

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE

BEST PRACTICES OF TEACHING ADULT
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE



Let's get to work.

OACES

Office of Adult & Career Education Services
Rochester City School District

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE

The Office of Adult and Career Education Services (OACES), a department of the Rochester City School District, and the Catholic Family Center (CFC) have collaborated to support various community agencies in their efforts to provide services to new Americans.

This guide was partially funded by the New York State Office of New Americans (ONA). ONA supports programs that encourage new Americans to fully participate in New York State civic and economic life by providing training for English Language Students, helping legal permanent residents navigate the path to citizenship, and encouraging entrepreneurship. ONA is taking steps to protect new Americans as they transition to full participation in New York's communities.



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WHAT IS ADULT EDUCATION?

Adult Education is instruction, often at no cost, for adult students who want to improve their employability, education, or English language skills. Adult Education programs offer basic reading, writing, math, and problem-solving classes, English language lessons, employment preparation and training, Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) preparation, and other basic educational services for adult students. Adult Education includes Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE) as well as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL / ESL).

Adult Education programs are for adults 16 years of age and older who are not in school, who have academic skills below the 12th grade level, and/or who need help learning English. The goal of Adult Education is to help adults reach their full potential as workers, family members, and citizens.

Adult Education is funded in part by the federal and state governments, with local and community support. Many programs receive grant funding from private and corporate sources. The New York State Education Department's (NYSED) Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES) unit oversees Adult Education programs in New York. ACCES works with public schools, community-based organizations, colleges, correctional facilities, and other agencies to provide Adult Education services.

In Rochester, the Office of Adult and Career Education Services (OACES) is a workforce preparation organization that helps adult students learn the skills they need for success in the workplace and outside the classroom.

With unique focus on the education and employment needs of New York State's adult citizens, several vital interests and goals can be best served through:

- Ensuring that the needs of adults and out-of-school youth are met through efficient and effective access to relevant services, programs, and opportunities offered by the NYSED.
- Encouraging full participation of adults with disabilities.

- Enhancing post-secondary transitions by developing the capacity of individuals to engage in post-secondary education leading to high-quality employment opportunities.
- Promoting workforce investment through unified collaboration with the New York State Department of Labor and State and local Workforce Investment Boards to assure that individuals have access to a “one-stop” source for a full range of services leading to high-quality employment opportunities.
- Supporting individuals experiencing poverty and relying on public services to develop their capacity to earn income and develop assets toward greater economic independence.
- Utilizing a more comprehensive and effective representation for adults in coordinating services and program initiatives with New York State agencies such as the Departments of Labor and Health, the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), the Office of Children and Family Services, and the State University of New York (SUNY).

There are multiple literacies addressed by Adult Education.

- Survival Literacy
- Oral/Speaking and Written Literacy
- Cultural/Social and Civic Literacy
- Workplace and Employment Literacy
- Health Literacy
- Financial Literacy
- Technological and Digital/Electronic Literacy
- Geographic Literacy
- Media Literacy
- Environmental Literacy
- Scientific Literacy



The importance of each of these literacies in an individual’s life varies based on specific circumstances. They all, however, have the potential to greatly affect the life of every adult and his/her family.

Literacy begins within the family and is reinforced, whether positively or negatively, in subsequent generations. Adult Education seeks to reinforce, promote, and support literacy to help adults reach their full potential as workers, family members, and citizens and in turn continue the cycle of literacy into the future.

Adult Education provides for the Community in numerous ways:

- Adult Education programs benefit businesses, workers, and job seekers. Businesses encourage Adult Education in order to provide and sustain a highly skilled and specialized workforce a workforce with the skills to perform a variety of tasks or workers with “cross-functional” skills. Workers may receive promotions, gain more power in the job market, or become more valuable employees by enrolling in Adult Education programs.
- Adult Education training facilities often house state-of-the-art equipment such as computers and computer-based training equipment.
- Adult Education programs benefit families. Increased literacy and skills translate to a higher earnings potential for the household. Parents’ literacy levels directly correlate to their children’s educational success (according to the National Center for Families Learning).

BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING ADULT ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Definition

A **best practice** is a method or technique that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means and is used as a benchmark. In addition, a “best” practice can evolve to become better as improvements are discovered.

Understanding the Student

Prior to the late 1970s, instructional methods and materials for adults learning English as a Second Language (ESL) assumed the presence of literacy in a first language. After 1975 the United States experienced an influx of refugees from Southeast Asia. Many had minimal or no experience in reading and writing in their native languages and, as the students joined ESL classes, educators saw that existing methods and materials were not appropriate for these students. Ten years later during the implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), educators were again faced with teaching adult students who had little or no schooling in their native countries.

Teaching English to adult students can be both challenging and rewarding. Adult students bring many issues to the classroom that a teacher must address before creating a successful learning environment. As a teacher for adult students, you must be prepared to understand the needs of your students and be flexible enough to alter lessons when they’re proving to be ineffective in the classroom.

Another aspect to think about is teaching students with learning disabilities. Being identified as learning disabled can be stigmatizing for anyone—adult, child, native English speaker, or ESL student. It is difficult to assess across language and culture lines. It is first important to ascertain whether or not the student understands in the primary language before assuming that a student has a disability.

Classroom Ideas and Techniques

To help in your lesson planning, here are some ideas and techniques to make your classroom more effective and interesting.

The cultural background of adult English students can play a huge role in learning. Adult students bring a lifetime worth of beliefs and learning methods into the classroom which may vary from the culture in which they are learning. Sometimes students may act in ways that are acceptable in the student's country of origin but may conflict with learning behavior in their adopted country. You must be prepared to develop cultural skills and take into account each student's country of origin to effectively teach English and foster an effective and positive classroom environment.

Create a positive learning environment: focus on what students can achieve rather than what they cannot. Instead of focusing on things that the students are struggling with, try to develop the areas in which they are finding success. This will help to boost self-esteem and, as the old saying goes, success breeds success. Praising any successes and moving quickly past any areas of particular difficulty will help student confidence greatly.

Adequate personal connection with each student is important and should be established before teaching any aspect of the language. Your students should want to communicate with you first before you can help them learn how to communicate in English. Learn your students' names and ask them about their families. This will help foster a sense of community in the classroom.

Every adult student that walks into the classroom, no matter their educational background, has his/her own individual knowledge regarding language. The teacher must be able to align the learning process for adult ESL students with daily life. This strengthens comprehension in English since students can associate their language knowledge and skills with the ability to function in the world. As a teacher, you need to develop lesson plans that will link to daily activities that rely on the use of English.

Highlight objectives and structure activities clearly. Providing an overview of the session's objectives and activities can help students prepare for the day's learning. This allows for some level of regularity and structure in their learning time.

Lessons should have attainable and measurable objectives. A specific objective will help adult students to understand their goals for learning during the lesson. This will also help you evaluate student performance and gauge if the students have comprehended the lesson. Objectives also help students know if they have achieved the skills and knowledge required for success. If there are unclear

objectives, students may become frustrated and fall behind in the lesson.

Have a set of positive rules. Having a list of ground rules for class time that states the positive actions that are expected of students (as opposed to a list of “don’t-dos”) can really help with student behavior. Furthermore, have other students lead by example by praising positive actions for the rest of the class to see and learn from.

Reduce potential distractions. Reducing noise and any other things that can cause distraction to students will definitely help them keep focus and make for more effective lessons.

Peer collaboration and team activities can spur language learning. Placing students in cooperative groups will give each student personal attention from their peers, a useful technique especially when providing focused personal attention to each student is difficult. This is also helpful when you need the students to be the focus of activities. Groups can create a community setting and help students learn from each other.

Grouping Students

There are four ways to group students.

- Pair work (two students working together)
- Group work (three to ten students working together)
- Teamwork (teams of students working together in competition with other teams)
- Whole-class work (the entire class participating in an activity)

The role of the ESL teacher is not only to deliver instruction but to orchestrate the pairing, grouping, and teaming-up of students as well. In the multilevel classroom, this process is especially critical for the below-level and above-level students.

Students can be paired and grouped as either “like-ability” or “cross-ability.” Like-ability is where students of the same proficiency level work together. The benefit of like-ability matching is that similar needs of the students can be addressed. Cross-ability is where students of different proficiency levels work together. The benefit of cross-ability matching is that the higher level students can assist the lower level students.

Student Motivation

The motivation of your students may fall into a broad spectrum distribution.

- You will have students who are very eager to learn English so they can move on to other classes or so they can advance in their employment.
- You may also have students who are required (by their employer, by some social assistance program, etc.) to attend your classes but who do not really care about English at all. Some may be motivated to learn every possible detail about every aspect of English while others may only want as much language as is necessary to do a particular job or meet a specific requirement.

As a teacher you need to explore what your students really want. Regardless of the motivation of adult students, have genuine concern for them. An enjoyable class and a sense of progress will increase motivation once the students are there.

Planning and Delivering Instruction

The most important role of an ESL teacher is planning and delivering instruction that keeps adult students engaged, motivated, and working toward their educational goals. You may be teaching students that function at many different levels or you may be helping non-English proficient students improve their speaking and language skills. Whatever your teaching assignment involves, there are strategies and techniques that will help you create a student-centered classroom.

Additional Ideas and Techniques

In addition, here are a few more good practices to implement when providing instruction.

- Be highly structured and predictable.
- Teach small amounts of material in sequential steps.
- Include opportunities for students to use several senses and learning strategies.
- Recognize and build on students' strengths and prior knowledge.
- Simplify language but not content.
- Emphasize content words and make concepts accessible through the

use of pictures, charts, and maps.

- Reinforce main ideas and concepts by rephrasing rather than repeating.
- Be aware that students can often take in information but may have difficulty using it.
- Provide a clean, uncluttered, quiet, and well lit learning environment.
- Use technology if possible. Students often feel more comfortable and productive working alone in front of a computer where they receive immediate personal feedback rather than in a crowded classroom.

A teacher should be very familiar with technology used in the classroom. One should understand not only computers, programs, and applications, but also the use and content of websites. The Smart Board can also be an asset to the teacher in the classroom. It allows students to be interactive with the lesson; it also brings a deeper understanding to the content. Using assistive technology can build self-esteem as well as provide immediate feedback, two things all adult ESL students will benefit from.

Additional Resources

Academia.edu

www.academia.edu

Center for Applied Linguistics

www.cal.org

NYS Education Department

Adult Career and Continuing Education Services

www.acces.nysed.gov

Sources

Center for Applied Linguistics

www.cal.org

EnglishClub

www.edition.englishclub.com

NYS Education Department - Adult Career and

Continuing Education Services

www.acces.nysed.gov

PearsonELT

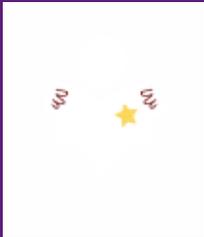
www.pearsonelt.com

TESOL Blog

www.tesall.com

Wikipedia

www.en.wikipedia.org



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