

# **Practical Strategies for Educating ESOL Students in the TANF Classroom**

**Marty Guild, MTESL  
Adult Learning Center  
4 Lake Street  
Nashua, NH 03060**

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## **Introduction**

My goal for this project was to develop a practical teaching aid to help teachers better prepare TANF/ESOL/GED students in their classes. To that end, I interviewed TANF/GED/ESOL administrators, teachers and students with the following questions:

1. What challenges do you face as administrator of (teacher of, or GED/ESOL student in) a TANF classroom?
2. What pressures do you face in the TANF classroom?
3. What suggestions do you have to overcome these challenges and pressures?

These questions and their responses led me on a pursuit to synthesize them in a logical manner. I researched the best, practical, teaching strategies and present them here in an easy-to-use format.

The results are presented in this way:

**Challenge:** the statement of a concern.

**Strategies :** Each challenge's educational strategies follow directly. The rationale for those strategies come next. The complete list of strategies and their rationale is at the end of this project.

To delve deeper into a topic, search for it on the Internet or refer to the list of suggested reading.

It is my sincere hope that you find this project interesting as well as helpful.

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Spring 2004

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## **Challenges and Strategies**

1. **Challenge:** Many TANF/ESOL students have listening, speaking, reading and writing skills that are too low for GED or Pre GED work.

**Strategies:** 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

2. **Challenge:** Even though many TANF students have gaps in both their education and in their life skills, TANF/ESOL students have especially wide gaps in these critical areas because of language and cultural differences.

**Strategies:** 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

3. **Challenge:** TANF preparation recommends teaching Life Skills plus GED preparation and has a finite time allotted for students to get their GEDs. TANF/ESOL students need a long time to learn Life Skills and prepare for the GED. There is not enough time allotted by government and state regulations for TANF/ESOL students to achieve these goals.

**Strategies:** 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

4. **Challenge:** There are exactly the same pressures and time constraints from government and state standards on TANF/ESOL students and native English speaking TANF students. In effect, this means much more pressure on TANF/ESOL students because English is not their native language. They are studying in English and will be taking the GED in English. Thus, it takes much longer for TANF/ESOL students to study for the GED and learn Life Skills than for TANF students who already speak English.

**Strategies:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

5. **Challenge:** If suspected learning disabilities are added into the educational and testing mix, there is an added length of time needed for educating and testing TANF/ESOL students. It is very difficult and expensive to document learning disabilities in someone who is a native speaker of a foreign language. Thus, GED testing modifications are very hard, if not impossible, to get for TANF/ESOL students.

**Strategies:** 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

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6. **Challenge:** TANF/ESOL students face daily challenges of getting to school on time, missing school because of their own or their child's illness and surviving on a limited income. All of these factors affect the students' amount of time available to spend on studying and their ability to concentrate.

**Strategies:** 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

7. **Challenge:** TANF/ESOL students who get their GEDs often wonder what to do in order to form future goals.

**Strategies:** 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25

### **Strategies and Rationale**

1. BICS and CALP: Use your understanding of the large significance of the levels of TANF/ESOL students' basic interpersonal communication skills (**BICS**) and cognitive academic language proficiency (**CALP**) to adjust your expectations of their skills. Thus, you will be able to plan appropriate lessons.

**Rationale:** It is well documented that ESOL learners need two different types of proficiencies to succeed in school: basic interpersonal communication skills (conversational skills, BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (academic skills, CALP). Your students may interact well in English with each other (BICS) but may be floundering academically (CALP). This is because BICS may take up to 2 years to develop and CALP may take 5 to 7 years (or longer) to acquire! Spoken ability in English does not mean the student can work well academically in English.

2. Dictate a spelling list, vocabulary words or a short reading passage to a student or group of students. Have them check their work and practice what they did not know.

**Rationale:** Dictation helps students focus on listening, spelling and punctuation. It is excellent practice and can indicate to the teacher what the student needs to work on further.

3. Give frequent GED practice tests.

**Rationale:** Timed and untimed GED practice tests are practical, concrete ways for students to measure progress.

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### **4. Employ the Sheltered English approach.**

**Rationale:** This approach to language instruction emphasizes advanced skill level development in listening, speaking, reading and writing within the context of the content area studies. It includes using a variety of materials and methods in order to make academic English comprehensible to ESOL students.

### **5. Employ the Whole Language approach. Students select learning tasks relevant to their self-directed academic goals and interests.**

**Rationale:** This model of language learning views acquiring knowledge as holistic and needing to be personally relevant. Students learn to read and write by reading and writing about topics that are interesting to them. This method includes time for oral interaction to clarify learning tasks and relate them to the whole concept.

### **6. Focus on listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and build up to essay writing (an integrated language skills approach).**

**Rationale:** Listening, speaking, reading and writing are natural, cumulative parts of language acquisition. Each is equally important to the TANF/ESOL student's academic success. Focus on listening and speaking skills first and follow them with reading and writing exercises on the same topic. Use this natural progression of skills to present and reinforce lesson content.

### **7. Form study groups among class members.**

**Rationale:** Study groups can be a practical way of getting assistance and helping a classmate. Many TANF/ESOL students come from cultures where working together toward a goal is very natural. Collaboration in study groups also prepares students for the team approach that is often used in the American work place. Every one needs to get along while learning and working together.

### **8. Give specific vocabulary instruction. Incorporate vocabulary activities in your daily routine. Example: Display a "word for the day." Its frequent use will increase students' vocabulary and get them interested in the language.**

**Rationale:** Since vocabulary conveys a large part of the meaning of English, concentrating on vocabulary skills is very important to the TANF/ESOL student's success. For example, students can isolate new vocabulary, make flash cards and review them often. It is useful to study vocabulary words to the point of "over learning" them.

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9. Group students according to need or ability for mini lessons.

**Rationale:** Plan short lessons about subjects that are pertinent to the students' needs and that are at their ability level. For example, a group of students might need a review of how to do long division.

10. Have the student write a summary of a reading selection by choosing 8 or 10 key sentences from the text.

**Rationale:** By breaking the text down into the 8 or 10 most important sentences, the student looks for main ideas that communicate the essence of the text. This helps the student become a better reader and a better writer.

11. Incorporate real world material, Life Skills instruction and counseling about post-GED options.

**Rationale:** ESOL/TANF students need to be prepared for life outside of the classroom and after they get their GED. Life Skills instruction and counseling address these areas.

12. Individualize instruction.

**Rationale:** By using individualized materials based on the TANF/ESOL students' levels the teacher can let the students proceed at their own pace. Progress will be personally gratifying.

13. Plan multidisciplinary lessons.

**Rationale:** The teacher selects and presents various learning activities based on a topic. For instance, the topic of interior decorating could involve reading selections, math problems about square footage, and writing topics.

14. Present grammar skills strategies. For example, isolate new grammatical forms and study them. Write the pattern on a 3x5 card and memorize it. Write out and label a model sentence with the target grammatical forms.

**Rationale:** Teaching grammar to TANF/ESOL students is essential to their success on the GED test and in life. When students learn techniques to study and learn grammar, they gain confidence in their abilities to communicate using the spoken and written word.

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**15.** Practice the skills specifically for each test. Study for the writing test by writing! Study for the reading tests by reading!

**Rationale:** It is essential that students know what to expect from each of the GED test components. Students need to practice all the skills over and over.

**16.** Provide reading skills strategies such as: Read and study the vocabulary list first and then read the questions about the selection. Next, read all the way through the passage 2 or 3 times. Try to understand meaning from context and then answer the questions.

**Rationale:** Teaching students reading strategies like the one above, mapping and writing to show comprehension gives them an understanding of the processes of reading, writing and test taking. They gain confidence in their abilities to demonstrate reading comprehension.

**17.** Supply a variety of materials on many levels about the same subject. For instance, very low reading materials, low level reading materials, intermediate reading materials, high level reading materials, Pre-GED reading materials and GED reading materials could be surveyed and arranged so the TANF/ESOL student could proceed from very low to the GED level on the topic of global scientific issues. Be sure to look for resources and materials that provide adaptations for teaching ESOL students. This approach lends itself well to both individualized work and group lessons. It can be applied to all areas of the GED test.

**Rationale:** TANF/ESOL students need to be successful in developing their literacy abilities. One way to breed success is to have reading and testing materials available on a wide variety of levels. In that way, the teacher can address students' various abilities and have them strengthen their literacy skills with a sequential approach to skills development.

**18.** "Scaffold" the topic before you present the actual Pre-GED or GED material.

**Rationale:** Pre-teach the material before you actually teach it. For instance, use pictures to introduce science and social studies topics. Then, present vocabulary that is part of the lesson. ESOL students need lots of background material combined with listening and speaking about it in order to understand what they are studying.

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### **19. Supplement with computer instruction.**

**Rationale:** Frequenting a computer lab where personalized study can be done is extremely helpful to TANF/ESOL students. Depending upon the software available, the lab provides introduction to and reinforcement of all skill areas plus the use of computers. Introducing the students to Web resources in order to incorporate them in GED study is also an excellent way to build students' skills.

### **20. Teach specific strategies for GED test taking.**

**Rationale:** Many TANF/ESOL students are not familiar with taking tests in the GED format. Lessons in test taking skills are crucial to students' success in all areas of the GED test.

### **21. Teach spelling strategies.**

**Rationale:** Many TANF/ESOL students have not been taught any spelling rules at all. A review of, or introduction to, the spelling rules of English is necessary to success in all areas of the GED test.

### **22. Teach study skills. Encourage students to review and study every day.**

**Rationale:** Many TANF/ESOL students have never been taught how to study. Learning a language is a cumulative process. Students must study every day in order to make progress in listening, speaking, reading and writing English for the GED test. To maximize this process, the teacher should teach study skills.

### **23. Use the Multiple Intelligences approach to learning.**

**Rationale:** According to Dr. Howard Gardner, there are at least nine different human intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist and existential intelligences. He holds that schools and the American culture focus most of their attention on linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. Dr. Gardner feels that emphasis should also be put on the other intelligences. He advocates designing lessons to include as many of the multiple intelligences as possible to ensure that students learn the material.

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**24.** Use paid aides, tutors and volunteers (in addition to the teacher) to give assistance to students during class.

**Rationale:** It is very frustrating and discouraging for a student to have to wait to get a question answered because the teacher has too many students in the classroom. There needs to be a reasonable student/teacher (paid aide, volunteer, tutor) ratio so that students can maximize their learning.

**25.** Use Project Based Learning.

**Rationale:** Project Based Learning (PBL) is a comprehensive approach to instruction. Students do projects while practicing interdisciplinary skills including science, social studies, mathematics, English, reading and writing. For example, students can choose to do written reports, multimedia projects, oral presentations and science projects about a relevant GED topic.

**26.** Where available, have the TANF/ESOL student prepare for and take the GED in his/her first language. In NH, GED tests are available in French and Spanish. Study materials in these language can be ordered from local bookstores.

**Rationale:** If the student's academic skills are much better in his or her first language, the probability of passing the test is greater than if the student studies for the GED with English materials. Since TANF/ESOL students have a limited period of study, taking the GED test in their first language may be a shorter route to earning a GED.

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## **Suggested Reading**

Allen, Virginia French. 1990. *Techniques in Teaching Vocabulary*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

This text presents and exemplifies practical techniques of vocabulary teaching.

Armstrong, Thomas. 2000. *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Lesson planning and teaching strategies using Multiple Intelligences theory are the thrust of this text.

Bell, Jill Sinclair. 1991. *Teaching Multilevel classes in ESL*. Carlsbad, CA: Dominie Press, Inc.

This is a practical guide for teachers facing mixed level classes.

Brown, H. Douglas. 1993. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

This presents straightforward information on research and practice in the field of second language acquisition.

Canton-Harvey, Gina. 1987. *Content-Area Language Instruction: Approaches and Strategies*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Strategies and materials to help teachers design lessons for different subjects are presented in this text.

Celce-Murcia, Marianne and Sharon Hilles. 1990. *Techniques and Resources in Teaching Grammar*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Basic issues of, and techniques and resources for, teaching grammar are presented in this text.

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### **Suggested Reading, Continued**

Gardner, Howard. 1993. *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

The educational implications of lessons based on separate human capacities based on various intelligences are presented.

*GED Testing in New Hampshire: Information for School Counselors*. 2002.

This document is available from Debbie Tasker, GED Administrator for the State of New Hampshire. Dtasker@ed.state.nh.us 603-271-6699

*GED 2002 - Fourteen Tips for Teachers to Address Problem Areas for Examinees*. 2002.

This document is available from Debbie Tasker, GED Administrator for the State of New Hampshire. Dtasker@ed.state.nh.us 603-271-6699

Madsen, Harold S. 1994. *Techniques in Testing*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

This book presents current thinking in the field of testing. It gives the teacher practical strategies to use.

Raimes, Ann. 1994. *Techniques in Teaching Writing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This book is especially designed to present current thinking in the field of teaching writing. It gives the teacher practical strategies to use.

Silberstein, Sandra and Russell N. Campbell, Editor, and William E. Rutherford, Editor. 1998. *Techniques in Teaching Reading*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

This book presents current thinking in the field of teaching reading. It gives the teacher practical strategies to use.

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**Suggested Reading, Continued**

Templeton, Shane. 1991. *Teaching the Integrated Language Arts*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

This text approaches instruction from the integrated view so that lessons in reading (for example) build on oral language or writing. Learning is deeper and more logical.

*The GED Tests: What's New for 2002?* GED Testing Service, One Dupont Circle, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1163 [www.gedtest.org](http://www.gedtest.org) 202-939-9490

This document explains changes in the GED test format.

*The National Symposium on Adult ESL Research and Practice: September 4-7, 2001.* 2002. Washington, DC. National Center for ESL Literacy Education. [ncle@cal.org](mailto:ncle@cal.org) [www.cal.org/ncle](http://www.cal.org/ncle)

This document summarizes the national symposium's findings.