, those you teach have probably had similar experiences. For example, many class members in an adult Gospel Doctrine class are parents who have gained significant experience and insight through raising their children. In elders quorums, many have served full-time missions. Many high priests have served in administrative positions in the ward or stake. Many of the young men and women attend the same school or similar schools.

8- There will always be something that those you teach have in common. You should learn about the characteristics and experiences they have in common and find ways to draw on those similarities. As you do this, those you teach will feel that your lessons are sensitive and relevant to their needs and interests. They will participate more fully and contribute more confidently.

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9- For information about the common characteristics of different age-groups, see part C, "Teaching Different Age-Groups" (pages 107–24).

Getting to Know Each Person You Teach

10- Although the people you teach have many common characteristics, they come from a wide variety of backgrounds and circumstances. No two are exactly alike. They have different abilities, likes, and dislikes. They have experienced different joys, opportunities, and challenges.

11- When he was a regional representative, Elder Neal A. Maxwell said:

12- "A Church group, quorum, or classroom may contain some who are bored; some who are making an unobserved, agonizing, and crucial re-appraisal of their relationship to the Church; some who are 'single-shot' visitors who may base their future attendance and attitudes toward the Church on their experiences on a 'sample Sunday'; some whose idealism has soured; and a goodly number of ... well-informed members who find joy and growth in a divine Church full of frail humans and who can cope with disappointments.

13- "To be impersonal or to use the indiscriminate ... approach to leadership and teaching with such inevitable variety of individuals is clearly not to be 'anxiously engaged' in the leading or teaching process. Casual, insensitive leading and teaching means that the individual sees himself merely as a course or a toll-gate through which members must pass. Such leading is heedless of individual differences and devoid of meaningful, personal warmth" ("... A More Excellent Way" [1973], 56–57).

14- As you come to know and understand each person, you will be better prepared to teach lessons that speak to their individual situations. This understanding will help you to find ways to help each person participate in discussions and other learning activities (see "Reaching Out to the One," pages 35–36). You will know who will be able to handle certain questions, who might be able to contribute a faith-promoting story or personal experience, or who has had an experience that supports the purpose of a certain lesson. You will be better able to assess the responses given in discussions and adapt your lessons.

Considering Similarities and Differences As You Prepare Lessons

15- Think about the next lesson you will teach. Try to picture in your mind the setting and each individual who will be there. Perhaps someone who sits in the same place each week comes to mind. What do you know about that person that might help you decide which point to emphasize in the lesson? What experiences has he or she had that might help someone else better understand a gospel principle? Your knowledge of these things will influence your choices as you prepare and present lessons. This is why you need to do more than simply understand your lesson material; you need to understand the people you teach—as children of God, as members of their age-group, and as individuals.

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