Research Article

Adult Literacy Teachers' Perspectives on Reading Difficulties and the Origins of These Perspectives

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Abstract:

Studies of the teaching practices used in adult reading programs suggest that these practices often reflect the personal perspectives of teachers on factors that contribute to less-skilled reading development. In this study, 19 adult reading teachers were interviewed to explore their perspectives on how adults become less-skilled readers and the origins of these perspectives. Four themes were identified in terms of teachers' perspectives, which attributed less-skilled reading respectively to: (a) learners' distinct needs not being met, (b) readers' "life baggage", (c) under-developed sense of joy in reading, and (d) inappropriate learning environments. Four main types of experiences appeared to have contributed to the development of these perspectives: (a) teachers' own experiences in learning reading, (b) teachers' general teaching experience, (c) teachers' experiences of teaching reading specifically, and (d) teachers' knowledge of formal reading theories and/or empirical research findings. Potential implications for enhancing the outcomes of adult reading instruction programs are discussed.

Literacy skills have long been recognized as an important correlate of social and economic outcomes, both for individuals and for overall communities (e.g., European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012; National Research Council, 2012). Despite this, a considerable body of research evidence suggests that large numbers of adults worldwide continue to have difficulties in the area of basic literacy. Foremost among this research is a series of international surveys of adult skills, the most recent of which is the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

(PIAAC) (OECD Skills Outlook, 2013). PIAAC has prompted a series of national reports examining local contexts. For example, one recent Australian report (Australian Industry Group, 2016) indicated that 44% of Australian adults have literacy skills below the minimum level required to function fully in a modern society. Similar results have been reported in studies from other developed countries. For example, in 2012, the European Union's *High Level Group of Experts on Literacy* reported that 20% of adults in Europe exhibited some difficulties in the area of literacy, while in 2014, Gyarmati et al. reported that nearly half of the working-age

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population in Canada had identifiable literacy difficulties. Results such as these underscore the urgent need for research into ways to enhance literacy skills within the adult population.

This paper focuses on adult reading as a critical facet of literacy. Reading skills, or the skills needed to understand and interpret printed material, are essential for overall literacy development and growth (Galletly & Knight, 2013). Less-developed reading skills have been posed to limit an adult's ability to live a fully productive and secure life (National Research Council, 2012). Apart from the more obvious correlates of low reading levels e.g., reduced earnings, unemployment, and poverty (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2014; Shomos & Forbes, 2014), low adult reading skills have now been linked to negative outcomes in various other facets of individuals' lives. These facets include health and social life quality (Clark & Dugdale, 2008; Miller, McCardle, & Hernandez, 2010). Various hypotheses have been posed with respect to the precise mechanisms responsible for the association between reading levels and outcomes within these diverse areas. For example, it has been proposed that the correlation between adults' reading levels and adults' health outcomes may be attributable in part to the need for sound reading skills to make full use of available public health information, complete medical forms, and understand instructions provided on prescription medicines (Gyarmati et al., 2014). Research on the correlates of reading skills point to the wide-ranging impact that reading skills can have on the social, economic, and personal quality of life enjoyed by affected individuals.

While a considerable body of research has now emerged on the importance of possessing strong adult reading skills, research on how reading skills can best be developed has traditionally focussed on child readers. Research on less-skilled adult

readers is relatively scarce (MacArthur, Konold, Glutting, & Alamprese, 2012). In addition to the relatively scarce literature available on adult reading difficulties, confusion over the approaches that should be used in adult reading programs has been propagated through many decades of debate on how reading skills are acquired and developed through the lifespan (e.g. Goodman & Goodman, 1979; Gough & Hillinger, 1980; Share, 1995; Stanovich, 1980). Despite an emerging consensus that a balanced view of reading is necessary to develop effective reading programs i.e., ones that focus on the competent co-ordination of decoding, word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, fluency and reading comprehension processes (e.g. Pressley, 2006), research suggests that this view is not reflected in the development of many adult reading programs across the world (National Research Council, 2012).

Regardless of the particular reading theory adopted, practitioners and scholars alike agree that in principle, effective reading instruction relies upon teachers who are well-informed with regard to the reading process, and able to respond on this basis to learners' specific reading needs (Condelli, Kirshstein, Silver-Pacuilla, Reder, & Spruck Wrigley, 2010; National Research Council, 2012). Educators with higher levels of professional experience and knowledge are more likely to be able to target appropriate and important reading skills in their instruction, and to adopt effective approaches in their efforts to assist readers in developing these skills (Kruidenier, MacArthur, & Wrigley, 2010). Despite this, research suggests that the training provided to adult reading teachers is often inadequate, with professional learning opportunities reported also to be limited. Not surprisingly, the practices adopted by teachers in adult literacy programs have also been reported to vary considerably, an outcome often attributed

to the inadequate training and development opportunities provided within these programs (Kendall & McGrath, 2014). Studies of the teaching practices used in adult reading programs have also suggested that the teaching methods used are generally not evidence-based (National Research Council, 2012), more often reflecting the personal beliefs and perspectives of teachers on how adults can, or should be taught to read (Beder, Lipnevich, & Robinson-Geller, 2007; Belzer, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2011; Van Kan, Ponte, & Verloop, 2013). Findings such as these suggest that, in order to improve the outcomes achieved in adult reading programs, it is first necessary to explore the beliefs and perspectives that reading teachers bring to the programs, as well as the origins of these beliefs and perspectives.

In one previous study conducted by the authors, 60 adult reading teachers were asked to discuss their beliefs about how less-skilled adult readers should be taught to read (McHardy & Chapman, 2016). In this phenomenographic study, the adult reading teachers responded to an online survey on the instructional approaches they would use to teach a specific, profiled adult reader.

Four broad approaches to teaching adult reading were identified from the responses obtained. In the least complex of the approaches identified, the *reassurance* approach, the focus was primarily upon developing positive relationships with the learners. This reflected a belief in the notion that adult readers acquire reading skills naturally when the learning environment is conducive. There was no specific focus on providing instruction in targeted reading skill areas. *Task-based* instructional approaches also had a focus on creating reassuring learning environments, but were more directed and focused upon reading instruction, than wholly reassurance-based approaches. Task-based approaches relied heavily on teachers' views of what readers needed, and generally focused on a

limited selection of tasks. *Theory-based* approaches to teaching reading were informed by particular understandings of the reading process. These approaches were grounded in well-developed, but in many cases, narrow views on the reading process and on how readers should be taught to read. These approaches did not necessarily focus on specific reading difficulties. The most complex approach was labelled the *responsive* approach, and was characterised by the incorporation of elements from all three previous approaches, *as well as* a focus on providing instruction to bolster specified processes that are critical for effective word reading (e.g., decoding, syllable awareness). The responsive approach relied upon a high level of knowledge about the reading process, and about strategies for teaching reading. This approach also relied heavily on flexibility, allowing an appropriate 'response' to individual learners' needs.

The diverse approaches identified in this and other previous research may provide insights into why adult reading programs continue to have limited impacts on adults' reading skills (Palameta, Myers, & Conte, 2013). More specifically, the variable results obtained in adult reading programs may be a product, at least in part, of teachers not targeting specific, critical reading difficulties in their instructional approaches (e.g., MacArthur et al., 2012).

Other research has suggested that problems with a lack of sound theoretical and empirical knowledge of the reading process on the part of reading teachers may be compounded by teachers' lack of awareness of the assumptions that they bring to teaching situations (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011; Stephens et al., 2000). Various researchers have suggested that teachers' ability to engage in this form of reflection is a critical determinant in the success or failure of instructional reading programs (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011). Findings

of this kind highlight the need not only to provide better training and support for teachers within adult reading programs, but also, to bolster teachers' own ability to reflect upon, evaluate, and improve their instructional approaches. In this view, teachers need to be provided with frameworks for acknowledging and analysing their own reading-related beliefs and perspectives, as well as the origins of these, to be able to evaluate and improve upon the instructional approaches they adopt.

Given the research evidence which suggests that adult reading teachers often rely upon their own beliefs about the reading process in deciding upon their instructional strategies, rather than on evidence garnered from well-controlled research within the field (McHardy & Chapman, 2016; Benseman, 2013; Van Kan et al., 2013), to change teachers' practices and facilitate the adoption of responsive approaches in adult reading programs, it will first be necessary to extend our own understanding of the perspectives adopted by reading teachers (Barnyak & Paquette, 2010). There is limited reference to the origins of reading-related beliefs and perspectives in the adult teacher education literature. Beliefs about reading and reading development processes have been reported in child reading research to derive from personal childhood experiences, experiences and observations as a teacher, and teachers' own literacy education and school experiences (Barnyak & Paquette, 2010; Mansfield & Volet, 2010; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011; Stephens et al., 2000), although professional readings (Stephens et al., 2000), formal knowledge (Mansfield & Volet, 2010) and previous training (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011) have also been identified in some studies. Overall, however, there has been little attempt in the research literature to unpack the sources of adult reading teachers' beliefs in

this area. Based on an extensive search of the adult reading literature, no studies were identified by the authors that had focused specifically on the origins of reading-teachers' beliefs and perspectives on why less-skilled adult readers had not developed reading skills.

The present study aimed to extend our current understanding of why adult reading teachers adopt given approaches and practices in their reading instruction (e.g. McHardy & Chapman, 2016; Kendall & McGrath, 2014). The two specific research questions addressed in the study were: (a) What are adult reading teachers' perspectives on how adults become less-skilled readers?, and (b) What are the origins of these perspectives?

Method

Participants

The data for this study were generated from a series of interviews with teachers of less-skilled adult readers. Nineteen adult reading teachers from one Western Australian city and one New Zealand city participated in the study. Of the 19, four were males and 15 were females. Participants' ages varied widely; three teachers were aged 20-29 years, one teacher was aged 30-39 years, two teachers were aged 40-49 years, seven teachers were aged 50-59 years and six teachers were aged over 60.

Participants were recruited through the lead researcher's networks in Western Australia and New Zealand. Through these networks, relevant organizations were contacted via email and asked to distribute information about the study to reading teachers who worked in that organization. To capture a range of perspectives, adult reading teachers with varying years of experience, employment status, and teaching contexts ranging from community volunteers to formal tertiary settings were invited to participate.

While all participants had some experience in teaching adult reading, the number of years of experience in adult literacy varied considerably across the sample. One teacher reported having less than one year of experience, two teachers reported 1-2 years of experience; five teachers had 2-5 years of experience; six teachers had 5-10 years of experience; three teachers had 10-20 years of experience; and two teachers reported having more than 20 years of experience.

Interview Design

The research questions were pursued through a series of semi-structured interviews. Given the research questions posed, in the design of the interviews with participants, importance was placed upon understanding the *perspectives* of the adult reading teachers on the reading process, and on the *origins* of these perspectives. Thus, the interview

questions were designed to capture the underpinning ideas, behaviors and contexts associated with particular acts taken by the participating teachers. 'Perspectives' were viewed here in alignment with Blackledge and Hunt's (1985) framework, which depicts a perspective to incorporate notions of aims and intentions, significance, reasons and strategies. Guiding questions used in the interviews to address these elements of participants' perspectives are shown in Table 1.

Interview Procedures

Interviews were conducted over a three month period. Once an email response to the information sent out by organizations was received, the primary researcher organized to meet with the teacher at a convenient time and location. Interviews took between 20 and 60 minutes in all. As described above, to address the primary

Table 1: Guiding questions with related conversational questions

GUIDING QUESTIONS	CONVERSATIONAL QUESTIONS
What are the aims of adult reading teachers when they work with a less-skilled adult reader? What reasons do they give for having these aims? What challenges do they have in trying to realise their aims?	**I want you to think about adult reading:** • When you are working with a learner what are you hoping to achieve in your sessions? • Why do you think the things you mention are important? • What do you think makes you think that way? Are you aware of learning about this? • What makes it hard to achieve what you want to, in a session?
What strategies do adult reading teachers adopt in trying to realise their aims? What reasons do they give for adopting these strategies? What challenges do they face in adopting them?	**You have told me what you are hoping to achieve in regards to adult reading in your sessions.** • Now, tell me what you use, or do in your sessions so that you achieve what you want to? • Why do you choose to do these things? Why do you think they are important and/or appropriate? Are you aware of learning about this? • What are the issues, challenges, problems you have found using or trying to use these?

(continued on next page)

Table 1: Guiding questions with related conversational questions *(continued)*

What significance do adult reading teachers attach to their aims and strategies? What reasons do they give for their position on this? What challenges do they face in trying to maintain this position?	**Think about what you have told me about what you want to achieve in regards to adult reading and the things you do in your sessions (which help you achieve what you want to).** • Tell me about how important it is to you that you achieve the aims. Tell me about 'bits' which are more important than other 'bits'. • Why is it important to you that you achieve the aims? Why do you think the 'bits' you describe are more or less important? • What are some of the barriers to achieving the aims you prioritize? • Tell me which of the things/ways of teaching (strategies) you have described are more important to you. • Why are these more important to you? Are you aware of learning about this? • What are some of the barriers to using these things/ways of teaching?
What outcomes do adult reading teachers expect from pursuing their aims and strategies? What reasons do they give for expecting these outcomes? What challenges do they face in trying to realise them?	• When you are working with an adult reader and all the things we have talked about (what you hope to achieve, what things you will do and use) "fall into place" what do you think the result(s) or outcome(s) of your work with your learner will be? • Why do you think this will be the outcome(s)? • What issues do you have in attempting to arrive at these outcomes?

aims of the study, the interview questions focused upon eliciting information about the aims and intentions of the teachers in the context of a particular lesson. Other aspects of teachers' perspectives explored through the interview questions included the strategies that teachers used to achieve their aims, as well as significance of these strategies in the teachers' views. Throughout the interviews, the participants were prompted to elaborate their responses through frequent 'why' questioning, with the goal of encouraging the teachers to think deeply about the factors that underpinned their responses to particular situations.

Analysis Approach

All interviews were audio taped and transcribed for coding purposes. Coding procedures were then used to identify common themes. Transcribed interviews were read and re-read multiple times and were coded on a line-by-line basis. Within each interview, the researcher attempted to put herself in the position of the participant, and to interpret the actions of that participant and grasp the meaning(s) of the participant's actions through the lens adopted by the participant. The key research questions were used as a focus throughout each reading to enable the researcher to identify viewpoints that were then reduced into themes. Miles and Huberman's (1994) three stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing were used to guide the analysis process. Emergent viewpoints and themes were listed at the side of the page containing the raw data and revisited and reworked over successive readings. Relationships between the categories were then

identified for the purpose of generating the themes that were identified.

Results

Four themes emerged with respect to Research Question One: What are adult reading teachers' perspectives on how adults become less-skilled readers? These responses suggested the beliefs that, to become a skilled reader, a) distinct learner needs must have been met, b) that 'life-baggage' must be managed, c) that learning environments must meet physical, psychological and learning requirements, and d) that the pleasure of reading must be developed. Twelve participants made comments that reflected the distinct needs theme, 11 participants spoke of factors that suggested the pleasure of reading theme, and all 19 participants spoke of aspects signifying both 'life baggage' and inappropriate learning environments themes. The themes are summarized in Figure 1 below.

Four themes emerged with respect to Research Question Two: What are the origins of these perspectives? These themes suggested that adult reading teachers' perspectives originated in a) teachers' own experiences in learning and reading (reflected in comments from 10 participants), b) their experiences as teachers (comments from 15 participants), c) teachers' knowledge
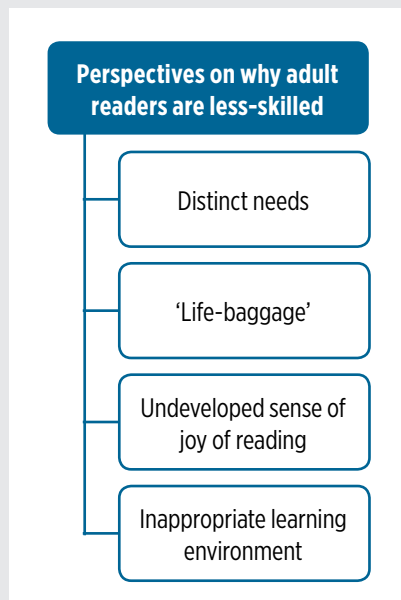
of teaching reading (comments from nine participants), and d) their knowledge of reading frameworks and theory (comments from nine participants). The themes are summarized in Figure 2 below.

In the next section, the perspectives expressed are considered together with reported origins of each perspective to emphasize the connection between the two. Differing origins emerged in discussions of any one perspective theme; the expressed perspective of any one participant as to why an adult was a less-skilled reader did not always have the same origin as the same perspective expressed by another participant. The origins of perspectives were not exclusive to any perspective theme.
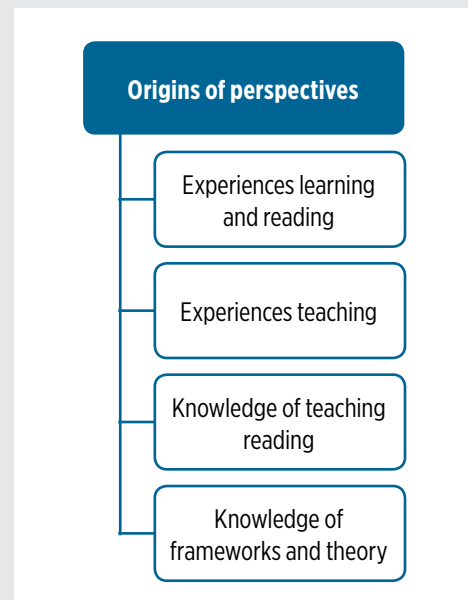
Perspective Theme 1: Distinct Needs

Two overlapping viewpoints characterized this teacher perspective; reading skill development

FIGURE 1. Adult reading teachers' perspectives on why adults are less-skilled readers.

Perspectives on why adult readers are less-skilled

- Distinct needs
- 'Life-baggage'
- Undeveloped sense of joy of reading
- Inappropriate learning environment

FIGURE 2. The origins of adult reading teachers' perspectives on why adults are less-skilled readers.

Origins of perspectives

- Experiences learning and reading
- Experiences teaching
- Knowledge of teaching reading
- Knowledge of frameworks and theory

may have been limited by first, a cognitive or physical disability such as dyslexia or speech difficulties and second, by lack of attention to individual learning requirements. Nine participants spoke about specific disabilities as possible explanations as to why an adult had not developed skills in reading. That individual learning requirements may not have been met was suggested by seven participants. The viewpoints were characterized by comments on the need to target the teaching to each individual with reference to different abilities, learning demands, learning styles, context, and cultural factors.

> Oh, every session is different…one size doesn't fit all… often the learners come here, they might have a disability or something …and sometimes I can be blown away…and what I have thought would be good for them, or not good for them, but be helpful to them, is not.

The source of these perspectives was degrees of combinations of experiences as a teacher and particular understandings of theory and frameworks of adult learning and learning needs.

> I have read a lot of research - that says it is, but I found over and over again. I wouldn't teach everyone the same way: I could have another learner and I wouldn't be teaching them like this. They would know the alphabet, maybe. The learning demands could be quite different - learning requirements could be quite different.

Perspective Theme 2: "Life-Baggage"

Three viewpoints emerged and are collectively labeled as "life-baggage" which less-skilled readers "carry" and which restricted opportunity to build reading skills. The viewpoints were that first, reading skill development had been limited by earlier experiences where reading was not valued or encouraged, second, by current life stresses and concerns which take priority or distract the adult learner and third, by poor self-esteem and confidence which has left the adult-reading learner *terrified*, *frightened* and *powerless*.

> OK, so, the first thing that makes that difficult is self-esteem in the learner, bad experiences that they've had, and mostly an identity decision that they've made that they do not read and they're not a reader, and they are one of those 'other' people.

The source of these viewpoints was largely based on teachers' experiences with teaching and learners. The three "life baggage" viewpoints are discussed in more detail below.

Limited earlier reading experiences of learner. Six participants expressed the viewpoint that learners may not have had much exposure to text. The origins of the perspective were combinations of two sources: teachers' own experiences of reading and learning, and knowledge of reading theory. Teachers discussed their own early, positive experiences as a reader (*I grew up reading. I read all the time… and find it hard to imagine a life lived without text*). There is a sense by teachers that this childhood history of reading was not a universal experience and learners have been left out.

> There can be negative experiences that have an impact, not just motivation but attitude towards reading. They may have a home environment, a home background where reading is not so valued. They may not do so much reading…

Teachers prioritized exposure to text and links were made to theory:

> There is that boot-strapping effect where the more they read, the more they engage in reading, and the more likely they are to develop automaticity [of] those kinds of skills.

Current life stresses. The second viewpoint on the 'life baggage' that learners 'carry' was that of current life stresses which lead to many issues for learners including poor attendance. Eleven teachers spoke of current life stresses. The source of this perspective was experience as a teacher:

> When the learners are stressed, it's very hard to… which is often…very hard for them to concentrate. It makes it very difficult to teach, because there's never a day where everyone's on the same page. In addition, people, especially people who don't have much money, [are] too busy to be able to have any

time for what for them is quite a new thing. New things take a lot of energy. I've been through a lot of learners, and I've… it's an observation.

Poor self-esteem and confidence. All 19 teachers expressed a third viewpoint in the "life-baggage" theme which saw poor self-esteem and low confidence as limiters to reading skill acquisition. Less-skilled readers have had *bad experiences*, and are *ashamed* and *terrified when the next challenge comes up.* Teachers know this from *histories of failure* told to them by learners.

> They have had a lifetime of poor self-esteem, negativity … that you have to get over. [I] do think that there is a lot of stuff for adult learners where they're self-limiting… where people just do not attempt to do things, because they believe they can't… the moment there's a word that is difficult, or a sentence that makes no sense whatsoever, they just throw their hands up and go "it must be me, I'm stupid, I can't do this" …if we can give people evidence that it's not their stupidity that stops them from being able to do it, that reading is a task like any other thing [that] you can learn to do, and some strategies will help …that there will be things that are more difficult than others and some stuff is impossible, but it may not be your fault. It is all to do with what happens in the session, how the learner feels in the session [and I] wouldn't frighten them with something too hard.

Perspective Theme 3: Undeveloped Sense of Joy of Reading

The third theme, expressed by 11 participants, described a perspective that less-skilled readers have not developed a sense of joy about their reading and this has limited their development as skilled readers.

> I believe that he [the learner] gets no joy or pleasure out of reading things. My hope is that they [learners] get a taste for reading; that they start to enjoy reading. I think that's important too, because they need to continue their reading development when you've finished with them. There's the dream; the dream is that these adults will begin to find books that [they] will love and read, then reread them. I'd like people to begin to develop a self-sustaining interest in reading.

The source of this perspective was teachers own experience as a learner and reader:

> …there's a lot of satisfaction that can be gained from being able to read. You know what sort of joys and pleasures you get from it, and how much information you get, leisure time, work as well.

Perspective Theme 4: Inappropriate Learning Environment

The many ideas which emerged to characterize this theme are summarized into two general viewpoints: (a) Less-skilled readers have not had appropriate physical and psychological environments provided to foster learning, (b) nor have they had a teaching and learning environment which appropriately addressed their needs as a learner.

Appropriate physical and psychological environments. All 19 teachers spoke of the need to create a comfortable, calm, relaxed, safe reading place with the implication that this has not been the prior learning environment for learners. These ideas came from experience as a learner and teacher, and also from adult learning theory.

> Warm positive relationships must be established as relationship[s] and rapport can overcome some of the 'things' limiting the reader. This is common sense. If an adult feels uncomfortable, in any way, they're not going to learn, and there is a need to be settled into feeling comfortable with each other. I was raised in a very positive environment myself. There's the big rapport-relationship component with adults, I think, it has to be there, and part of that is trying to enter their world, to figure out what motivates them and what encourages them…

Appropriate teaching and learning environment. Two groups of ideas emerged from comments of 17 participants to describe this viewpoint: First, less-skilled adult readers have not been taught in an informed, planned, professional way with targeted, assessment-informed content

demonstrating understanding of specific needs, and second, the learners have not been taught in an engaging way and *"hooked-in"* to learning. The teaching has not motivated learners to learn. Experience, knowledge of teaching and theoretical knowledge were all sources of these perspectives.

The first group of ideas was that informed, planned, professional teaching underpinned by assessment is needed for effective teaching with the implication that lack of this has limited the less-skilled reader.

> Learners can get shoved aside, like what probably happened at school. Teaching must be specialized but flexible enough to deviate if need be so as to create momentum and success. It's their [the teachers] job to do their best every time, to bring quality stuff, no matter what. Teachers have to have training and education … have to be research-informed with a combination of a ton of reading....

The second group of ideas was that less-skilled adult readers have not been taught in an engaging way and *"hooked-in"* to learning. Teachers drew on their experience.

> It is important for your student to see the purpose behind it: even though I explained it to him, now and again he would say "what's the point of all this". So, for students to see the overall picture, and relevance in their life, and how it's going to help them in the program as well… pay attention to what they [are] interested in. If it's not interesting, they'll struggle with things. Sessions need to be interesting or funny or very little learning occurs. Teachers need to talk [to learners] quite a bit to see where the interests lie and try to find something that's relevant. There are programs with at least half the students bored and half the students struggling. Adults will learn if it's realistic, authentic, and real life strategies, and content is used. Keep it real for them.

Discussion

Responses to questions about what teachers hope to achieve in adult reading programs, how they expect to do this and why they act in the way they do, reveal varying perspectives on why teachers in this study teach the way they do and varying origins of these perspectives. These teachers teach the way they do because of perspectives that less-skilled adult readers have not had distinct learning needs met, have issues which hinder learning, have no joy of reading, and have had inappropriate learning environments. The origins of these perspectives are personal experience as a learner, reader and teacher, and knowledge of teaching reading, and knowledge of theory and frameworks.

While these findings support, in part, those from studies of teachers of children (Barnyak & Paquette, 2010; Mansfield & Volet, 2010; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011; Stephens et al., 2000) the findings make an original contribution to the existing literature on adult-reading teachers and specifically on teacher perspectives on why adults may be less-skilled readers. Although perspectives regarding teaching and learning are fundamental to every teacher (Abernathy-Dyer, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2013) there is frequently a lack of awareness of individual perspectives and where they come from (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011; Stephens et al., 2000). The identification and graphic organization of adult-reading teacher perspectives in this study, provides a useful tool for further reflection in general. More importantly, identification of the origins of the perspectives, where the ideas come from, enables teachers to evaluate the merit of views underpinning teaching practice; understanding the origins of the perspectives allows candid reflection on the value and relevance of such perspectives for teaching (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011). The graphic tool facilitates teachers in confronting their own views about how they teach and how they view adult-reading learners.

Viewing perspectives alongside their origins highlights particular implications for adult-reading teachers and programs. First, the findings

demonstrate that despite discussing how they draw on levels of teaching-reading knowledge and frameworks, adult-reading teachers may often rely principally on personal experiences and assumptions about learner lives to make decisions about how to teach. Despite quoting theories of adult learning and reading development, teachers talk about using approaches which worked for themselves as child learners, of how they themselves like to learn, and of their own positive childhood experiences. Teachers own personal joy of reading is drawn on to speculate on approaches to motivate and enthuse less-skilled adult readers. However, the adult learners have reading difficulties with experiences potentially, vastly different from the teachers who were likely readers whose reading skills followed normal development patterns. Further, generalisations are made about negative life experiences of learners and the need to compensate for this. While personal sources of information and perspectives are important in providing the empathy and rapport-building aspects of the teacher-learner relationship, they are not sufficient to inform instruction which can address reading difficulties effectively (National Research Council, 2012). Adult-reading teachers need to be watchful of the over-dependence on personal feelings and beliefs which is evident in this study.

Second, teachers in this study contend that they teach the way they do because they are informed by professional experience and observations. Indeed, professional wisdom, acquired through experience, traditionally informs teacher perspectives. While teacher experience is useful, previous studies have established that it does not necessarily match the relevant research (Benseman, 2013) and teachers need to be aware of an over-reliance on professional observations and experience described by teachers in this study.

Third, despite describing the importance of using research-backed, targeted teaching, assumptions are made about learners and how to teach them which appear to have no bearing on the reality of that learner or on their specific learning difficulties. Useful adult reading instruction includes careful recognition of what reading skills an individual has mastered, and which skills need further development. To address entrenched reading difficulties, programs must be informed by diagnostic assessment (Kruidenier et al., 2010, National Research Council, 2012) not merely by teachers' subjective views of what the problem is and how to address it. The lack of reliance on diagnostic assessments, and inability to interpret and apply findings, illustrated in adult teacher responses, supports the case for more focus on diagnosing reading difficulties in training and ongoing professional learning.

Adult-reading teachers must be aware of, and open to, alternative teaching options and approaches depending on the needs of the learner. To be open to new ideas teachers must be aware of their own knowledge and limitations, and to what informs individual's teaching decisions (Fives & Buehl, 2012). Both teacher education programs and professional learning must prepare teachers by helping them become aware of when personal perspective and research-based practices are incompatible. More research on the perspectives of teachers and the origins of perspectives is required in order to advance our understanding of teaching practice. A specific focus on possible associations of beliefs with teacher characteristics and training, may inform future targeted professional learning; the more teachers know about themselves, the better the ability to reflect on and modify teaching decisions. In addition, trials are required to evaluate the potential of self-reflective frameworks, such as that created

in this paper, in teacher professional learning. Understanding and addressing perspectives and their origins, and how these influence teaching practices, may help teachers identify shortcomings in their perspectives on why adults are less-skilled readers and provide a platform for adult-reading teachers to build new information and improve effectiveness of adult reading teaching.

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