



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES



Let's get to work.

OACES

Office of Adult & Career Education Services
Rochester City School District

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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).

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

To be effective in teaching adults it's important to know your audience and have a general understanding of how adults learn. There are many ways to develop instruction, and educators have frequently debated which ways are the most effective. One practical approach that works well with adult students shifts the thinking about developing instruction from "what will you teach," to "what do the students need to learn?" This change of perspective will help the development process immensely.

Adult Learning is Based on Five Basic Principles

- Leadership
- Experience
- Appeal
- Respect
- Novel Styles

Leadership

The adult student enters the training or educational environment with a deep need to be self-directed and to take a leadership role in his or her learning. Teachers can help students acquire new knowledge and develop new skills, but they cannot do the learning for them. As a teacher, it is important to have each student see him or herself as not being a dependent student but becoming a self-directed student. Adult educators, in the development of a learning environment, define the process through which learning takes place.

For example:

- The teacher guides the students in determining the relevance of the learning for their own lives and work; whereas,
- The students are encouraged to use their own leadership, judgment, and decision-making capabilities to best learn the information being presented.

To reinforce the notion of student responsibility in the instructional process, a variety of activities can be used to obtain information from students regarding what they want to get out of the class and to

ensure a match between teacher and student objectives.

If information is known about a student's educational functioning level, it will help with outlining the classroom environment. This information can be used to organize instructional objectives, sequence content, and design-reinforcing activities.

An educator remains alert to the first principle of adult learning: Adults enter the learning environment with a deep need to be self-directing and take a leadership role in their learning.

Experience

Adults bring a background of experience to the classroom that is a rich resource for themselves and for others. In adult education, there is a greater emphasis on the use of experiential learning techniques (discussion methods, case studies, problem-solving exercises) that tap into the accumulated knowledge and skills of the students. Techniques such as simulation exercises and field experiences provide students opportunities to analyze data and assimilate information in the process. A rich, adult-focused instructional approach takes into account the experiences and knowledge that adults bring to the class. It then expands upon and refines this prior knowledge by connecting it to new learning, making the instruction relevant to important issues and tasks in the adults' lives.

The more you know about your students, the better you can tailor instruction to meet their needs. Everyone comes to the classroom with a lifetime of various experiences such as being employees, spouses, parents, voting citizens, organizational leaders, or other adult roles.

Few individuals prefer to just sit back and listen to a teacher go on and on about the topic. The effective teacher keeps the students' various levels of experience in mind and designs learning experiences that actively involve them in the instructional process. This entails practice activities such as discussion, hands-on work, or projects for each of the concepts that the teacher wants the students to master. Concentration is also an important issue. Humans can only consciously think about one thing at a time. It is essential to provide learning environments that help students concentrate on their learning tasks.

An educator knows that experience is a rich resource for adult learning and therefore draws upon that experience to maximize learning.

Appeal

Appeal is the power of attracting or arousing interest. Adult students are motivated to learn when they have a need to know. They want to know how the instruction will help them and often ask themselves the following questions:

- What's in it for me?
- Why do I need this information?
- How will I benefit from it?
- How can I make use of it in a practical, real way?
- How will it help me be a better person or professional?

Sometimes adults enter the learning environment with little interest or motivation. Many genuinely want to improve their job performance or to learn new knowledge and skills in order to move up the career ladder. Their motivation can diminish if the instructor fails to direct and encourage this or doesn't capitalize on students' other interests and motivations.

Teachers can help students develop an early and appropriate "mental set" for learning programs by giving an overview of the course objectives, describing upcoming activities, and helping them see the future advantages of the instruction for their lives and work. Introductory exercises early in the session can help establish the mental set. For example, an exercise titled "hopes and fears" allows students the opportunity to express their learning goals and concerns. In this exercise, students are instructed to write down their hopes (goals and desires) and fears (concerns and specific issues about the instructional session) on tear sheets. They may do this individually or in small groups. The teacher then uses this information to ensure that instructional objectives are on the mark and that appropriate attention is given to the interests of individual students.

Motivation can be improved and channeled by the teacher who provides clear instructional goals and learning activities that encourage and support strong interest for the student. To best capitalize on this high level of student interest, the teacher should explore ways by which the needs of each person can be incorporated into the classroom. This would include:

- The use of challenging and exciting learning experiences.
- Learning activities that are self-paced and tailored to individual

rates of learning.

A key principle in adult learning is that the educator needs to develop an appeal, a “need to know” in the students—to make a case for the value of learning what is offered.

Respect

The teacher of adults must show deferential regard for the students. By acknowledging each student’s experiences, the teacher creates a climate in the learning setting that conveys respect.

People are more open to learning if they feel respected. If they feel that they are being talked down to, patronized, or otherwise denigrated, their energy is diverted from learning to dealing with these feelings. The following suggestions are offered as ways in which the teacher can help foster a comfortable, productive learning climate through the attitude that he or she projects:

- Show respect for the student’s individuality and experience.
- Be sensitive to the language you use so that students are not inadvertently offended.
- Be open to different perspectives.
- Adopt a caring attitude and show it.
- Treat the students as individuals rather than as a group of people who are all alike.
- Support all student comments by acknowledging the “rightness” that is in each comment and each person.

Establish a learning climate of:

- Mutual respect.
- Collaboration rather than competition.
- Support rather than judgment.
- Mutual trust.
- Fun.

Adult students respond to reinforcements. Although adult students are usually self-directed, they do need to receive reinforcement.

Teachers should take every opportunity to demonstrate appreciation in the classroom.

Like most students, adults prefer to know how their efforts measure up when compared with the objectives of the instructional program. Adults have a tendency to “vote with their feet”; that is, if they find the program to be a negative experience, they will find some reason to drop out of the program before its completion.

An educator honors adult students’ individuality and experience and creates a safe, respectful, and student-centered environment for instruction to take place.

Novel Styles

The last principle refers to individual or novel styles that characterize students. Novel styles are defined as different, unique learning styles and preferences. Generally, most adults prefer to be treated as individuals who are unique and have particular differences. The teacher must keep in mind that although adults have common characteristics as students, adults also have individual differences, and most adults have preferred methods for learning. Adult students respond better when new material is presented through a variety of instructional methods, appealing to their different learning preferences.

No matter how well planned a program is, individual differences among students often make it necessary to make some adjustments during the class. The novel styles of learning that each adult brings to the classroom should be taken into consideration.

Some students have an especially strong auditory memory that enables them to remember what they hear with little effort, while others may be less skilled. This can be seen in differences in following verbal directions given by a teacher, or in the ability to learn the words to a new song. Some students have an especially keen eye for noticing detail in pictures or a design in a pattern. This can be seen in differences in speed in recognizing letters of the alphabet or understanding principles of geometry. Some students are very talented artists from the first moment they are given crayons or other tools to draw, while others develop such a skill through structured learning opportunities at school and at home.

Behavioral characteristics can also affect the learning process.

Students may have a short attention span or be easily distracted by sounds or movement around them, while others can stay with a task for a lengthy period of time regardless of what might be going on around them. Some students appear more “emotionally mature” which can translate into greater patience, ability to cooperate, or a higher tolerance for frustration, while others become upset quickly if a task is frustrating. Some students have a “need to move” or be more active than is typical for their age group; others simply have more stamina, and so on.

In addition, stimulation and opportunity can affect ability and achievement. If a student is deprived of opportunities to move, explore, touch, grasp, and/or interact with sound and speech, long-term learning ability is diminished. Furthermore, without opportunities to use once learned skills, the ability to perform tasks is often lost and must be relearned.

Adult Learning Styles

Most adult students have developed a preference for learning that is rooted in childhood learning patterns. To understand and address adult students, it is important to understand differences in development and learning. As students develop, their ability to process information is affected by their own individual strengths and weaknesses and the environment in which they grow and learn. Individual differences in interests, aptitudes, abilities, and achievement can be quite pronounced.

Auditory, visual, and kinesthetic students - Differing aptitudes, abilities, and experiences have caused individuals to develop a preference for sending and receiving information through one sense over another. Most often people prefer auditory or visual input; however, some people have a preference for kinesthetic learning, i.e. learning that involves movement. A preference for one type of learning over another may be seen in the following ways:

- Auditory students prefer, enjoy, or require: A verbal presentation of new information, such as a lecture; group discussions to hear other points of view or practices; fast-paced verbal exchanges of ideas; a good joke or story that they can repeat for others; verbal cues or mnemonic devices to help them remember information; music at the beginning or during transitions in a training setting; words to accompany a cartoon; oral reports of working groups.
- Visual students prefer, enjoy, or require: Graphic illustrations such as bar graphs or crosstabs to explain data; color codes to highlight salient information; maps to find their way on the subway or while driving in a

new city; written material to study new concepts; wall charts that display points to be remembered; written outlines; drawings or designs to illustrate overhead presentations; sitting “up close” in a presentation in order to see the presenter’s face, gestures, or visuals; taking notes during a lecture; instructors to repeat verbal directions.

- Kinesthetic students prefer, enjoy, or require: Movement, such as rocking or shaking a leg during a lecture; hands-on experience to learn a task; gestures while making a point; role-play exercises over discussion groups; shaking hands when meeting or greeting people; trying new things without a lengthy explanation of the activity; frequent breaks; regular opportunities to change seating or room arrangement; “just doing it” rather than talking about it.

While it is thought that people have developed a preference for or have greater skill in processing one type of input over others, most people simultaneously process information through multiple senses. In fact, the retention of learned material is enhanced if the student is asked to process information using more than one sense. Presentations that are multisensory (using visual and auditory components) in combination with interactive activities will increase learning and retention for most adults.

Learning Environment Conditions Effect Learning

The physical environment in which instruction takes place and the structure of the activities in the course can also affect learning positively or negatively. People react differently to such factors as room temperature, arrangement of the room (e.g., closeness of seats), time of day (early morning versus late in the day), brightness of the lighting, and sound (e.g., noise distractions from nearby construction or talking among participants). In addition, adults differ with regard to whether they prefer to work alone or in groups.

A teacher must recognize that adults’ preferences in these areas may affect their responsiveness in the classroom. Efforts should be made to accommodate differences by providing a variety of learning activities in which students feel comfortable.

The educator delivers instruction in a stimulating, rich, and diverse environment through a variety of instructional methods to appeal to adult participants’ learning styles and preferences.

Additional Resources

Colorín Colorado

www.colorincolorado.org

E-Learning Resources

www.grayharriman.com

Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy

www.teal.ed.gov

Sources

National Criminal Justice Reference Service

www.ncjrs.gov

Northwest Center for Public Health Practice

www.nwcphp.org



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