



# Differing Levels of Ability

In any class there will be students who excel, learn quickly, and are interested in the subject; some students will be disinterested and entertain themselves by distracting others; still others will be shy, have learning problems, lack motivation, or lack the years of training that others have had. So, how do you teach a class full of students with different levels of ability? Follow the steps below.

## 1 Pray

Begin by praying for each student. Then pray that God will help you love Him with all of your heart, soul, mind, and spirit so you can in some way transfer that love to the students in your class. Ask God for help in discerning how best to reach each student at his level of ability.

## 2 Get to Know Your Students

Learn what the students' abilities are spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. Learn what your students like, what they don't like, what they fear, and what they love. You can do this by asking yourself some simple questions:

- ? When does the student pay attention in class?
- ? When is the student disruptive or bored?
- ? What does he talk about most?

- ? What is the student interested in? Hobbies? Activities? Interests? Favorite subjects in school?
- ? What parts of the lesson does he seem to like most?
- ? How long has this student gone to church? Gone to Sunday School?



- ? Does he have any learning or behavior disorders?
- ? Is this student considered gifted? In what ways?
- ? In what kind of family environment does he live?

By knowing your students, you can tailor your lessons to their specific needs. For example, if a student has a physical or learning disorder, learn as much about that disorder as you can through books and the Internet. Talk to the parents to find out how you can

effectively teach their child. You may also talk to special education teachers at a local school for insider tips.

## 3 Use What You Know

Once you know your students, tailor your lessons to meet their specific needs. Students of all levels of ability enjoy being involved in the lesson, especially when they can participate in ways that showcase their gifts and abilities rather than their shortcomings. There are many ways to reach both students who excel and those who have trouble in class. Here are some examples:

- ✍ Let one or more of your gifted students read or tell the Bible story to the rest of the class.
- ✍ Let older or more capable students help those who might need it. Pair them or put them in small groups so they can work together on projects, crafts, and activities.
- ✍ Ask a variety of questions, some difficult and some easy. Ask specific students specific questions according to their levels of ability.
- ✍ Act out the Bible story or do role play, pairing students with learning problems with students who excel. Or assign parts to students according to what they can handle. If there is a lot of reading for the part, do not assign the part to a student with dyslexia.

Give him a more active non-reading role.

✍ Assign classroom jobs to students according to what they do well. If you have a student who is a gifted artist but doesn't enjoy being involved in role-play because of his physical limitations, ask him to illustrate the Bible story on the board for you. Or if you have a student who is extremely outgoing, give her the lead part in the skit. A shy student may enjoy being the class recorder, taking attendance as the students enter the room.

✍ Draw names for specific jobs if students find the assignments unfair. Then allow the students to trade jobs if they wish. Or assign jobs on a first-come, first-served basis.

✍ You may allow gifted students to help you teach.

✍ Use a variety of teaching methods, such as drama, illustrations, Bible research, crafts, writing, games, and other activities. By varying your approach, you ensure that you will reach more of the students in your class.

✍ Integrate the interests of the students into the lessons

when possible. If some of your students are involved in soccer, use soccer analogies to help the students understand the concept. If a student is involved in an unusual past-time, ask him to share it with the class.

✍ Give two or three projects or activities, and allow the students to choose the ones in which they wish to participate.

✍ When it comes to rewards, do not just award prizes to students who excel at memorization or have higher intelligence. Try to set up awards all students can achieve, such as showing kindness to others, participating in activities, helping the teacher, reading aloud, writing on the board, or handing out worksheets. These can be in place of or in addition to the awards you may already have in place for memorization and review.

✍ Teach the students with concrete concepts and examples.

✍ Use words that the students understand. If you introduce new words, explain what they mean. Ask a lot of questions to make sure the students understand new or difficult concepts.



## Create a Safe Environment

Set up rules in the class that discourage the students from comparing themselves or putting down students who are different or less gifted. The rules should encourage the students to appreciate their differences, such as:

- ♥ Only say kind and encouraging things to each other in class.
- ♥ No put downs allowed.
- ♥ There are no stupid questions.

You can reinforce these rules by setting an example. When you compliment students, be specific: "Karen, I like all of the different colors you used in your picture. You have a good eye for picking colors that look good together." Or, "Martin, you were kind to help Chris with his puzzle."

**T**eaching students with different levels of ability can be challenging, but with a little effort and practice you'll be reaching all the students in your class in no time.



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