Rising to the Reading Challenges of Adult Learners

Practitioner's Toolkit

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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- What are your goals for reading this Toolkit?
- What are two important things you would like to learn?

Purpose of the Toolkit

The ultimate goal of the Toolkit is to help practitioners use effective teaching strategies to help struggling adult learners improve their reading skills. To accomplish this goal, we are drawing on years of research and practice from the fields of learning disabilities (LDs) and reading research. We will refer to learning disabilities as "LDs" throughout the Toolkit.

We recognize that practitioners have limited time and resources and we have done the groundwork in selecting critical information and providing ideas for practical applications. The Toolkit:

- Provides practitioners with information from the fields of learning disabilities and reading research.
- Builds awareness of the reading process. Where does reading break down for this learner? How can I help?
- Provides instructional strategies and resources that are effective for learners with LDs – and for all learners.
- Adds to understanding of strategies to support social-emotional challenges of adult learners.
- Builds an awareness of "red flags" for learning disabilities to help guide instruction and decisions about pursuing a psycho-educational assessment.

The target audiences for this resource are adult foundational learning practitioners, teachers, literacy tutors and anyone who is interested in helping an adult improve their reading skills. In our experience at the CanLearn Society, it is particularly important to address the needs of adult learners who are at the beginning stages of learning to read.

Important to Know

- The Toolkit does not offer a specific method for reading instruction because there is no magic bullet or fail-proof recipe for reading instruction.
- Research indicates that there are no quick fixes but it is possible to significantly boost the reading skills of struggling adult readers if instructors access and use tools that work.
- The tools described apply to all adult literacy learners including those with LDs and English language learners (ELL).
- The tools described reflect the best available research on effective approaches to reading instruction. These tools are derived mainly from research with K-12 learners because research on effective adult reading instruction is limited. However, many researchers in the field are in agreement that applying, modifying and reflecting on best K-12 practices is a good starting point that allows the adult foundational field to move forward despite the scarcity of research.
- The Toolkit should be used as a tool to guide instruction rather than as a "cookbook." All tools and strategies presented in the Toolkit will need to be modified to reflect the needs, learning goals, age, motivation and cultural and linguistic background of individual learners. A simple principle is this, "If it works, do more of it; if it doesn't work, don't do it."

Why Focus on Reading?

Reading is the most important foundational skill. Adults who have trouble reading are faced with numerous and complex challenges. They are at a disadvantage when competing for jobs in the 21st century workforce. They are often socially isolated and unable to provide for their families. They are more likely to have health problems and they struggle to support their children's learning. The situation is perhaps most dire for those at the lowest reading levels because they cannot use printed media to learn and pursue educational opportunities that would enable them to enhance their economic and social well-being.

The results of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies survey (PIAAC[1]) paint a troubling portrait of the literacy skills of adults in Canada. The survey included a direct assessment of reading skills and was conducted in 23 countries with nationally representative samples of adults ages 16 through 65. It was found that literacy skills of adults in Canada have remained relatively unchanged in the decade since the previous report, while other countries have been showing improvements, especially among adults with low basic skills.

4% of adults in Canada have demonstrated reading skills below Level 1, while 13% are at Level 1.

What does this mean?

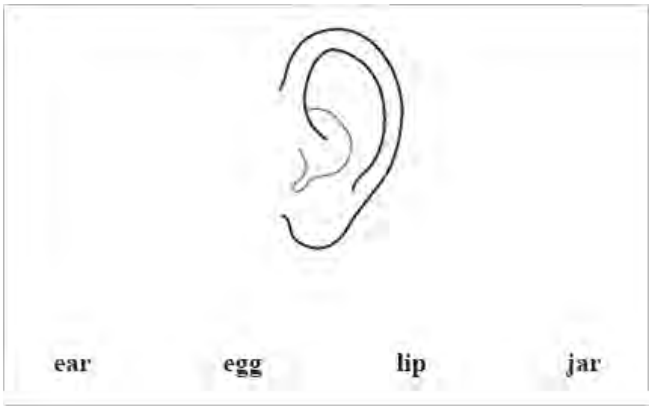
17% of adults in Canada have very weak reading skills!

This limits their ability to use reading for learning.

Here is what their struggles may look like.

Typically, below Level 1 and at Level 1 adults:

- Cannot recognize printed forms of words associated with common objects such as body parts, animals, furniture, and shapes.



Sample PIAAC Word Meaning Task

- Are not able to understand and evaluate short sentences.

Three girls ate the song.	**YES**	**NO**
The man drove the green car.	**YES**	**NO**
The lightest balloon floated in the bright sky.	**YES**	**NO**
A comfortable pillow is soft and rocky.	**YES**	**NO**
A person who is twenty years old is older than a person who is thirty years old.	**YES**	**NO**

Sample PIAAC Sentence Processing Task

- Are not able to read passages for basic understanding.

> To the editor: Yesterday, it was announced that the cost of riding the bus will increase. The price will go up by twenty percent starting next wife / month. As someone who rides the bus every day, I am upset by this foot / increase. I understand that the cost of gasoline / student has risen. I also understand that riders have to pay a fair price / snake for bus service. I am willing to pay a little more because I rely on the bus to get to object / work. But an increase / uncle of twenty percent is too much.
>
> This increase is especially difficult to accept when you see the city's plans to build a new sports stadium. The government will spend millions on this project even though we already have a science / stadium. If we delay the stadium, some of that money can be used to offset the increase in bus fares / views. Then, in a few years, we can decide if we really do need a new sports cloth / arena. Please let the city council know you care about this issue by attending the next public meeting / frames.

Sample PIAAC Passage Comprehension Task

Consequently, in their day-to-day life, these adults struggle to read a menu, a pay stub or a bus schedule. Poor reading affects every aspect of life – family life, relationships, health and overall well-being.

This information about the reading challenges of adults can inform practice in the adult foundational learning field.

Learners come to adult foundational programs to pursue their personal, family and work-related goals. They have hopes for the future and they know that learning will give opportunities to improve their lives. However, their limited reading ability too often proves to be a barrier to achieving their learning goals. For example, a learner who enrolls with the goal of earning a plumbing certificate may hope to reach that goal in a matter of months, especially if he has already worked in the plumbing field. However, reading skill deficits will affect performance on nearly every part of the journey because the process is based on written tests.

At CanLearn, we greatly value current programs and practices in the adult foundational learning field. We fully recognize best practices in adult literacy call for the embedded, contextualized instruction based on learners' everyday lives and authentic literacy materials. Simply saying, if a learner needs a driver's license, we need to help him pass the driver's exam.

However, we also recognize that it is important for beginning adult learners to address their reading problems in order to meet their learning goals. Consequently, in addition to developing skills in real-life contexts of their lives (e.g. filling out forms, reading instructions for medication), adult learners require explicit, direct and systematic instruction in basic reading skills.

Why Consider Learning Disabilities?

Many learners in adult foundational learning programs have experienced longstanding difficulties in learning. Because reading is a complex process, many things can go wrong along the journey of learning to read. Some struggling adult readers may have entered school with very poor preparation for learning to read – they got off to a very poor start and never recovered. Others may have experienced significant emotional or physical trauma in their childhood – poverty, homelessness, family conflict, chronic health problems, physical and emotional neglect/abuse are just some of the factors that have a profound impact on a person's ability to learn. Attending school sporadically and receiving insufficiently powerful instruction are additional causes of poor reading in adults. There is growing recognition that one reason an adult may not have learned to read may be a learning disability that has not been identified or addressed. Adults with LDs struggle to learn to read because of the way their brains process information. It is estimated that as many as 30% to 60% of adults in foundational learning/literacy programs have LDs.[2, 3]

Not all adult beginning readers have LDs —but some do.

It is important for practitioners to have a knowledge base and tools to thoughtfully consider the possibility of LDs. If a learner is struggling to make progress in acquiring basic reading skills, you might suspect LDs. However, before suggesting that a learner have a psycho-educational assessment to find out if they do indeed have LDs, it is important to take time to follow the following two steps:

1. Provide individualized explicit reading instruction
2. Screen the learner for possible LDs

The purpose of individualizing instruction is to ensure your learner tries reasonable modifications before there is a referral for psycho-educational assessment. Sometimes, a change in instruction can turn the learner's performance around and make it unnecessary to consider psycho-educational services. If the concern persists, it is time to do the screening. LD screening is an informal process that shows whether there is a **possibility** that the learner might have an undiagnosed learning disability. The screening process also provides an understanding of a learner's strengths and needs to further inform adjustments to instruction to address different processing difficulties. You will find the screening process that we use at CanLearn described later in the Toolkit.

It is important to keep in mind that while informal screening can be done by an instructor, formal psycho-educational assessment must be done by a psychologist who is qualified to evaluate LDs.

Why a Practitioner's Toolkit?

Since 1979, the CanLearn Society (formerly the Calgary Learning Centre) has been immersed in research and practice to understand and support individuals of all ages who struggle with learning. On a daily basis, we experience the need to provide front line practitioners with knowledge, skills and tools that will be most effective for helping adults who are struggling to learn to read. We began sharing information about adults with LDs and Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) in workshops and on-line modules entitled *LIFE: Learning Is for Everyone*.[4] We continue to share our experience in this Toolkit where we attempt to distill critical messages and provide practical approaches that practitioners can implement.

Key Messages

Some key messages that emerge in the Toolkit:

- Adult learning practitioners can help struggling beginning readers by using strategies that are effective for adults with LDs.
- Addressing the social-emotional challenges of adult learners is critical to the learning process.
- Practitioners do not diagnose LDs. They can answer the question: "Is it likely, or possible, that this learner has a learning disability?"
- Not all struggling learners have LDs.
- Not all learners with suspected LDs need an assessment. Awareness of the benefits and barriers of obtaining a psycho-educational assessment can help practitioners support adult learners.

Chapter 2: Learning Disabilities in Adults

Pre-Reading Reflection

- What are two things you know about learning disabilities?
- What are two things you want to know about learning disabilities?

Adult learning practitioners have important roles to play in understanding, recognizing and supporting learners with unique learning challenges, including LDs. While not all adults who struggle with learning to read have LDs, many do. An understanding of LDs in adults provides a context for planning and adjusting instruction and for recognizing possible LDs.

The term "learning disabilities" (LDs) was first used by a psychologist, Dr. Samuel Kirk, in 1962 to describe children who had "unexpected" difficulties in learning. The difficulties were unexpected because these children were developing as expected in many areas and did not have any of the conditions that might typically explain their difficulties in learning to read and write – they could see, hear, communicate, reason and problem solve, but they still struggled to develop literacy skills. Since 1962, we have learned how LDs affect individuals across their lifespan. The current most accepted definition of learning disabilities in Canada is included in Appendix A. We have come to understand what LDs "are" and what they "are not". The following key points help to build an understanding of LDs and to dispel some of the myths about LDs.

What Learning Disabilities Are

LDs are lifelong: Individuals do not grow out of them, although the impact may change with changing life demands.

LDs are heterogeneous: Not all individuals with LDs are the same. There are many patterns of strengths and needs and levels of severity. There are many different terms that have been used to describe some of the patterns of difficulties, for example dyslexia and dysgraphia. A list of terms and their meanings are included in Appendix B.

LDs are different from intellectual or developmental disabilities: Individuals with LDs have at least average intelligence, however, they have a pattern of uneven abilities with strengths in some areas and significant difficulties in other areas. This means that they have good thinking and reasoning skills, but they struggle with learning specific things.

Tim Tebow

It has nothing to do with how intelligent you are. You can be extremely bright and still have dyslexia (learning disability). You just have to understand how you learn and how you process information. When you know that you can overcome a lot of the obstacles that come with dyslexia. When you figure out how you learn, you can accomplish what ever you want.

Tim Tebow, former NFL quarterback with learning disabilities.
Retrieved from http://www.understood.org

LDs involve difficulties in processing information: Individuals with LDs can learn, but they learn differently because they process information differently. Their brains deal with information in different ways. The differences may be in language processing, speed of processing, memory, attention or overall planning and organization. They may occur anywhere along the information processing continuum:

Take in information through our senses	Make sense of the information	Express information
See	*Associate*	*Speak*
Hear	*Interpret*	*Write*
Feel	*Analyze*	*Demonstrate*
	Give meaning	

LDs result in academic under-achievement: For individuals with LDs, the most obvious negative impact in their lives is on the development of academic skills, most often reading and writing.

LDs are neurologically based: Brain research has shown that LDs result from a difference in the way an individual's brain is "wired". For example, brain imaging studies have demonstrated that during reading, the activation patterns of brains in individuals with LDs differ from those of normal readers.[5,6]

LDs run in families: When the LDs affect reading, between 25% and 50% of children with LDs have a parent who has LDs.[7]

LDs do not "walk alone": Individuals with LDs often have other difficulties. For example, 30% to 50% also have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)[8]. Anxiety and depression are also common.[9]

Dispelling Myths – What Learning Disabilities Are Not:

LDs are NOT an intellectual disability: Individuals with LDs have at least average intelligence. They do many things well and have an uneven profile of abilities and difficulties. This is in contrast to an overall intellectual disability that affects all aspects of learning and development.

LDs are NOT the result of poor educational history or ineffective teaching: Individuals with LDs have had opportunities to learn. However, many do drop out of school early.

LDs are NOT the result of socio-economic factors: LDs occur across all socio-economic levels, although access to opportunities and supports may vary across income levels.

LDs are NOT the result of cultural or linguistic differences: LDs can occur in any cultural or linguistic group. Cross cultural research indicates that individuals exhibit characteristics associated with LDs across the world.[10, 11.] If an adult learner comes from a different cultural or linguistic group, there must be evidence of literacy and learning challenges in their first language before LDs are considered.[12]

Whoopi Goldberg

They thought I was lazy so they put me in the slow class. But my mom was a Head Start teacher, and she told me, 'You're not slow, you're just different'.

Whoopi Goldberg, award-winning actress and comedian with LDs.
Retrieved from http://www.understood.org

LDs are NOT the result of emotional disorders: Many individuals with LDs experience anxiety and depression as a result of their learning difficulties, but the learning difficulties are not the result of such emotional disorders. In addition, there is increasing awareness that trauma can affect brain development and have an impact on learning[13]. Some adult learners may have experienced trauma related to war and violence, or experienced abuse/neglect.

LDs are NOT the result of vision or hearing problems: It is important to ensure that adult learners do not have uncorrected hearing or vision problems.

When we look at all of the information about LDs, we see that the picture is complex – but it is hopeful! Adults with LDs can learn and there is information available to improve the effectiveness of instruction for these learners. Adult foundational learning practitioners do not diagnose LDs. However, awareness of LDs and effective instructional strategies can be helpful in your work with all learners, especially beginning readers.

Impact/Experiences of LDs in Adult Years

LDs are lifelong. There is great diversity in the experiences of adults with LDs. Individuals with LDs are in all walks of life, from unskilled workers to highly skilled workers[14]. Some find success in their personal and professional lives while others face ongoing daily struggles. For many individuals, their LDs may go unrecognized or unsupported resulting in persistent reading difficulties and negative personal experiences at home, at work and in the community. Negative experiences can accumulate over the years and contribute to social-emotional challenges.

Negative Outcomes

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada analyzed Canadian census data and found that when compared with the general population, individuals with LDs were:

- Twice as likely to drop out of school
- Significantly underachieving in literacy
- Less likely to experience stable employment
- More likely to report higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety
- More likely to report poorer mental/physical health[15]

In addition, individuals with LDs are at an increased risk for lingering dependence on caregivers and are more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system.[16]

Social-Emotional Challenges

The experiences of adults with LDs put them at risk for dependence on others and feelings of failure. Their self-determination is reduced – they do not have positive feelings about themselves and do not believe that they can set and achieve goals. The social-emotional consequences of years of failure and learning struggles are significant for adults with LDs and affect their participation in learning activities.

Alison is now in her 30's and dropped out of school in grade 11. She has been moving from job to job without a goal. When her daughter was recently diagnosed with a learning disability, Alison recognized herself in her daughter and does not want her to have the same experience. Alison recalls: "Things got harder as I got older. I could see my friends reading the textbook and I couldn't read it. I became the "bad kid" and the "class clown" to get out of doing the work. I felt that it was better to avoid the work than to let others know that I couldn't do it. I felt I wasn't as smart as my friends so I quit school."

***Low self esteem and fear of failure*:** Adults with LDs often have negative thoughts about themselves and their abilities. These thoughts can limit their willingness to try in learning situations. Frequent experiences of failure lead to a "fear of failure" and an avoidance of new situations. We could call it 'the little engine that can't' because learners are often saying to themselves "I know I can't; I know I can't".

***Learned helplessness**:* Attribution Theory describes how we interpret experiences – do we consider the cause of the behavior to be internal (e.g. ability, effort) or external (e.g., difficult test)? Adults with LDs tend to make external attributions for both success and failure. For example, when they experience success, they attribute it to luck or the teacher marking easily – they do not attribute success to their own efforts or ability. When they experience failure, they also attribute it to outside factors and not to their efforts or ability. Repeated failure often results in "learned helplessness" where the learner stops trying because they think that their efforts are useless. Individuals with LDs begin to doubt their own abilities, leading them to doubt that they can do anything to overcome their school difficulties.

"My parents and teachers often told me to "just try harder" and I could do it – but I was trying hard and I couldn't do it. After a while, I just gave up trying. It was easier to not do something than to try it and fail. "Feeling dumb" is an all-too-common experience for students with learning and attention issues. So much so that when we do get a good grade on something, we might feel like we don't really deserve it. That was the case with me. When I started doing well in school, after years of tutoring and using accommodations, I developed feelings of guilt and self-doubt. It seemed like success and learning issues were like oil and water…they didn't mix."

Tamburello, N.(2016, July 22). The inside track [blog post]. Retrieved from http://www.understood.org

***Emotional sensitivity, anxious feelings*:** Adults with LDs experience many fears and ongoing emotional stress. They often fear failure and fear being exposed – that is, they fear others finding out that they struggle to learn. Many struggle financially, with employment and in relationships. This stress may lead to anxiety and depression and these emotions interfere with learning. Another possible response is to 'act out' to avoid situations where they might feel embarrassed or to avoid admitting when they do not understand something because they do not want to feel 'stupid' or have others think they are 'stupid'.

Interpersonal/social interaction difficulties: Some adults with LDs are "social stars" – their social skills are an area of strength. For other adults with LDs, their difficulties in learning also affect their ability to develop positive social skills. For example, language difficulties can interfere with effective communication – the adults may react defensively because information is misunderstood. They may not understand humour and react inappropriately. They may not maintain appropriate physical distance or have difficulty reading "body language" resulting in awkward interactions that make others feel uncomfortable. Impulsive responding can result in difficulty taking turns in conversations, interrupting others and making off topic comments.

Here are two recommended titles in the LD field, written by Rick Lavoie, that speak to the social difficulties that many experience throughout their lives:

"It Is So Much Work To Be Your Friend", and

"Last One Picked, First One Picked On".

Reading Difficulties

The processing difficulties experienced by individuals with LDs have their primary impact on the acquisition of reading and writing skills. Reading intervention during the school years can lead to improvements in reading. With effective interventions and accommodations, some individuals with LDs become competent in dealing with print. However, their reading difficulties often continue to present challenges. For example, they may be able to decode words and have a broad reading vocabulary but they read slowly. If attending a post-secondary program, they will need accommodations and supports (such as extended time and audio texts) to be successful.

Other adults with LDs have very low reading skills and these are the adults who are found to be over-represented in adult foundational learning programs. These adults struggle with basic word recognition and decoding. Most negative outcomes for adults with LDs appear to be related to low literacy: "there is a connection between low-literacy in adults with LD and a variety of adult adjustment issues, particularly economic issues."[17]. The hopeful message is that these adults can make improvement with explicit, targeted reading instruction.

Key Resources

- Schwarz, R. (2009). *Learning to achieve: A review of the research on serving adults with learning disabilities*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.
- Vogel, S. and Reder, S. (1998). Learning Disabilities. *Literacy and Adult Education.* Baltimore: Paul Brookes.
- Retrieved from http://www.lbspractitionertraining.com/pd-courses/practitioners/lbs-101/67-learning-disabilities
- Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. http://www.ldac-acta.ca/
- Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta. http://www.ldalberta.ca/

A Word about Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Pre-Reading Reflection

- When you think about ADHD, what two questions come to mind?
- Can you think of a learner who had attention difficulties? What was the impact on learning?

LDs and ADHD are NOT the same thing, but, they often go together. It is estimated that 30% to 50% of adults with LDs also have ADHD[18]. This high level of association suggests that many adults in adult foundational programs will have ADHD characteristics that affect their performance in learning situations.

ADHD is an umbrella term. There are three subtypes or "presentations":

- Predominantly inattentive presentation (formerly referred to as ADD without hyperactivity) – this is most common among adults (56 %)
- Predominantly hyperactive-impulsive presentation – rare among adults
- Combined presentation – second most common among adults (44 %)[19]

Characteristics

Here is what their struggles might look like:

Distractibility: They have difficulty maintaining focus and are easily distracted by sounds and sights around them, and by their own thoughts. They are often off topic in conversations where one idea reminds them of something else. Sustaining attention in meetings, reading and doing paperwork can be challenging. It is important to note that adults with ADHD can pay attention to things that are of interest to them and highly motivating. In fact, they sometimes "hyper-focus" and spend extensive amounts of time on activities that are of interest, neglecting other activities.

Poor attention to detail: They make careless mistakes, for example, misreading signs in math (+,X), omitting letters when spelling known words (wen for when), missing specific instructions ("do" for "do not").

Lose and misplace things: Although they may not actually "lose" things, adults with ADHD often "misplace" things that they find eventually. They may need to go back into their home several times in the mornings to get things they have forgotten. Many hours of the day are spent looking for keys, wallet, cell phone, etc. They often lose notices and assignments.

Poor time management: Adults with ADHD are often late (or early!). They have difficulty judging how long something will take and have difficulty getting started and completing things. Often, their homes are filled with projects that they started but did not complete.

Paralyzing procrastination: Many adults with ADHD experience high levels of stress. Because they have difficulty managing time and getting started on projects, they often need a crisis or deadline to be motivated to start and finish something. The due date becomes the start date.

Poor organization: Difficulties organizing time and belongings contribute to overall difficulties with organization.

Impulsivity: They act or speak without thinking. They may interrupt others frequently. They may make rash decisions that they regret later. They may experience an internal restlessness and shift activities and life directions frequently.

Poor regulation of emotions: They may be easily frustrated and quick to feel and express anger. Sometimes, this presents as a volatile temper.

Fidgety, restless: They may rush through work, have difficulty sitting still and need to move. Adults often "fidget".

Causes

ADHD runs in families with 80% being inherited – second only to height in inheritability! ADHD is a "neurobiological" disorder that is caused by reduced electrical activity and blood flow in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. The prefrontal cortex controls important brain functions often referred to as "executive functions": planning, organization, judgment, attention, working memory.

Diagnosis

ADHD is diagnosed by adult psychiatrists, family physicians or psychologists. There is no "test" for ADHD. The adult's "story", i.e., their history, and rating scales of symptoms are key to diagnosis.

The symptoms must be:

Persistent: They have been evident since childhood and have not appeared suddenly.

Pervasive: They occur across all aspects of the individual's life, i.e., at home, in school, at work, in the community.

Severe: They cause "impairment", that is, they interfere with the individual's functioning.

Treatment

There are four pillars for the treatment of ADHD:

Lifestyle: A healthy balanced diet, daily physical exercise and good sleep habits are all beneficial.

Education: It is important that the adult and their family understand what ADHD is and how it affects that individual and their interactions.

Strategies: There are many strategies for addressing the characteristics that cause impairment in the lives of adults with ADHD. For example, structure and routine, breaking down tasks into manageable steps and using checklists can be helpful in adult foundational learning programs.

Medication: Medication can be a powerful tool in combination with the other pillars of treatment. It is also important for adults to be informed about medication and what it can and cannot do - "pills" do not give you "skills" and medication is most beneficial when used in combination with strategies.

For More Information about ADHD

LIFE Training – This online training for literacy practitioners helps you to understand, recognize and support the unique learning challenges and needs of adult learners with suspected and/or diagnosed Learning Disabilities (LD) and Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

To enroll or for more information about the training, contact the CanLearn Society by email at workshop@canlearnsociety.ca. We also do onsite workshops.

CADDRA is an independent, not-for-profit, resource organization for medical, healthcare and research professionals with an interest in the field of ADHD. Visit their website at http://www.caddra.ca

CADDAC is a national, not-for-profit, organization providing leadership and support in awareness, education and advocacy for ADHD organizations and individuals across Canada. Visit their website at http://www.caddac.ca.

ADHD Families is an online resource for information about ADHD for both children and adults. http://www.adhdfamilies.ca

Chapter 3: The Reading Process

Pre-Reading Reflection

- What is reading? How do we learn to read?
- When you think back to the reading instruction you received in school, what stands out?
- Paolo Freire, one of the founding fathers of the adult literacy field, talks about "reading the word and reading the world". What does this mean to you?

When we think of the reading process, we can either focus on its complexity or simplicity. Let's look first at its complexity. Reading is a multi-component process. It involves the following major component skills:

- Phonological and phonemic awareness
- Word Recognition (also known as word analysis or decoding)
- Vocabulary
- Fluency
- Comprehension

Components of Reading

Phonological Awareness

Before they can start to work with print, learners need to be able to hear the sounds in spoken words. The ability to hear and work with the sounds in words is known as phonological awareness. It is an awareness that operates at different levels:

- Syllable awareness (the word "run" has one syllable, the word "paper" has two syllables)
- Onset – rime awareness (in the word "*cat", c-* is the onset and *-at* is the rime)
- Phonemic awareness (the word cat consists of three phonemes/sounds, /c/ /a/ /t/; we can hear that the words "cat" and "car" begin with the same sound)

Research evidence supports the important role of phonological and phonemic awareness in learning to read[20]. This awareness is critical to developing decoding skills. Although the great majority of research in this area has involved children, the few studies done with adult beginning readers tell us that learners of all ages take the same steps through phonemic awareness towards reading[21].

Adults who are non-readers or beginning readers may have no or limited phonemic awareness[22]. They can hear the words but they may not be aware of the individual sounds (phonemes) within them. Some researchers indicate that, while young children benefit from explicit instruction in phonological awareness skills, we don't need to teach these skills to adults in isolation as most adults are able to develop them during phonics instruction. However, there are exceptions. If an English Language Learner has phonological awareness in their mother tongue, this ability will not automatically transfer to phonological awareness in the English language. These learners may require explicit instruction. A learner diagnosed with LDs and deficits in phonological processing will also benefit from direct and explicit instruction.

Word Recognition (Decoding)

Decoding is an essential skill for reading. To easily read the texts in their everyday lives, adults need to be able to decode unfamiliar words without having to think about it - they need to develop the ability to decode automatically.

Adult beginning readers are likely to struggle with different aspects of decoding. Consequently, we need to explicitly and systematically teach different aspects of word recognition – phonics, word families, word analysis skills and sight words. The degree to which instruction needs to focus on decoding and which aspects of decoding to emphasize depends on the needs of an individual learner.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is critical to our ability to read. Our richest source of learning new words beyond the age of 10 is through reading (e.g., newspapers, books, magazines). Adults with decoding difficulties have been unable to access these print sources. Over time this has had a negative impact on vocabulary. Accordingly, they will benefit from explicit vocabulary instruction.

Fluency

Reading fluency is a reader's ability to read a book or other text correctly, quickly, and with expression. A fluent reader doesn't have to stop and "decode" each word. Rather, most of the words can be read automatically. This means the reader can focus their attention on what the text means. Fluency is the bridge between decoding words and understanding what has been read. Beginning adult readers typically have a limited ability to decode words accurately. As a result, their reading is slow, chopped and laboured. Learning and applying strategies to increase fluency is an important part of effective adult reading instruction.

Comprehension

Comprehension is the goal of reading – it is the ability to create meaning with print. With struggling readers, it is obvious that weaknesses in the area of decoding / word recognition significantly impact comprehension. Comprehension is also affected by oral language comprehension, extent of conceptual and factual knowledge, knowledge and skill in use of cognitive strategies to achieve comprehension or repair it when it breaks down, reasoning and inferential skills, motivation and interest in tasks and materials. Explicit comprehension strategy instruction is the most effective way to help learners strengthen their reading comprehension.

Additional Processing Factors

Dividing the reading process into the above separate components informs instruction and practice because it clearly indicates that adult beginning reading instruction should include a systematic approach to the teaching of all five components of reading.

However, the process of reading development is complex. In addition to the five language-based processes described above, there are several brain-based processes that impact reading development. We will provide a brief snapshot of these processes in this section and explain them in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7, because deficits in these areas are often "red flags" for LDs.

Language Processing

Language processing refers to the ability to efficiently manage various types of language information that we need to understand or express an idea. Many learners who struggle with reading experience language difficulties.

Memory

Memory refers to the ability to retain information over time. There are several kinds of memory: short-term memory, long-term memory, working memory, visual memory, auditory memory, to name but a few. Each of these influences development of fundamental reading skills and plays an important role in overcoming reading difficulties.

Attention

As we read, we focus on letters, words and sentences of the text we are reading. We ignore sounds in the background and irrelevant thoughts in our heads. If we don't do so, understanding of what we are reading is difficult. Attention difficulties are common among struggling readers.

Emotional Factors

Our learning achievement is greatly influenced by how we feel about ourselves. Learning failure affects us as early as in kindergarten and causes the onset of anxiety about learning. Anxiety causes humans to avoid whatever frightens them and anxiety related to learning is no exception.

Adult learners with a history of learning struggles have a lot of emotional baggage. Low literacy is very much related to feelings such as shame, fear of being ridiculed, a negative view of life, embarrassment, hopelessness, etc. It is often hard for these adults to disclose their struggles, seek help and persevere with their learning efforts. The emotional side of reading struggles is one of the main reasons why many adults who would benefit from a literacy program never enrol and why many of those who do enrol leave a program before completing it.

A Simple View of Reading

Now that we have explored the complexity of the reading process and the many factors that affect reading development, it is time to take a more simple view. To understand reading difficulties, it is helpful to have a model in our heads about the basic anatomy of reading. Then, when someone asks us why a learner cannot read, we can consult the model and we will know what to look for.

There is value in looking at the process of reading in the simplest possible way. According to the **"Simple View of Reading"**[23], reading consists of just two parts, the ability to decode written language, and the ability to comprehend spoken language.

Consider "audio books". You can listen to a popular novel while you are driving to work.

The novel is decoded for you. All you need do is operate your language knowledge system to comprehend the audio book.

The Simple View of Reading model is a helpful framework for thinking about reading difficulties. When a person can't read, this model tells us that there must be a problem either with decoding or with language comprehension or with both.

Joshua (34) dropped out of school in Grade 11. He is a poor reader who has good language comprehension. Hence the problem is located in poor decoding.

Henry Ying (44) moved to Canada with his family when he was 17 years old. After high school, he completed a college program. Finding and keeping employment is very hard for Henry. Job interviews are very stressful. Daily tasks in a workplace that involve reading, speaking or writing are a source of overwhelming anxiety. Henry is a poor reader who has good decoding skills. Hence, poor language comprehension is the problem.

Martha (35) struggled with reading and writing and had difficulty understanding concepts in her high school classes. Schoolwork was so difficult that she dropped out of school in grade 9. She is now in an adult literacy program and is having difficulty figuring out unknown words and often does not know their meanings. She has difficulty understanding text when it is read aloud to her. Martha has both decoding and language comprehension difficulties.

Of course, there are often all kinds of other explanations about why difficulties happen. There are also difficulties that might be a consequence of not being able to read and not the direct cause of a reading problem. However, working from a simple model of reading and reading difficulties means that we can go to the core of the problem and focus our energies on that area.

Chapter 4: Effective Adult Reading Instruction

Based on the review of the best research currently available and over 35 years of experience in working with adult foundational learners with and without LDs and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, we at CanLearn have identified the following foundational building blocks of effective adult reading instruction:

- Positive Learner Identity
- Assessment for Learning
- Explicit Reading Instruction
- Adult Learning Principles
- Continuous Professional Development

Positive Learner Identity

Pre-Reading Reflection

- If you were describing the construct of "positive learner identity" to a friend, how would you describe it?
- Think of a time when you were motivated to learn something. Describe a time when you were not motivated to learn something. What can be applied to reading instruction for struggling adult learners?

Adults with or without LDs who struggle with reading have one thing in common – they are **wounded learners**. This means that they experience emotional pain because something has happened to them in school or in life.

In her book "Wounded by Schools"[24], the educational consultant and researcher Kirsten Olson shares stories of many individuals who experience painful memories of their past learning experiences and consequently have become reluctant to learn, easily discouraged and self-conscious. These feelings stay with them as they enter the adult world and enroll in adult foundational learning programs.

Adults who cannot read at all or cannot read well often feel trapped in a society without tools to take an active part in it – it is like living abroad in a foreign country without language skills to get a job, buy food and make friends. Shame is a good description of the range of emotions to do with feeling stupid, inadequate, defective, incomplete, exposed, vulnerable and insecure.

Adults who struggle with learning typically go to great lengths to avoid tasks that reveal their difficulties. At work, they may avoid mixing socially with colleagues as they feel they are unable to keep track of conversations and remember what has or hasn't been said earlier. When it comes to friendships, they either lack confidence as they are anxious about their ability to hold an interesting and appropriate conversation, understand humour or interpret "body language" or, they may act as "social butterflies" to compensate for their insecurities. Personal relationships can be impacted as well – a spouse may get frustrated about their partner's inability to do what are perceived to be basic tasks or the partner affected with learning struggles may feel as an unequal partner in the relationship. For adults with ADHD, impulsivity and emotional self-regulation are areas of struggle. They may respond without thinking, begin a task before the instructions are completed, answer questions before the speaker has finished asking them, or, interrupt others while they are speaking. This can lead to a lot of frustration and a range of unhelpful emotions such as anger, resentment, sadness and anxiety as well as feelings of unfair treatment, exclusion and embarrassment.

To summarize, a wounded learner in an adult foundational program may exhibit the following characteristics:

- Low self-esteem and fear of failure
- Learned helplessness
- Anxiety
- Interpersonal / social interaction difficulties

It has been identified through research that only 10% of adults who would benefit from literacy instruction enroll in basic literacy programs and that as many as 50% drop out.[25] Learning wounds, sometimes also described as dispositional barriers to learning, may be one of the root causes of these low engagement and completion rates.

When an adult non-reader or beginning reader comes to our program, we cannot go straight to teaching phonics and decoding. We need to address the social-emotional side of learning and help them begin to heal their wounds.

A recent study conducted by the University of Alberta has yielded the following recommendation to the field of adult foundational learning:

"Community adult educators have the opportunity to extend recognition of wounding by helping learners re-store positive learning identities, rebuild learning capacities as well as social and intellectual capital, and transform limiting habits."[26]

When we are considering ways to build positive learning identities, we need to plan the content and activities aimed at helping our learners develop the following attitudes and beliefs:

- I CAN learn.
- I have weaknesses and gifts and I use my strengths to compensate for my weaknesses.
- I am good at learning from my mistakes; mistakes are not the end of the world.
- I have dreams, hopes and goals and I am determined to fulfill them.

Strategies and Tools

Provide a Safe and Welcoming Learning Environment

- Get to know your learners and begin building a positive working relationship; establish an atmosphere of respect and safety.
- Demonstrate that you are genuinely interested in what your learners think, do, feel and care about.
- Help learners set appropriate, realistic and achievable learning goals.
- Set expectations about the amount of effort and practice required to develop reading skills.
- Allow your learners to set their own pace of learning.
- Establish a culture of learning. To support this, cultivate a growth mindset, build engagement, and provide learners with strategies and tools to support them in owning their learning.
- Don't come across as someone who knows everything; think aloud when you make a mistake and convey that mistakes are okay and that we learn from them.
- Share the hopes you have for your learners and your desire to see them empowered.
- Build a sense of belonging; individuals without a sense of belonging struggle to learn, so encourage social interactions among your learners.

Be Positive, Build on Strengths

- Believe in success for your learners. Engage all learners in learning; it is critical to helping them succeed.
- Help your learners recognize and celebrate their talents.
- Discuss with learners how engaging with our strengths and talents can enable us to cope with challenges and difficulties.
- Notice, acknowledge and praise learners' existing coping and compensatory strategies.
- Focus on what learners have done well, instead of what they have struggled with.
- Ask learners to consider what they can do to ensure that each session ends on a positive note.

Plan for Success

- Make intentional efforts to encourage learners that they can learn and succeed.
- Be playful and experimental in instructional design.
- Plan short lessons that learners can complete quickly and successfully to gain confidence from repeated success. Success breeds success.
- Involve learners in monitoring their own progress.
- Share stories of people who overcame obstacles to find success; read stories, watch films and invite people to be guest speakers in your program.

Reduce Anxious Feelings

- Teach learners how to identify negative thoughts and replace them with realistic alternatives.
- Be mindful and respectful of personal privacy.
- Provide routines and a predictable environment.
- Be cautious whether and/or when you should use timed assessments or activities.
- Break down tasks into manageable chunks.
- Discuss abstract words such as hope, optimism, well-being, happiness.

Example Activities

Three Good Things

Ask your learners to think about and write down (if they are comfortable with writing), three good things that happened in the course of the day or week. The three good things can be small in importance or more significant. Next to each good thing, learners are asked to discuss or write the answer to one of the following questions:

- Why did this good thing happen?
- What does this mean for you?
- How can you have more of this good thing in the future?

WWW (What Worked Well)

The activity involves first identifying what worked well in the session (or learner's life) and then thinking and figuring out why it worked well. It is a good activity for encouraging learners to monitor their learning progress. The activity can be modified into WWWW – What Worked Well + One Thing to Work On.

Staying Positive

Sometimes it is hard to stay positive and motivated if what we are learning is hard. If we encounter difficulties, we are all often tempted to blow this out of proportion and make things worse than they really are. Learners are provided with an example of this on an activity sheet:

"I got the answer wrong. Everyone laughed. They all think I'm stupid! I'll never try again!"

Learners are then asked to reflect on their own thoughts, figuring out why they have blown something out of proportion. Learners then share their insights (but this is voluntary, everyone has a choice to "pass"). Instructor can initiate and frame a discussion around the following questions:

- What holds us back from being more positive?
- Why is it important not to blow things out of proportion?
- Does everyone find it easy to maintain a positive outlook on life?
- How has this activity been useful in terms of identifying future aspirations and goals?

In Conclusion

When learners enroll in our programs, they often present themselves at the intake interview as being overwhelmed. Sometimes they are confused as to what to expect as they came to us at a suggestion of other professionals. Often they appear to be hesitant to ask questions and express their needs. Their wounds inhibit them from expressing themselves. It is very important for adult learning practitioners to be knowledgeable about the emotional aspects of reading difficulties and focus on providing positive learning situations from the first working session. Building a positive learning identity, increasing self- confidence and re-engaging wounded adults into learning come first.

Assessment for Learning

Pre-Reading Reflection

Some practitioners question the value of assessments and say that assessment results usually tell them what they already know about their learners. They believe that their time would be better spent providing instruction.

Do you agree with this? Why? Why not?

Adult foundational learning programs commonly conduct assessments to:

- Place a learner or assign a level - initial assessment
- Measure learning outcomes and learner's goal completion - exit assessment

Initial and exit assessment can be formal or informal. As it occurs at the beginning and/or at the end of the learning process, it is **assessment OF learning**, also known as summative assessment.

Assessment FOR learning, also known as formative assessment, is different. It takes place throughout the course of learning and it is sometimes embedded in instruction. Assessment for learning is learner-centred and collaborative – it engages instructors and learners in gathering, interpreting and using information together.

Assessment for learning is a critical piece of effective reading instruction. Reading ability builds upon itself and failure to learn a core principle hinders a learner's progress.

Much of the assessment for learning happens at an everyday, informal level using tools that are often unique to the program and the learner. In the following section, you will find examples of techniques that can be used in the assessment FOR learning process.

Strategies and Tools

- Before instruction starts, discuss with learners their areas of strength (for example ability to hear sounds orally, good vocabulary) and areas where reading breaks down for them (for example decoding words automatically); clarify what specific skills learners will be working on.
- During instruction, ask questions, elicit evidence of learner's progress, surface errors and misconceptions.
- Keep daily or weekly observation notes.
- Provide feedback that focuses on the task, causes students to reflect on their learning, and includes suggestions for future action. (Example: The WWW activity).
- Encourage learners to own their learning and monitor their progress; learners should be given frequent opportunities to engage in self-assessment and reflecting on their learning goals.

Observation Notes – Examples

Bob is making progress with his phonemic awareness skills; his auditory discrimination and blending skills are improving. He is still showing confusion between the lower case letters b, d, and q.

Martha is proud of her progress in decoding. "I think I am getting better because of what we did before we started working on reading, (she is referring to oral phonological awareness activities) – nobody did that with me before!" Martha is using the two basic decoding strategies, sounding out and chunking words effectively and confidently. She is ready to move to the next step – decoding multisyllabic words.

Mike is working hard to apply the comprehension strategies we are working on. Before starting to read, he looks at the title and thinks about what the story might be about. During reading, he pauses to check for understanding. We still need to work on decoding strategies – occasionally, when Mike encounters a word he cannot decode, he becomes frustrated and announces that "he can't do it".

Selected Assessment Tools

We have included both formal and informal tools in this section. They can be used for both assessment of learning and assessment for learning.

- Canadian Adult Reading Assessment (CARA) – http://www.literacyns.ca/enews/CARA.pdf
- Diagnostic Literacy Assessment for Beginning Readers (DALA) – http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/detail.jsp?Entt=RDM2788648&R=2788648
- Common Assessment of Basic Skills Online (CABS) – http://www.lleo.ca/col/cabs_online.html
- Read Forward – http://ww.readforward.ca
- Catching Confidence – http://fetn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/NIACE-Catching-Confidence.pdf

At CanLearn, we use an internally developed screening tool called

'Reading Connections'.

Reading Profiles

Using the Simple View of Reading model, assessment information can be used to develop a Reading Profile for a learner. A Reading Profile provides a picture of a learner's strengths and needs in the five components of reading: phonological awareness, word recognition, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The Reading Profile helps us identify where the reading process breaks down for a learner so that we can target instruction most effectively. More information about Reading Profiles is included in Appendix D.

In Conclusion

Assessment for learning is an important building block because it informs instruction. The heart of it lies in the use of targeted and differentiated instructional processes. Although the essential components of assessment for learning, initial screening/assessment and progress monitoring are essential for implementation, it is the instruction that truly drives the changes we hope to see in struggling adult readers.

Explicit Reading Instruction

Pre-Reading Reflection

- How did you learn to read?
- "Struggling readers simply need more phonics". What is wrong with this statement?
- "Reading is sounding out words". Why is this an inaccurate statement?
- How do you best learn a complex skill?

Extensive K-12 research and emerging adult reading research indicate that effective reading instruction must build reading skills in the five important areas: phonological awareness, decoding/word recognition, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

Explicit, or direct, instruction is "a systematic method of teaching with emphasis on proceeding in small steps, checking for learner understanding, and achieving active and successful participation by all learners[27]." Explicit instruction has been found to be effective for individuals with LDs.

Systematic instruction is a key aspect of explicit instruction. It refers to a plan or logical sequence of lessons used to decrease learner confusion and errors.

Explicit instruction is **cumulative**. This means that prerequisite skills are taught in small steps before more complex skills and strategies are taught. Explicit instruction can also be referred to as **"demonstration-prompt-practice,"**[28] or "**I do, we do, you do**[29]**."** In this type of instruction, learners are shown how to perform a task before being expected to do it on their own. Explicit instruction involves learning experiences that move learners from little or no knowledge to mastery where they can perform skills and strategies at high levels.[30, 31]

Overarching Principles of Explicit Instruction

Careful Planning

- Ask ourselves, "Do our learners have the required background knowledge or skills needed to experience success with this task?" For example, before teaching strategies for decoding multisyllabic words, we ask ourselves and check if the learner is able to break words into syllables orally.
- Plan to teach pre-skills before a skill is presented.
- Ensure that examples are presented before introducing exceptions in the application of a skill.
- Plan to teach easy skills before more difficult ones.
- Separate the teaching of similar skills to avoid confusion.
- Plan 15 minutes of explicit reading instruction for each session.

Modeling

The hallmark of explicit instruction is a clear model of what learners are expected to learn. A model is the strongest level of instructional support. We should always provide a demonstration of the skill along with an explanation of what is being done, often referred to as a **think-aloud**. In this way, learners not only see how to do something but hear about it as well. We might use wording such as "Watch as I show you" or "Watch me." We should be careful to control how much information is provided in the model; if the task appears too complex, it is far better to break the skill down into parts that are taught separately. We should always be mindful of what learners can handle from an instructional perspective. If not, learners will experience instructional overload.

Guided Practice

In guided practice, the instructor provides a moderate level of support, serving as a guide for the learner. It involves the process called **scaffolding** - asking the learner to complete only part of a task at first. Over time, the support is faded, allowing the learner a chance to complete the entire task. If the learner is successful, their progress should be validated through positive feedback. If the learner still struggles with the task, it is viewed as a learning opportunity. This tells us that their learning is not firm yet and that we need to provide additional modeling and guidance. Once successful in guided practice, the student moves to independent practice activities.

Independent Practice

Independent practice for children typically involves giving homework assignments. For adults, independent practice is about encouraging self-directed learning – motivating learners to start applying their newly learned skills while working towards the goals that had brought them to your program in the first place:

- Reading to their children.
- Going back to school.
- Being able to read newspapers.
- Not wanting to depend on family members to read medication instructions, manuals, school memos.

Explicit vs. Implicit Reading Instruction

As you have now learned, explicit programs and instruction require instructors to model or show learners how to do something, provide learners with practice and feedback, and include independent activities for learners to practice on their own. Explicit instruction is more likely to use phrases such as "My turn," "Watch as I show you," "This is how you do _____" and "Let's do some together."

It is important to remember that reading can also be taught through implicit instruction. In this approach instructors serve as facilitators. They encourage learners to find ways to build their skills without direct instruction by encouraging them to "build an understanding of" "or "try again." This approach is absolutely valid and it "works" for many people. For example, parents who attend family literacy programs with their children may not be receiving any direct reading instruction, but it is very likely that their phonological awareness skills are improving while they participate in singing and rhyming activities with their children and that they have opportunities to build their decoding, fluency and even vocabulary while reading books with and to their children.

K-12 research has identified that approximately 70% of children can learn to read without being taught reading skills explicitly. However, without opportunities for explicit reading instruction the remaining 30% are likely to experience reading difficulties that may persist in their adult lives[32]. In the context of adult foundational learning, this information confirms the value of a functional, embedded approach to adult literacy instruction, but it also highlights the need for services and programs that will help adult non-readers and beginning readers learn to read with reasonable accuracy and fluency. If learners have deficits in their oral language skills, particularly phonological awareness, or if they are extremely weak in phonics, we need to identify what they don't know and teach it. If they have grade 3 to 4 skills, we have to teach them how to attack multi-syllable words and apply word analysis in context. If they have a hard time understanding what they read, we must help them learn how to think about meaning at the same time they are decoding and identifying words. At the same time, we need to keep in mind that adults come to us with many different life-related goals and levels of skill, so we need to individualize learning.

What Can We Expect from High-Quality Explicit Reading Instruction for Adults?

There is a common perception that becoming literate is not possible for adult non-readers or beginning readers. Many people, including potential learners themselves, believe it is too late for them. However, there is evidence from neuroscience which indicates that when it comes to the development of reading skills, it is never too late. It just may be more difficult for individuals whose learning difficulties were not addressed in their childhood.

Dr. Joseph Torgesen from the Florida Center for Reading Research has come to the following conclusions through his research:

- Most should be able to acquire beginning word analysis strategies relatively quickly (15- 60 hours) depending on where they start.
- Reading fluency will take longer to acquire and will depend a lot on their willingness to practice.
- Comprehension will increase as their reading accuracy and fluency grows, and will also be helped as they learn to think actively while they read.

"Can adult non–readers and beginning readers learn to read"?

The short answer is YES. However, they require skillful, explicit and relatively intense instruction as well as self-determination to engage in self-directed learning.

Strategies and Tools for Teaching the Five Components of Reading

Phonological Awareness

Determine if you will teach skills orally or in combination with phonics.

- Many adults are able to work on these skills in combination with phonics but some will require oral only instruction first. Analyze your assessment results and decide the starting point.

Teach skills sequentially, one skill at the time.

- First, demonstrate that sentences can be broken into words and then that some of the words can be broken into smaller units. Have your learner practice identifying the unique words in sentences or compound words.
- Next, demonstrate how words can be broken into syllables. Tell learners what syllables are and model how to identify them. Then have your learner practice identifying and manipulating syllables within familiar words by:
    - Placing their hand on their chin and paying attention to the number of times their chin moves down as they say words slowly
    - Holding up a finger for each syllable as they say a word
    - Blending syllables articulated by you into a word
- Once your learner can break words into syllables, teach how to recognize even smaller units called onsets and rimes (sn-ail, p-ail).
- Next, demonstrate how to isolate individual sounds in words and segment words into their component sounds with modeling and guided practice.

- Your learner can practice isolating the sounds in words by using Elkonin sound boxes. Place a card with empty boxes or squares in front of the learner (one box for each sound in a target word). Your learner can use colored discs to mark the unique sounds they hear in words, placing a disc in each sound box.

Learn more about Elkonin boxes on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClhurqhIk0c

- Your learner can practice isolating the sounds in words by sorting pictures. They can sort cards with pictures based on the beginning, middle or ending sounds of the word each picture represents.
- Encourage your learner to pay attention to sounds in their everyday life – for example listening for rhymes and alliterations in music.

Example Activities

How Many Words Are There in Your Sentence?

Show the learner several photographs and ask them to say what they see in one sentence.

Ask the learner to identify the number of words in their sentence.

Short and Long Words

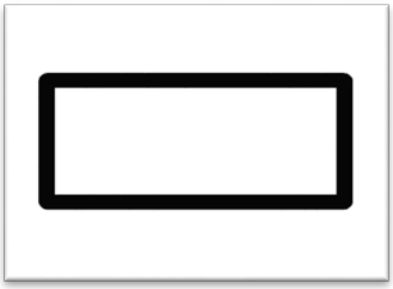
Show the learner a pair of photographs and ask them to say what they see in the picture in one word.

Ask the learner to decide which word is longer.

Odd One Out

Show the learner groups of three pictures and ask them to decide which one does not rhyme.

Say the Words in the Photos and Break Them into Syllables



Onset Rime Blending

Tell the learner that you are going to say the first sound of the word (the onset) and then the last part of the word (the rime). Have the learner try to guess the word.

F –ISH

The first sound is /fff/. The second part of the word is /ish/.

Decoding / Word Recognition

Provide Phonics Instruction

- Establish what your learner already knows about phonics; analyze your assessment results and plan your instruction accordingly. What is the area of break-down - letter-sound patterns, consonant blends (st-, bl-, cr,-), vowel combinations (ai, oa, ea) or something else? More information is available in Appendix C: Sequencing Phonics Instruction.
- Decide which phonics instruction method you will use.

Methods of Phonics Instruction:

- **Synthetic Phonics:** A "sounds first" approach is used.
- **Analytic Phonics:** Instruction starts at the word level. Learners are taught to analyze letter-sound relationships once a word is identified.
- **Analogy Phonics:** Instruction is based on learning to break words into "chunks" (onset and rimes). The learner uses parts of written words they already know to identify new words.
- **Embedded Phonics:** This is an implicit approach that relies to some extent on incidental learning.

- Sequence your instruction: Build skills from simple to complex, common to uncommon and known to unknown. In addition, an effective sequence minimises potential confusion, such as letters or blends that look and/or sound alike, or introducing continuous sounds like /m/ and /s/ before stop sounds like /t/ and /p/ because they are easier to blend.
- Provide instruction in short, regular, sequential fast-paced instructional time (around 15 minutes overall with time distributed as best judged by the instructor).
- Provide guided and independent practice to a level where decoding becomes effortless and automatic. Developing automatic word recognition will support and enhance comprehension.
- Use multisensory activities: High quality phonics instruction involves the use of auditory, visual and kinaesthetic activities that acknowledge learners' different learning approaches and encourages them to activate as many of their senses as possible. Activities could involve learners moving their bodies, manipulating magnetic letters, tracing letters and words with fingers in the air, tapping out phonemes or using a computer or Smart Board to create and manipulate words and texts.

- Combine, support and reinforce phonics instruction using quality texts appropriate for adults.
- Enhance your phonics instruction with the use of technology.

Apps for Adult Literacy

- *Literacy Skills Sampler*
- *PhonicsGenius*
- *Spinout Blue and Spinout Red*
- *Speedy Reader*

Keep in mind that phonics instruction is necessary but not sufficient for adult non-readers and beginning readers. Decoding without comprehension is not reading. The majority of adult beginning readers have previously had some type of reading instruction. Consequently, the best approach may be to find out the specific areas of decoding difficulties and provide **targeted** phonics instruction.

What About Scripted Phonics Programs? Do They Work?

The International Literacy (formerly Reading) Association (ILA) states that there is no certifiably best method for teaching learners who experience reading difficulty (Mathes et al., 2005). As learners with reading difficulties have varying strengths and challenges, teaching them is too complex a task for a scripted, one-size-fits-all program (Coyne et al., 2013; Phillips & Smith, 1997; Simmons, 2015). Optimal instruction calls for teachers' professional expertise and responsiveness, and for the freedom to act on the basis of that professionalism. (ILA Research Advisory, 2016).

At CanLearn, we don't use a single scripted reading intervention program. Our reading interventions are individualized and learner-centred. However, we use several evidence-based programs for the purpose of instructional design as well as in the context of professional development of our staff:

- Glass- Analysis for Decoding Only — http://www.glassanalysis.com/about.html
- Alphabetic Phonics — www.tsrhc.org/dyslexia
- Barton Reading and Spelling System — www.bartonreading.com
- Slingerland Approach — www.slingerland.org
- Wilson Reading System — www.wilsonlanguage.com

Help Learners Memorize High Utility and High Interest Words

- Explain to your learner that if a word does not "sound out", it is important to memorize it. Struggling readers often "get stuck" trying to sound out a word that does not make sense. Include words like "the", "was" and "said" as high on a priority list of words to be learned.
- Treat all two-letter words as sight words, that is, words that are recognized immediately. This will increase automaticity and often help learners see these words inside of bigger words.
- Move from simple to complex (shorter to longer words). Make sure that the learner not only recognizes and reads sight words they are working on effortlessly, but also spells them correctly without thinking twice.
- Introduce only three new sight words at a time.
- Separate similar looking words (come/came; has/had).
- Review previously introduced words before teaching new words.
- Practice sight words by playing games such as Snap and Bingo.
- Encourage the use of strategies for remembering sight words, for example, put word cards on the fridge.

Provide Intermediate Decoding Instruction for Learners Who Are Ready to Progress to the Next Level of Instruction

- Provide instruction in morphemic analysis (sometimes referred to as structural analysis). This is another word recognition strategy employed to read unfamiliar multisyllabic words. A morpheme is the smallest word part with meaning. Prefixes, suffixes and root words are considered morphemes. To illustrate, **regaining** has three morphemes:

  The prefix: re-

  The root word: gain

  The suffix: -ing

- Provide instruction in contextual analysis. This is when readers use the clues in the surrounding context to determine the unfamiliar word and its meaning. The following sentences illustrate a context clue to read the word "neighbours":

  The Smith family lived next door to the Jones family. They were neighbours.

Vocabulary

Provide Robust Vocabulary Instruction

- Select words and teach their meanings before asking your learner to read text containing these words.
- Directly explain the meaning of words along with thought-provoking, interactive, follow –up discussions.
- Provide multiple opportunities for your learner to interact with a new word in a variety of engaging contexts.
- Demonstrate to your learner how words are used in their different forms (example: anxious - anxiety).
- Teach multiple meanings of words.

Example Activities

Capsule Vocabulary

Capsule Vocabulary is a word connecting activity. It takes about 15-20 minutes to complete. Learners should be paired up into groups of two. They take a set of about 10 words that have been introduced and intentionally work them into a conversation. After each pair talks through their set of words, they present a summary of their topic to the rest of the group.

VSS – Vocabulary Self-Selection Strategy

Learners nominate words they would like to learn more about.

Semantic Associations

Semantic associations are connections between words based on meaning and context. There are several ways to implement this activity:

- Play word-classification games: Have your learner think of as many items in a category as they can. Categories to use depend on the learner's oral language proficiency. Some examples are: types of cars, tools, things that smell nice, most important values, etc.
- Play games involving synonyms: "Can you think of another word that means big?" "Can you tell me another word for smart?"
- Play games involving antonyms (e.g. attract – repel).

Seven Most Important Words

When introducing a topic in your session, ask pairs of learners to brainstorm what they think the most important words for the topic might be. After 2-3 minutes, ask learners to agree upon and circle what they think are the seven most important of those words and to provide a rationale for their lists of words[33].

Fluency

Provide Opportunities for Repeated Oral Readings

- Model fluent oral reading.
- Have the learner orally echo read with you.
- Have the learner orally read alone.
- Have the learner read with a partner.

Encourage Periodic Timing of Your Learner's Oral Reading

- Discuss progress in reading rate and accuracy with your learner.

Watch adult learning facilitator Tanya explain and demonstrate fluency in reading:

https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/ristrat.pd.reading.fluency.readflu/fluency/#.WazDacZMHIU

Use Recorded Readings

- Encourage your learner to listen to a carefully selected recording and then read along.

Motivate Your Learner to Read to and with Their Child

- Explain that reading to their children is an excellent opportunity for practice.
- If you have a book that is age-appropriate for your learner's reading level and developmentally appropriate for their child, practice reading it fluently together. Then give the book to your learner to take home, keep and repeatedly share with their child. Hardly anything can be as motivating for a beginning adult reader as being able to share a book with their child and being asked to read it again and again.

Use Reader's Theatre

Reader's Theatre is typically used with children but adult learners may enjoy it too. Reader's Theatre is an activity in which learners, while reading directly from scripts, are able to tell a story in an entertaining form, without props, costumes, or sets. This is a reading activity, and learners are not asked to memorize their lines. They are, however, encouraged to "ham it up" and use intonation and gestures appropriate to their characters and their characters' words.

Comprehension

Before Reading

- Help your learner activate prior knowledge.
- Encourage your learner to look at pictures or, for more advanced learners, to preview the title, subtitles, headings, illustrations and Table of Contents.
- Ask your learner to make predictions about the text.

During Reading

- Encourage your learner to create visual images in their mind.
- Help your learner monitor their comprehension.
- One of the ways to help learners start monitoring their comprehension is through the instructional practice called Think-Aloud in which the instructor describes their own thoughts while reading aloud to the learner.

After Reading

- Ask your learner to summarize the text in their own words.
- Encourage your learners to ask clarifying questions.

Example Activities

Activate Prior Knowledge

The most commonly used graphic organizer for activating learners' prior knowledge is KWL – "Know, Want to Know, Learn." Learners identify what they know about a topic, what they want to know, and after reading or instruction, identify what they learned or would still like to learn.

K-W-L Chart[34]

What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned

The following are links to some other tools and graphic organizers that may be helpful:

- **Anticipation Guide** — http://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/MG_HS_Math_Literacy-C_Danner(1).pdf
- **Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)** — http://www.readinrockets.org/strategies/drta
- **The Envelope, Please** — http://blog.discoveryeducation.com/blog/2014/12/01/sos-the-envelope-please/
- **Expectation Outline** — http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/expect_outlines.pdf
- **PReP (Prereading Plan)** — http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/prep.pdf

RAP[35]

The RAP strategy breaks summarizing into three component steps:

R: Read

A: Ask yourself what it means

P: Put it in your own words

"What is going on?" Photos: Make Inferences with Images

Show a mystery photo and invite learners to weigh in on what they see and why.

Grab Bag

Near the conclusion of a reading session, have a learner draw an object from a bag. The learner must explain or illustrate how the object is related to what they have learned.

X Marks the Spot

Learners flag passages as important (mark with an "X"), interesting (mark with a "!"), or something about which they have a question (mark with a "?").

In Conclusion

In order to become successful readers, learners, regardless of their age, must develop skills in ALL five essential components of reading. These components should not be seen as sequential. People do not develop phonological awareness, then learn decoding skills and then improve their vocabulary, become fluent and eventually focus on comprehension. All the components reinforce each other, and as a result, often develop simultaneously.

Explicit reading instruction combines demonstration, modeling and guided practice. It relies on ongoing assessment for learning to monitor progress, provide feedback and adjust instruction.

Adult Learning Principles

Pre-Reading Reflection

- Think of something you have learned as an adult and something you learned as a child. How were the two experiences different?
- A new phone that uses a lot of gadgets is given to you to use for work. You have never used such a phone before. How would you go about learning to use it?
- Describe something that you have learned by dong.
- Brainstorm all you know about adult learning principles.

An adult learning experience differs from that of a child. This means that adult reading instruction should be different than reading instruction for children.

Adults will come to an adult foundational program with life experiences. While sometimes they may not acknowledge it, they know more than they sometimes say they do. The majority of them have had previous reading instruction. There are things that they have never learned during the process and reading strategies that they may have learned to apply incorrectly and now they need to "unlearn them" (for example, using only one strategy, sounding out, when trying to decode). Their learning identities are often fragile and they have diverse needs for literacy in their lives, from filling out applications and reading bills from utility companies to reading manuals at work and books to their children.

While the focus of this Toolkit is on explicit reading instruction, it is important to remember that the most significant role of the adult learning practitioner is to draw on learners' experiences and situate learning in the context of their real lives. Consequently, the following adult learning principles are at the heart of effective instruction.

Self-Directed and Autonomous

Adult learners are *autonomous* and *self-directed.* They need to be free to navigate their own learning. As adult learning practitioners, we must actively involve our learners in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them. Specifically, we must get participants' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on activities that reflect their interests. We have to be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge. We need to help our learners understand and embrace the benefits, values and purposes of explicit reading instruction. Last but not least, we also need to ignite their optimism and positive attitude towards reading and help them grow their effort and persistence.

Goal-Orientated

Adult learners are *goal-oriented*. Upon enrolling in a program, they usually know what goal they want to attain. They, therefore, appreciate a program that has clearly defined goals and learning outcomes. However, adults who struggle with reading may not be able or ready to set realistic and achievable goals and plan steps towards goal-attainment. As instructors, we need to help our learners set goals and show them how our program will help them attain their goals. This engagement process should be done early in the program.

Practical

Adults learn best by doing. While providing explicit reading instruction, we still need to ensure that learners are gaining skills and strategies that will immediately improve their everyday lives. If your learner is looking for work and there are anxieties about completing the application or completing a literacy related task as a part of the interview, we address these needs first. Remember that the recommended explicit reading instruction time is only 15 minutes.

Relevant

Adults must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their everyday life, work, family or other responsibilities to be of value to them.

Effective adult reading instruction should be based on authentic literacy materials rather than work sheets and isolated drills. Learners benefit from being actively involved in the instruction design process and are encouraged to express their ideas and draw on their experiences.

Life Experience

Adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base. To help them do so, we need to draw out participants' relevant experience and knowledge. Effective adult reading instruction needs to be implemented through topics, materials and examples that learners can relate to.

All of the Senses

Learning results from stimulation of the senses. In some people, one sense is used more than others to learn or recall information. Effective adult reading instruction needs to be based on multi-sensory learning experiences. As instructors, we must ensure that we present materials that stimulate as many senses as possible in order to increase our learners' chances of success.

Respectful

As do all learners, adults need to feel respected. As instructors, we must acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to our program and feel empathy for our participants' learning wounds. People learn in different ways and at different speeds, so it is natural for them to be anxious or nervous when faced with a learning situation. Positive reinforcement during reading instruction that builds skills in small, doable steps are critical elements of effective reading instruction.

In Conclusion

Adult learning principles must be embedded in effective adult learning instruction to ensure that participants learn. Explicit reading instruction will be of no or little use if the learner does not recognize the need to develop their reading skills or feels discouraged or intimidated. As instructors, we need to establish a friendly, open atmosphere that shows participants they will be able to learn to read well and transfer their newly learned skills into the context of their everyday life.

Continuous Professional Development

Pre-Reading Reflection

- What skills do you need to meet the needs of adult non-readers and/or adult beginning readers in your programs?
- What areas of reading instruction would you like to learn more about?
- How much do you know about opportunities for professional development in the field of community adult learning in Alberta?

Instructors of adult foundational learning programs require very special training and continuous professional development in order to meet the needs of learners with diverse backgrounds, experiences and skill levels.

In our experience at CanLearn, professional development for instructors and tutors who work with adult non-readers and beginning readers should address the five suggested elements of effective reading instruction. Staff development activities should be ongoing and include opportunities beyond one-time training sessions such as:

- Peer learning.
- Opportunities to observe accomplished instructors.
- Opportunities for reflection, debriefing and trouble shooting.
- Encouraging practitioners to engage in their own reading about best practices in reading instruction and share/discuss their learnings and insights with colleagues.

Professional development topics should include but not be limited to:

- Understanding reading components and methods to teach them.
- Assessment for Learning: activities and processes that comprise the process.
- Helping adult learners build positive learner identity.
- Strategies for engaging learners, providing feedback and monitoring progress toward learning goals.
- Adults with Suspected and/or Diagnosed Learning Disabilities and ADHD.

In Conclusion

Continuous professional development is an important element of effective reading instruction. It introduces us to new ideas, instructional strategies and tools that will benefit us every day in our work with adult non-readers and beginning readers.

As educators we must always be looking to improve our knowledge and understanding, but also look for ways we can share our knowledge with our colleagues. We must set an example to our learners by continuing to learn and expand our knowledge.

When we return to our programs, the most important part of professional development is applying these new ideas and instructional methods to benefit, engage and motivate our learners and help them make positive changes in their lives. This is what, in turn, keeps us feeling motivated and energized for the work we do.

Key Resources

- Kruidenier, J.R. (2002). Research-based principles for Adult Basic Education reading instruction. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.
- National Institute for Literacy. (2010). Learning to Achieve: A Professional's Guide to Educating Adults with Learning Disabilities. Washington, DC.
- McShane, S. (2005). Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults: First Steps for Teachers. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.
- All About Adolescent Literacy. www.adlit.org
- Focus on Basics. (n.d.). Retrieved October 19, 2017, from http://www.ncsall.net/index.html@id-31.html

Chapter 5: What If A Learner Is Not Making Progress?

Pre-Reading Reflection

- What does "making progress" mean to you?
- What would make you think that a learner may have LDs?

If the targeted reading instruction is effective and a learner is making progress in developing reading skills, you are on the right track. However, sometimes a learner makes limited progress in learning to read even when you have implemented the instructional strategies found to be effective for adults, provided support for social-emotional challenges and provided explicit targeted, systematic instruction in reading balanced with addressing real issues in the learner's life. If a learner is making little or slow progress in learning to read, you might want to screen for possible LDs.

Remember, you are not diagnosing LDs.

You are gathering information to guide next steps in your work with a learner.

Screening answers the question: "Is it likely, or possible, that this learner has a learning disability?"

If the answer is "yes", you can look at suggesting that this learner pursue an assessment. It is important to note that not all learners experiencing difficulty need an assessment and the pros and cons to consider are presented in Chapter 7. There are other benefits of screening for LDs. The screening process develops a better understanding of a learner's strengths and needs to help you adjust instruction. Instructional strategies that are helpful in addressing different processing difficulties ae presented in Chapter 6.

Screening for Possible LDs

You have been gathering "screening" information all along, beginning with your initial meeting and interview with the learner and continuing through your conversations and the observations you have made and recorded each time you have met.

A learner's history and daily life experiences provide clues that may suggest the possibility of LDs. A **History Checklist** is provided to organize this information. Look at what you know about the learner in the context of the red flags in the checklist. You may not know some of the information but you likely have a good understanding of the learner's history and challenges. Sometimes it is helpful to ask a few more questions when you are meeting with the learner. Summarize the red flags and the learner's strengths and coping skills. Remember that many of these characteristics are common among adults with low literacy. We are looking for a pattern that may suggest that the learner has LDs.

An **Observation Checklist** is also provided to help organize general observations during instruction. The red flags include different areas of processing that are often areas of difficulty for adults with LDs. Organizing what you know about a learner in this way provides a picture of learning strengths and needs.

Special Considerations for English Language Learners

"It takes one to two years to develop sufficient English oral language skills for Basic Interpersonal Skills and seven to ten years to develop Cognitive Academic Proficiency Language. There are other variables to consider when distinguishing between ELL students who are having learning difficulties versus learning disabilities. For instance, although a student may tell you they completed the eighth grade, this could mean they attended school three times a week for a few hours."

Panda Minnesota Adult Basic Education Disability Specialists. (n.d.)
Retrieved from http://man.abedisabilities.org/abe-disability-manual/learning-disabilities/english-language-learner-ell-applications

Red Flags for Suspected Learning Disabilities – History Checklist

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Past School Experiences			
Experienced difficulty in school			
May have been identified as an "exceptional" learner e.g., learning disability, dyslexia, language disorder			
Received special help in school, especially for reading, writing and spelling			
Wanted to learn; told to 'try harder' (as opposed to lack of interest)			
Uneven performance (Did well in some subjects, poorly in others, e.g., did poorly in language based subjects and better in art, physical education, shop classes)			
Left school because of lack of success, frustration (High school drop-out rate for students with LDs is twice that of their non-disabled peers)			
Lack of school success in spite of adequate school experiences (As opposed to having inadequate schooling related to missing a lot of school and/or changing schools frequently)			
May have been "bullied"; felt they never belonged at school			
Everyday Life			
Difficulties with reading and writing interfere with daily activities (e.g., shopping, managing finances, negotiating rental agreements, etc.)			
May have developed coping strategies to get around reading and writing difficulties			
May have difficulty with social relationships and/or poor self-esteem (Feel they are "stupid", not living up to their potential)			
May have difficulty regulating emotions (e.g., explosive, sensitive)			
Work History			
Avoided jobs requiring reading and writing			
Problems getting and keeping jobs			
Has developed coping strategies to get around reading and writing difficulties			
Feeling stressed when asked to do tasks they are not able to do			
Family History			
Family history of learning and/or attention difficulties among parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, etc. (learning disabilities and ADHD frequently occur together and run in families)			
Learner's children need extra support at school and/or have been diagnosed with a learning disability or ADHD			

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Health History			
History of respiratory distress at birth, premature birth or low birth weight			
History of chronic ear infections			
History of speech and language difficulties			
History of fine motor or gross motor difficulties			
Strengths			
Uneven performance – they have areas of strength and areas of difficulty			
Reported strengths in non-academic areas (e.g., playing music, sports, working with their hands)			
Developed everyday life coping skills to deal with/avoid reading and writing			
Demonstrate resiliency			
For Non-Native English Speakers: Look For All Of the Red Flags, PLUS			
History of difficulties with learning to speak first language			
History of difficulties learning to read and write in first language			
Had opportunities to attend school in first language but experienced difficulties in school			
Has been learning to speak and/or read English for many years			
Things That May Indicate Something Other Than an LD			
Difficulties began following a head injury or seizures			
Emotional problems that may interfere with learning			
Medications that may interfere with learning			
Chronic illnesses			
Uncorrected hearing problems			
Uncorrected vision problems			

Red Flags for Suspected Learning Disabilities – Observation Checklist

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Overall Profile Of Uneven Performance			
Does well in some areas and not others during instruction			
Unexpected difficulties – disconnect between how they present themselves and how well they are able to read or write			
Is able to learn some things well but struggles in other areas			
Performs similar tasks differently from day to day			
Able to explain things orally, but not in writing			
Does better when shown how to do something (i.e., concrete demonstration)			
Observations Of The Learner During Reading Activities			
Tracks print when reading			
Skips lines of print (or partial lines) when reading			
Leaves out words			
Confuses words and numbers that look similar; guesses at words incorrectly (e.g. reads "from" instead of "for")			
Reverses letters, words or phrases			
Poor sound-symbol association (matching sounds with letters)			
Difficulty with rhyming			
Difficulty breaking words into syllables			
Loses place on page			
Difficulty focusing on the page (without having a vision problem)			
Difficulty reading sight words			
Does not understand what is read			
Difficulty remembering what was read			
Avoids reading out loud			
Weak skills in decoding/word recognition, yet strong comprehension skills			

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Language Processing			
Asks for repetition of verbal instructions/information			
Misinterprets what is said			
Has difficulty telling or understanding jokes			
More limited speaking vocabulary than peers			
Omits or uses words inappropriately (e.g., making a "registration" for a hotel room instead of making a "reservation" for a hotel room)			
Mispronounces words, particularly multisyllabic words, omitting syllables or mixing up the order of syllables (e.g. ven-ge-nar for vinegar, cat-i-pal for capital)			
Difficulty getting a thought into spoken language. Frustration and a few key phrases may be a tip off: "Oh, you know—I mean—Oh, I can't explain it!"			
Makes grammatical errors			
Often difficult to understand what they are trying to communicate when speaking			
Difficulty organizing ideas			
Processing Speed			
Works slowly			
Needs time to consider questions before responding			
Becomes anxious when required to work quickly			
Memory			
Difficulty recalling instructions and following directions			
Difficulty following through with multi-step instructions			
Difficulty remembering important telephone numbers and names of people important to learner			
Pauses for periods of time searching memory			
Knows words one day; forgets the next day			
Attention			
Difficulty sustaining focus on tasks			
Easily distracted			
Short attention span			
Difficulty getting started on tasks			
Difficulty completing tasks in expected timeframe			
Makes careless mistakes			

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Organization (Time and Space)			
Difficulty telling time with an analog clock			
Confuses right and left			
Gets lost in large buildings, parking lots			
Difficulty with eye-hand coordination			
Seems "clumsy" (frequently drops or spills things)			
Workspace is messy and disorganized			
Backpack, briefcase or purse is messy			
Misplaces or loses things regularly			
Does not have needed materials			
Frequently forgets things (e.g., to bring back a form or an assignment)			
Difficulty predicting the time required to complete a task			
Either late or very early for appointments or misses appointments			
Social-emotional			
Low self-esteem			
Lacks self-confidence			
Reluctant to try new things			
Frequently asks for help			
Avoids tasks that may be difficult			
Appears anxious			
Acts without thinking			
Quick to feel and express anger			
Easily frustrated			

Using Screening Information

Screening information can be used to adjust instruction and to determine if a referral for psycho-educational assessment would be helpful.

First, review the Observation Checklist to better understand a learner's strengths and needs. Identify areas where the learner has difficulties. For example, if a learner has many "red flags" in the language processing and memory areas, then they will likely benefit from strategies to support language processing and memory. Also look for areas of strength. Chapter 6 provides suggested instructional strategies, accommodations and assistive technology to address areas of difficulty common among adults with LDs. These suggestions complement the instructional strategies for reading and supporting social-emotional challenges presented in Chapter 4. These approaches can be helpful whether or not the learner has LDs.

Second, review both Checklists and identify "red flags" that may indicate possible LDs. There is no "one size fits all" approach. You cannot count the number of red flags and make a decision. Individuals with LDs vary in their pattern of strengths and difficulties and in the severity of the impact on their lives. The pattern of red flags from the Checklists can increase your suspicion that a learner may have LDs. Sometimes the information suggests alternative explanations for the difficulties that a learner is presenting. Sometimes the red flags point to possible LDs.

If the pattern of red flags suggests that: "Yes, it is possible that this learner has LDs," your next step is to decide if diagnostic testing/psycho-educational assessment would be beneficial. To help you decide, Chapter 7 provides more information about a psycho-educational assessment including the benefits and barriers to be considered. If you decide to suggest an assessment there are tips for a conversation with a learner.

Remember, you do not have to wait for the results of an assessment to change your work with a learner. The screening process can direct you to instructional strategies that may be helpful in addressing the learner's needs.

Chapter 6: Adjust Instruction – Effective Strategies for Adults with LDs

Pre-Reading Reflection

- What actions have you taken when a learner has not been making progress? What has been helpful?
- What kinds of difficulties do you find most challenging?

You have already been introduced to effective instructional strategies for adults with LDs in Chapter 4: Effective Adult Reading Instruction. Whether or not a learner has LDs, they will have more difficulty processing some kinds of information than others – they will have processing strengths and needs. In this Chapter, we will re-visit some of the key principles of effective instruction and expand on strategies that have been found effective in supporting learners with difficulties in different processing areas:

- Language
- Memory
- Processing speed
- Organization (time and space)
- Attention

Some of the suggestions are "accommodations", i.e. different ways of presenting information, performing tasks, or demonstrating knowledge. Some suggestions involve "assistive technology" from low-tech (calculator) to high tech (speech-to-text software).

As part of the screening process presented in Chapter 5, you can use the Observation Checklist for a learner who is not making progress to identify the processing areas that are most challenging for this learner. Then, consider adjusting instruction to include strategies that are helpful in supporting learners with these specific processing needs. Also consider a learner's processing strengths. Be sure that the learner is aware of their strengths and encourage them to use their strengths.

Principles of Effective Instruction for Adults with LDs

Always Consider the Emotional Challenges of Learners

- Review the strategies and tools for building positive learner identities presented in Chapter 4.

Include the Elements of EXPLICIT Instruction

Target Specific Skills and Build Them Systematically

- Break down tasks into small chunks.
- Pay attention to the sequence and ensure that pre-requisite skills are mastered before going on to new skills.
- Teach fewer important skills until they are mastered rather than trying to teach many things with limited success. It is better to master a few skills than to sample a range of skills and not be able to retain and apply them.
- Explain what we are learning and why – there is an intentional purpose.

Model and Demonstrate

- Think aloud as you go through the steps. This provides a window to your thinking and gives the learner the vocabulary to describe their own thinking as well as an understanding of patterns, connections and strategies, i.e., the steps needed to complete a particular learning task.
- Involve as many senses as possible. Where possible, pair spoken information with visual information (e.g., a word with a picture) and include some kind of movement or activity. Have learners hear the information, see the information, say the information, do something physically with the information.

Provide Guided Practice and Scaffolding

- Break down the steps and practice only one step at a time, talking the learner through the activity, demonstrating again, giving feedback about their performance and providing emotional support and encouragement.

- "Scaffold" instruction. Think of a building under construction or repair - s*caffolding*, or staging, is the temporary structure used to support a work crew and materials to aid in the construction, maintenance and repair. The scaffolding is gradually removed as work is accomplished. In a learning situation, you provide supports or scaffolds so that learners are successful. You provide as much support as they need – easier materials, corrective feedback, demonstrations and explanations. You gradually remove the support as they become more proficient in applying the learning independently. For adult learners, scaffolding reduces frustration and helps create an environment where learners feel free to take risks with learning.
- Provide review. Each learning session should begin with a review of previous learning and end with a summary of what was learned.
- If possible, keep sessions short, focused and frequent.
- Provide opportunities for practice, practice and more practice during instructional sessions and between sessions, if possible.

Give Specific Feedback

- Provide corrective feedback throughout the learning process. The goal is to help the learner understand what they are doing right and what needs to be improved**.** It is very important to correct misunderstandings early in the learning process.
- Feedback is best if it is specific: "You were able to figure out the word because you broke it into syllables" vs. general feedback: "You did a good job". General feedback does not provide information to help the learner improve their performance the next time.

Teach strategies, teach "how" to approach learning tasks

Teach a strategy, that is, a series of steps to complete a learning task. Extensive research in the field of learning disabilities has resulted in many strategies with the following key features:

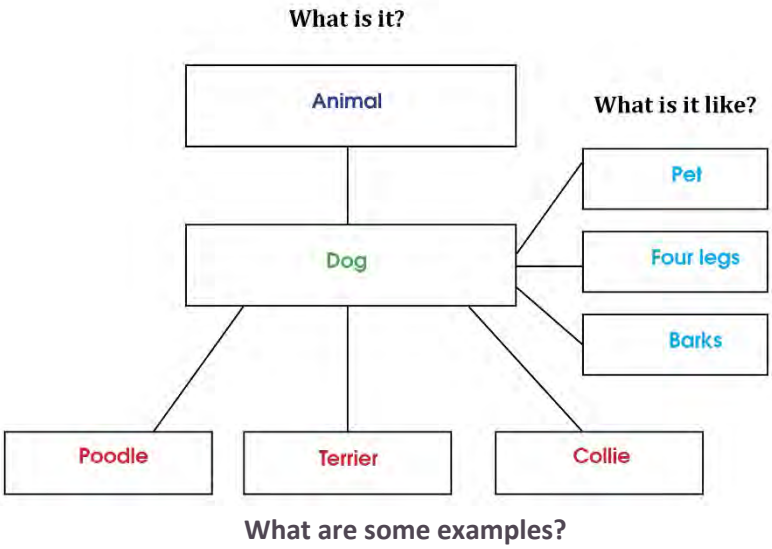
- They are useful and can be used in many learning tasks.
- They include organized and reasonable steps for the learner to approach the task (how to approach, think about, perform and evaluate their performance).
- They have cues that get the learner to take action.
- They are short and have memory cues, often an acronym to remember the steps in order. (e.g., **RAP** for summarizing: **R**ead, **A**sk yourself what it means, **P**ut it in your own words).
- They support "self-directed" learning.

Tools and Strategies for Processing Difficulties

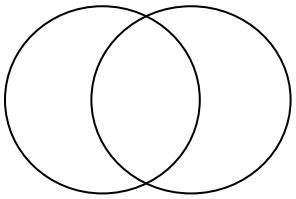
Language Processing

Language processing involves many complex activities – awareness of the sounds of language, vocabulary, word usage, grammar and pragmatics (social use of language). Many of the strategies introduced in Chapter 4 address language processing needs, particularly at the phonological level and vocabulary development. Revisit the suggested strategies and consider the following:

- Use graphic organizers to capture and build background knowledge. For example, develop a semantic map:
  - Invite ideas about a topic
  - Put each idea on a sticky note and post on large paper
  - Group the ideas to create a semantic map
  - Discuss the ideas that are grouped together and generate a label for each group
  - Learners read about the topic, or view a film, etc.
  - Learners add ideas to the semantic map, perhaps in a different colour
- Address vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge before introducing reading material or a topic by using a graphic organizer. In the example above, pick out vocabulary that may be difficult and explicitly teach the meaning of the words.
- Use graphic organizers to teach vocabulary.



- Use graphic organizers to teach text structure and the vocabulary associated with different organizational patterns:
    - For example, Compare/contrast text structure

Text Structure	Visual Representation	Keywords
Compare and contrast		however but as well as while although unless yet

For more information about graphic organizers, check out Current Practice Alerts #13 (2007)

http://www.TeachingLD.org

Processing Speed

Processing speed refers to the pace at which an individual takes in information, makes sense of it and begins to respond. Many learners with LDs have a "slow" processing speed – they get there, but it takes time. Processing speed is not related to intelligence; many individuals with good thinking and reasoning skills need more time to process information. The following strategies are helpful:

- Allow time to respond.
- Give advance warning that you will be asking a specific question.
- Reduce time pressures, for example, allow extra time for tests and in class assignments or reduce the volume required.
- Reduce the number of directions given at once. Provide the directions in other formats as well (written, pictorial).
- Provide opportunities to practice specific skills. Repeating a task makes it become more automatic. The more we repeat something, the faster we can perform the task.
- Assist with planning and organization. The more organized we are when approaching a task, the more efficient we can be in performing the task.

Memory

But will the learner remember this next week? Practitioners often express concern about learners who "forget" information. Adults with LDs struggle to store information in memory and then to retrieve, or find, the information when they need it. Instruction will be most effective when it includes intentional, explicit strategies to enhance memory, such as:

- "Talk" memory. Be explicit! Think out loud about how to remember information and explore different ways to approach storing and retrieving the information. Communicate that we have to "do" something to be able to remember steps and ideas. We have to be active.
- Build prior knowledge. We are better able to remember something if we have the vocabulary and knowledge of the context. We build on our knowledge of the world.
- Use graphic organizers.

- Organize information. Help learners to sort, chunk and categorize or classify information. We remember things best if they are in "file drawers" – then we know which drawer to look in to find the information. Graphic organizers are helpful in presenting information in a way that makes it easier to store and recall the information.
- Provide repetition. Each learning session should begin with a review of previous learning and end with a summary of what was learned. Sessions should be systematic, build on each other and provide opportunities for practice, practice and more practice.
- Use multiple pathways. Involve as many senses as possible – see, hear, touch, move.
- Reduce the load on "working memory". Reduce how much information a learner needs to "keep in mind" to do a task. For example, allow students to use response aids such as arithmetic tables, calculator or spell checker. See strategies to support working memory in a grade 12 classroom. https://www.canlearnsociety.ca/resources/take-ten-series/working-memory/
- Associate new with known. New information needs to be "hooked" onto something we already know. Many memory "tricks" involve making associations – make sentences, make a story, create visual images or pictures, or hook the information to a rhythm, melody, rhyme, chant or to an acrostic, acronym or location.

Examples of Memory Tricks are included in Appendix E.

Organization (Time and Space)

Difficulties include interpreting visual information (e.g., the orientation of letters, left and right), organizing belongings and organizing time.

Visual Processing

- Use colour to highlight relevant information.
- Use larger print and lots of white space.
- Provide graph paper to help align numbers in math problems and letters in words.
- Allow the use of a ruler or other device for the learner to keep track of their place while reading.
- Explore adjusting font, font size, and contrasting colours of print/background on the computer. Check out the Dyslexie font which was created by a graphic designer who has dyslexia for people with LDs, such as dyslexia. https://www.dyslexiefont.com/

Organization

- Provide routine and structure in the learning environment. When learners know what to expect, where things go, and the sequence of events, there is less need to actively remember details.
- Assist learners to develop routines. If they repeat the same sequence of activities until it becomes automatic, there is less chance that they will forget to do something. Routines for getting things ready at night for the next day and morning routines can be particularly helpful for adults who struggle with organization. Posted checklists with pictures of the sequence of activities are good reminders.
- Break down tasks into smaller steps.
- Assist learners to do "backward planning". Break down the task and work backwards from the final deadline and set timelines for each step. "Check-ins" for each step can help keep a learner motivated and on task.

Time Management

- Assist learners to use planners. Explore what works best. There are many paper and electronic options.
- Assist learners to use a master list and a smaller daily "to do" list.
- Assist learners to judge how long a task actually takes.
- Assist learners to develop "reminders" to stay on task or to remember to do an activity. There are many "apps" to choose from. Visit http://ww.adhdfamilies.ca to find reviews of apps.

Attention

LDs and ADHD often occur together. The above strategies for organization will be helpful. Further ideas for addressing inattention and distractibility, hyperactive/impulsive behaviour and executive functions related to task initiation and task completion are presented below.

Inattention/Distractibility

- Reduce environmental distractions (noise, movement, etc.).
- Allow learners to move to less distracting areas for independent work.
- Allow learners to wear noise reducing headphones.
- Provide extra time for tasks (learners will need more time to re-focus and concentrate).

Hyperactivity/Impulsivity

- Recognize the need for movement; include "movement breaks".
- Vary activities and increase active involvement.
- Assist learners to find appropriate ways to fidget (e.g., a bracelet).
- Discuss ways that learners can avoid blurting out or interrupting others, such as writing down their thoughts and voicing them at appropriate times. Provide reminders of this strategy before an activity begins.
- Assist learners to have "reminders", such as alarms on their cell phone (app).

Starting a task

- Have routines.
- Break the task down.
- Set a short time frame: "I am going to do this for five minutes" – then ask, "can I do another 5 minutes?

Staying On Task

- Have routines – again!
- Reduce distractions.
- Use timers or apps.
- Have cues for self-monitoring.

Promoting Follow Through

- Meet often and regularly.
- Set goals.
- Make a plan.
- Review what happened.
- Discuss obstacles, strategies for "next time".
- Provide positive feedback.

Consider Assistive Technology

Assistive technology refers to any device, piece of equipment, or system that helps bypass, work around, or compensate for an individual's specific learning difficulties.

- Explore the use of screen reading software such as Kurzweil or Read and Write Gold. Many cellphones have built in screen reading features.
- E-texts and audiobooks may be available in areas of interest to a learner.
- Consider talking spellcheckers.
- Computers with word processing, spell-check and grammar-check features are helpful for written expression.
- Explore the use of speech to text software.
- Select apps that help compensate for a learner's areas of difficulty. http://www.adhdfamilies.ca has reviews of many apps.

Chapter 7: Psycho-Educational Assessment

Pre-Reading Reflection

- Have you ever considered referring a learner for a psycho-educational assessment? Why?
- What are two things that would make you hesitate suggesting that a learner seek an assessment?

In the screening process, you may have answered "yes" to the question:

Is it possible that this learner has LDs?

You may wish to suggest that the learner look into getting assessed for LDs. This is called a psycho-educational assessment or diagnostic testing, but it may be referred to as a 'learning assessment'.

An assessment may not be necessary or even appropriate for all learners with suspected LDs. Before suggesting an assessment for a specific learner, you will want to:

- Understand more about psycho-educational assessments
- Consider the benefits of a psycho-educational assessment for a learner
- Consider the barriers to a psycho-educational assessment for a learner
- Consider the issues specific to EL learners.

Understanding Psycho-Educational Assessments

Who can provide a psycho-educational assessment?

Registered Psychologists who have background and experience in the assessment of adults with learning challenges.

What is the purpose of a psycho-educational assessment?

To identify an individual's learning strengths and needs, to provide a diagnosis of a disability, if appropriate, and to make recommendations to help the learner.

What is involved in a psycho-educational assessment?

1. **An Interview** to understand the learner's current and past experiences. Typically, the psychologist will gather information about the following:
   - Birth and development
   - Health and medical history
   - Family, social and relationship history
   - Educational/School history
   - Work history
2. **A review** of available school records and other relevant documents (e.g., previous assessments).
3. **Testing**: Testing can take 4 to 6 hours and is often done over several sessions. Standardized tests are administered one on one to compare the individual's level of functioning to that of others of the same age or educational level. Rating scales and questionnaires may also be used. Typical areas that are assessed include:
   - Thinking and reasoning (tests of "intelligence")
   - Psychological processing, such as phonological processing, language, memory, visual-spatial processing, processing speed, attention, executive functions
   - Academic functioning: reading, written expression, math
   - Social-emotional factors: anxiety, depression, attention.

What is the outcome of a psycho-educational assessment?

Written Report: The assessment process and results, interpretation, conclusions and recommendations are summarized in a Psycho-educational Assessment Report. If the learner's profile meets the criteria for a diagnosis, for example, a diagnosis of a learning disability, the diagnosis will be clearly stated in the report. There will also be descriptions of the individual's learning strengths and needs and the relevant recommendations.

Feedback: The psychologist will meet with the individual and explain the results and recommendations. It is often beneficial for the adult to bring someone with them to the feedback session. It can be an emotional experience and the adult may not absorb and remember all of the information presented. Having someone else hear the information so that they can discuss it afterwards is helpful.

How can literacy practitioners use this information?

Sharing the Report: An adult learner may share the report of an assessment with a practitioner. Remember, this is highly confidential information - it can only be released with written consent and must be treated as confidential. If a report is released to an adult foundational learning program, it is good practice to make a copy of the recommendations section to be used in planning instruction and to keep the full report in a secure location. It may be best if the learner shares only the Recommendations and Summary.

The information that is most useful to literacy instructors is the description of an individual's strengths and needs and the recommendations. This information can help practitioners to adjust instruction based on the understanding of the learner's strengths and needs. The recommended accommodations and assistive technology can also be helpful.

Benefits of a Psycho-Educational Assessment

If the assessment results in a diagnosis of a learning disability, the benefits include:

- Information may lift some of the learner's insecurity and sense of inadequacy.
- Accurate understanding of learning strengths and challenges can promote self-advocacy.
- Access to rights provided by the law (Human Rights Legislation).
- Access to accommodations in educational and workplace settings.

With or without a diagnosis, the assessment information can be helpful to:

- Inform instruction.
- Provide an understanding of the learner's strengths and needs and the barriers to learning.

Barriers to Psycho-Educational Assessment

Barriers to Obtaining a Diagnosis

Sometimes a psychologist cannot make a diagnosis. Adult learners have complex issues. Sometimes their life experiences make it difficult to determine if their learning challenges are the result of LDs or other factors in their lives, such as inadequate school experiences, mental health issues (e.g., addictions, anxiety and depression), trauma, head injuries or chronic health concerns, etc. While these experiences can co-occur with LDs, it is sometimes difficult for a psychologist to make a diagnosis of LDs when many complicating factors are present.

Issues Specific to English Language Learners and LDs

- Overall, we have limited knowledge of EL learners with LDs. There is a lack of research, theory and practical knowledge to guide the appropriate assessment of this group of individuals for LDs.
- Tests are normed for English-speaking populations. The test results may be an indication of lack of English language proficiency rather than underlying LDs.
- Assessments reflect our culture, not necessarily the culture of origin of the English language learner. It may not be a fair comparison.

- It is often difficult to obtain information about the learner's language development and their reading and writing skills in their home language.
- For many newcomers, a history of trauma and inadequate educational opportunities are complicating factors[36].

Educators should proceed with caution when recommending formal testing for LDs for adults who are English Language Learners.

Barriers to Obtaining a Psycho-Educational Assessment

- An assessment is expensive; it can cost from $1,200 to $3,000.
- There may be limited access to knowledgeable assessors, particularly in some locations.
- Some adult foundational programs can make referrals for assessments but in many cases, the learner has to seek an assessment on their own and the system can be difficult to navigate.
- Waiting lists may be long.
- Practical barriers may make it very difficult for a learner to follow through with an assessment (e.g. work schedule, child care, transportation). An assessment typically involves several sessions spread over time.
- There are concerns about "stigma." A learner may not understand the benefits of a diagnosis and be reluctant to have a 'label' of LDs. This may be particularly true for learners from different cultures.

Make a Decision

Carefully consider an individual learner's strengths and needs and their practical circumstances. Is obtaining a psycho-educational assessment feasible? If it does not seem to be feasible at this time, there are still many actions that you can take to assist the learner. Review the Observation Checklist to identify processing difficulties. Adjust instruction by selecting strategies, accommodations and assistive technology that have been found to be helpful for learners with these difficulties.

If you decide that a psycho-educational assessment would be beneficial and feasible, you will want to gather some practical information and prepare to discuss the possibility with the learner.

Prepare to Discuss a Psycho-Educational Assessment with a Learner

Find out about the steps required in your organization and your own community.

Is there someone in your organization who is responsible for making formal referrals for psycho-educational assessment? How can you make this happen?

If your organization does not make referrals for assessments, you will be suggesting that the learner pursue obtaining an assessment on their own. You will want to be able to tell them:

- Where they can go to obtain an assessment.
- The local options for funding an assessment. Is the learner eligible for any of these? What do they need to do?

Before You Talk to the Learner:	
☐	I have reviewed the History Checklist and there are many red flags for LDs and there are no clear alternative explanations (hearing, vision, social emotional stressors, trauma).
☐	I have adjusted instruction and the learner is not making progress.
☐	I have reviewed the Observation Checklist and there are many red flags for LDs.
☐	I have considered the benefits and barriers to assessment for this learner.
☐	I know where and how to refer this learner.
☐	I know the approximate cost of an assessment.
☐	I know about any financial assistance that might be available.
☐	I believe this learner is ready to hear this.

Based on your careful consideration of this learner and the available resources, is pursuing an assessment feasible and desirable? If "yes", prepare to talk to the learner.

How to Talk to a Learner if You Suspect LDs

This can be a very delicate conversation. Ensure that it is private and confidential.

Consider the following suggestions for discussing possible LDs and a referral for assessment. It is important that you do not offer a diagnosis or apply the label "learning disabilities" to the learner.

Introduce the Issue

- "We all learn differently. We all have strengths and challenges."
- "I have seen …." (Describe some of the learner's strengths).
- "I have also seen that you struggle with…" (Describe specific examples)
- "Do you think this information is accurate?"
- "What do you think this information means?"
- "Why do you think ____ is difficult for you?"
- "Sometimes people struggle to learn to read because they have missed a lot of school, or they were taught in a different language. Sometimes, people struggle to learn to read because they learn "differently" - figuring out why they are struggling and how they learn best can be helpful."
- "One way to find out how you learn is to have a psycho-educational or learning assessment. I would like to tell you more about these assessments – how they can be helpful, what is involved and some of the drawbacks."

Describe Benefits of an Assessment

"The most important benefit of an assessment is that it will help you understand your strengths and the reasons for your struggles. It will provide ideas to help you in learning and work situations – ideas for you and for your teachers."

"If the assessment results in a diagnosis of LDs, you may be eligible for something called "accommodations". Accommodations describe different way of doing things. For example, if someone has a physical disability and uses a wheelchair, accommodations are things like ramps. For individuals with LDs, accommodations may include more time for tests and exams, taking exams in a quiet place without the distraction of other students being there, permission to use a computer with software that can read the information to you."

Describe the process

Be sure that you understand what is involved in a psycho-educational assessment by reviewing the information on Understanding Psycho-Educational Assessments. A handout "What Is… A Psycho-Educational Assessment" is provided to share with your learner to guide your description of the process.

Describe the Barriers (Specific to This Learner).

- The assessment will go at your pace, often four or five meetings over a few weeks.
- Describe the funding options for this learner.
- Describe the local resources: Who does assessments and where they are located.

Summarize

- "The decision is up to you."
- "If you think you might want to find out…"
- "Here are some websites that have more information – see if the experiences of adults with LDs sound familiar."

Websites to Look At:

- http://www.ldac-acta.ca/learn-more/ld-basics
- http://www.ldonline.org/ldbasics (though this site is aimed at parents)
- https://www.canlearnsociety.ca/services/adult-assessments/
- www.understood.org
- The Power of Dyslexia: Famous People with Learning Disabilities. https://youtu.be/xoeZAXUZbqQ
- Searching for Words: A Woman's Fight to Learn. https://youtu.be/HOo1JQEZwU0

What Is...
A Psycho-Educational Assessment?

A psycho-educational assessment is done by a psychologist. The purpose is to understand your learning strengths and needs, especially what things are making learning difficult for you. An assessment gives ideas for helping address problems.

What Will Happpen?

Interview

The psychologist listens to your story. They will hear your concerns about your learning and your experiences.

Look at Records

If you have school report cards or any other reports from the past, the psychologist looks at these to get more information about your experiences.

Testing

The psychologist finds out about your learning strengths and needs. They work one-on-one with you to look at the following:

- Language and memory skills
- Thinking and reasoning skills
- Social and emotional
- Reading, writing and math skills

Report is Written

The report will tell you about your strengths and weaknesses in learning. It will tell you if there is a "diagnosis". It will also give you ideas to use at home, at school and at work.

Meeting With You

The psychologist will meet with you to go over the findings. It is always a good idea to bring someone you trust with you to hear the information. They will talk about ideas for you to use at home, school and work.

What Next?

The report can be shared with others so they are able to help. It can sometimes help you get other resources that will help you.

Outcomes of Psycho-Educational Assessment

There are many possible outcomes to a psycho-educational assessment. Practitioners screen for "possible" LDs. The psychologist then gathers extensive information to understand the learner. Based on this comprehensive assessment, LDs may be confirmed. It is also possible that an assessment will lead to a different conclusion about a learner or a diagnosis may not be made. In all situations, the information about a learner's strengths and needs will be important to providing instruction and supports.

The following three scenarios illustrate the range of possibilities from our experience at CanLearn.

Anya

Anya was struggling in a certificate program offered by a private college. She was in her 30's and had been in Canada since she was 12 years old. Although English was her second language, her conversational skills were good. She had difficulty writing exams. She had disorganized speech which carried over into written work. She was able to read passages from her textbook out loud but frequently pronounced words incorrectly and had weak comprehension. A CanLearn Learning Facilitator was providing 1-on-1 support to assist with reading, writing and spelling. Anya improved her performance on tests but continued to struggle with some of the practical demands such as taking notes while the client was talking because she found they spoke too quickly. Anya was asked to leave the program and faced significant financial stress as she had received a loan that had to be re-paid. The CanLearn Facilitator initially referred Anya for a psycho-educational assessment to understand her learning challenges with the hope of providing supports for greater success in the certificate program.

Outcomes of the Psycho-Educational Assessment

Diagnosis: Mild Intellectual Disability

Core reasoning and thinking abilities were extremely low compared to her same age peers. While she had developed practical skills for daily living, she lacked the skills necessary for managing finances and participating fully in managing daily living demands. Conversational skills in English were good, but her vocabulary, listening and speaking skills were limited. She had difficulty following instructions and understanding more complex and abstract information. Reading, writing and math skills were all Well Below Average.

It was concluded that Anya required significant support in learning situations and in meeting the demands of daily living. She had many strengths to build on but faced many challenges in learning situations. Recommendations were provided to address the Needs summarized below.

Strengths	Needs
Visual memory	General learning needs
Practical adaptive skills	Conceptual development
Conversational skills	Adaptive skills
Pleasant, confident in asking for help	Language processing
Self-determination	Memory processing
Dedicated to her children	Academic skills

Intervention after Assessment

- Emphasized vocabulary and background knowledge to enhance reading comprehension.
- Assisted her with self-advocacy – how to share her strengths and needs with others.
- Community volunteers advocated to address financial pressures.

Outcomes

- Anya felt relief – she now understood why learning was such a challenge for her; she also had a better sense of her areas of strength.
- Anya's self-advocacy skills improved and she also felt more confidence in asking for help (to meet daily living demands, to read complex materials).
- Anya had more realistic expectations of herself and set more realistic goals; she obtained a job that she could handle and enrolled in a program to increase her employability skills.

Conclusion

Although the assessment did not result in a diagnosis of a learning disability, it did lead to a diagnosis that provided an explanation for Anya's ongoing struggles and recommendations for instruction and support.

Bill

Bill, a 47-year-old English speaking Calgarian, had experienced longstanding learning and attention difficulties. He received special education supports until leaving school in grade 10. He struggled to get and keep employment. He was essentially a non-reader and had not been able to find help to improve his reading skills – being told that his skills were too low for many programs. Even with one-on-one learning support offered through CanLearn's Reading Connections program, Bill was struggling to learn. He appeared stressed and anxious and required significant support with time management and organizational strategies. CanLearn Learning Facilitators referred Bill for a psycho-educational assessment to further understand his learning strengths and needs.

Outcomes of the Psycho-educational Assessment

Diagnoses: **Severe Learning Disability (reading, written expression, math)**

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (inattentive)

Bill was found to have average nonverbal thinking and reasoning skills. However, he had significant difficulty with verbal reasoning, working memory, processing speed and phonological processing. He also has ADHD and significant difficulties with attention, organization and executive functioning. These processing difficulties have had a significant impact on his learning, particularly in the acquisition of literacy skills. He met criteria for a diagnosis of a severe learning disability that affected all academic areas. The extent of the impairment warrants emphasis – Bill does not have the literacy skills required to meet the demands of daily living. His learning and attention difficulties are severe and he will require extensive, intensive one-on-one supports to improve his functional skills and he will need to learn approaches to compensate for his severe level of impairment. Although he can be expected to make progress, the severity of his needs suggest that he will likely not reach a level of independence.

Strengths	Needs
Nonverbal reasoning	General learning needs
Visual memory	ADHD, executive functioning
Applied math problem-solving	Verbal conceptual development, vocabulary
Responsive to strategy teaching	Working memory
Committed to learning to read	Academic skills
Pleasant	Anxiety and mood

Intervention after Assessment

- Reading instruction was adjusted to maximize his visual processing strengths.
- He is learning to use assistive technology for daily reading tasks.
- He needs continued support for time management and organizational strategies, but he has improved.
- Recognition of slow pace and need for extensive repetition – he has persevered and is optimistic that he will learn to read.

Outcomes

- Assessment documentation supported a successful application for AISH funding (Assured Income for Severely Handicapped) – this brought financial stability and deceased Bill's level of stress and anxiety
- Assessment process resulted in an increase in Bill's feeling of optimism and hope for the future. He has been observed to act differently, to have "reframed" his experience. He was solemn and anxious in the past and now he shares more openly, jokes and smiles.
- He can now read a children's book to his baby grandson.

Conclusion

This was an appropriate referral and led to diagnoses and documentation that were supportive to the learner in several ways (self-perceptions, instructional strategies, financial).

Callie

Callie speaks Arabic and has been in Canada for three years. She has been studying English at different programs and has been struggling in these programs. She came to CanLearn for learning support and to develop English language reading and writing skills. She was making limited progress. The assessment was requested to determine strengths and needs for programming purposes and to assist with planning for the future.

Outcomes of the Psycho-educational Assessment

Difficulties with inattention, distractibility, impulsivity, organization and time management were significant factors that caused impairment in Callie's daily life. However, a diagnosis of ADHD could not be made given the complexity of factors affecting her functioning. She reported experiencing trauma and head injuries, had significant difficulties with sleep, and was being treated for depression and anxiety.

Callie was found to have at least Average nonverbal thinking and reasoning abilities. She demonstrated strengths in processing visual information when given time to do so. However, many factors affected her learning. Mental health concerns require continued support. English oral language skills, including phonological awareness, are limited and need to be developed to increase the effectiveness of instruction in reading and writing. Her processing speed is slow and she requires considerable time to complete tasks. Significant attention and language difficulties appear to contribute to memory difficulties making the acquisition and retention of information challenging for Callie. In addition, her rigid approach limits her willingness to use suggested strategies.

Strengths	Needs
Nonverbal reasoning	General learning needs
Visual spatial processing	English language skill development
Visual memory	Processing speed
Persistence	Memory
Personable, outgoing	Attention, impulsivity, organization
	Reading and writing
	Mental health

Intervention after Assessment

- Continued reading instruction focuses on phonological awareness and decoding and Callie has made some improvements.
- Facilitator emphasizes the need for flexibility and to try ideas presented by others and Callie will try.
- Callie was encouraged to continue to access mental health supports (i.e., psychiatrist).

Outcomes

- Callie appears to trust the CanLearn team and continues to come for support; in the past, she quit programs and jobs frequently.
- She has changed jobs and is participating in online training with support.
- She continues to receive professional support for mental health concerns.

Conclusion

This assessment was helpful in exploring the wide range of factors that have an impact on Callie's learning and daily functioning. However, the assessor was not able to make a diagnosis of a learning disability or ADHD.

For these three learners, psycho-educational assessment resulted in different outcomes with regard to diagnoses. Even though only one assessment resulted in a diagnosis of LDs, all were helpful in informing instruction and in assisting the learners to access supports.

Final Thoughts

At CanLearn, we have been immersed in research and practice to understand individuals of all ages who struggle with learning since 1979. We are committed to "unlocking potential so **all can learn"** – this includes adults who are non-readers and beginning readers. We believe that these adults can improve their reading through skillful, explicit and intense reading instruction along with self-determination to engage in self-directed learning. Research from the fields of learning disabilities and reading support this view.

In this Toolkit, we have shared information, tools and strategies to assist adult foundational learning practitioners to include the building blocks of effective adult reading instruction in their programs:

- Positive Learner Identity
- Assessment for Learning
- Explicit Reading Instruction in the Five Components of Reading
    - Phonological and phonemic awareness
    - Word recognition (also known as word analysis or decoding)
    - Vocabulary
    - Fluency
    - Comprehension
- Adult Learning Principles
- Continuous Professional development

We also recognize that sometimes learners make limited progress and that additional information may be helpful to understand their learning strengths and needs and adjust instruction. Sometimes LDs may be suspected. We have provided information about psycho-educational assessments and a Screening Process to help practitioners decide on the appropriateness of a referral for a psycho-educational assessment for a particular learner.

Adults with LDs are highly represented among learners in adult foundational learning programs. Whether or not an adult has been diagnosed with LDs, instructional strategies that are effective for adults with LDs are helpful for all learners.

We hope that the information in this Toolkit will help adult foundational learning practitioners to use effective teaching strategies to help struggling adult learners improve their reading skills.

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Appendix A

Official Definition of Learning Disabilities

Adopted by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada January 30, 2002. Re- endorsed on March 2, 2015

Learning Disabilities refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency.

Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g. planning and decision-making).

Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding);
- reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension);
- written language (e.g. spelling and written expression); and
- mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving).

Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking.

Learning disabilities are lifelong. The way in which they are expressed may vary over an individual's lifetime, depending on the interaction between the demands of the environment and the individual's strengths and needs. Learning disabilities are suggested by unexpected academic under-achievement or achievement which is maintained only by unusually high levels of effort and support.

Learning disabilities are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors or injury that alters brain functioning in a manner which affects one or more processes related to learning. These disorders are not due primarily to hearing and/or vision problems, socio-economic factors, cultural or linguistic differences, lack of motivation or ineffective teaching, although these factors may further complicate the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities. Learning disabilities may co-exist with various conditions including attentional, behavioural and emotional disorders, sensory impairments or other medical conditions.

For success, individuals with learning disabilities require early identification and timely specialized assessments and interventions involving home, school, community and workplace settings.

The interventions need to be appropriate for each individual's learning disability subtype and, at a minimum, include the provision of: specific skill instruction; accommodations; compensatory strategies; and self-advocacy skills.

Appendix B

Learning Disabilities Terminology

Learning Disabilities – umbrella term for a heterogeneous group of difficulties in learning related to processing deficits in individuals with at least average intelligence.

Some specific terms that may be used:

Dyslexia: reading disability characterized by inaccurate and dysfluent word reading

Dyscalculia: math disability characterized by poor number sense and arithmetic calculation

Dysgraphia: learning disability characterized by difficulty with the physical act of writing

Language Learning Disability: A language learning disability is a disorder that may affect the comprehension and use of spoken or written language as well as nonverbal language, such as eye contact and tone of speech, in both adults and children.

Nonverbal Learning Disability: A neurological disorder which originates in the right hemisphere of the brain. Reception of nonverbal or performance-based information governed by this hemisphere is impaired in varying degrees, causing problems with visual-spatial, intuitive, organizational, evaluative, and holistic processing functions.

Specific Learning Disorders: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders-5th Edition (DSM-5) uses the umbrella term, **specific learning disorders** and then areas of impairment and specific difficulties:

Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in reading:

- Word reading accuracy
- Reading rate/fluency
- Reading comprehension

Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in writing:

- Spelling accuracy
- Grammar and punctuation accuracy
- Clarity or organization of written expression

Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in math:

- Number sense
- Memorization of arithmetic facts
- Accurate or fluent calculation
- Accurate math reasoning

Processing Deficits Underlying Learning Problems:

Phonological processing – appreciating the sounds of speech; the ability to manipulate the sounds of words (sound blending, segmenting, rhyming); phonemic awareness –the understanding that words can be divided into a sequence of sounds.

Language processing – the understanding and expression of oral and written language; includes vocabulary, word structure, sentence structure and meaning across sentences.

Sensory processing (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) – interpreting information received through the senses (eyes, ears, touch).

Visual-spatial processing – ability to organize visual information into meaningful patterns.

Memory – short term memory, working memory (ability to hold information in mind long enough to do something with it), long term memory, retrieval strategies.

Attention – ability to focus on some activities while ignoring others, sustaining concentration, shifting attention, resisting distraction.

Processing speed – ability to perform simple cognitive or perceptual tasks rapidly and efficiently.

Executive functions – mental control processes of planning, monitoring, regulation, organization and metacognition.

Appendix C

Sequencing Phonics Instruction

In relation to phonics instruction, *sequencing* involves giving consideration to the order in which phonics knowledge and skills are taught. When providing phonics instruction to an adult learner, it is important analyze existing skills and areas of break-down and plan the instruction accordingly

Overview of Phonics Skills

- Letter Sounds (we need the learner to know the sound of the letter not its name; e.g. we need b for ball, not bee)
- Sounding out VC words (e.g. it, as) and CVC words (e.g. bat, set, dot).
- Sounding out CVC words with "s" at the end (e.g. bats, pigs, pets)
- Differentiating letters b and d (Bat before ball says "b")
- Initial blends (fl, gr, we, br, cr, fr, bl, gl, qu, sn, tw, sk, sl, sp, thr, pl, st, pr, dr, tr,cl sm, dw, spl, scr, str, spr, squ)
- Final blends (e.g. lump, task, land)
- Recognizing vowels
- The long and short sounds of vowels
- Silent e
- Diagraphs ay and oy (e.g. may, play, boy, soya)
- Sounds –th, - sh, - ch, -ck (e.g. thin, gush, pitch, thick)
- The letter "y" at the end of the word (e.g. try, satisfy)
- "er" and " ing" endings (e.g. running, brother)
- The two sounds of "oo" (e.g. food, stood)
- Double "ee" (e.g. tree, geese)
- The two sounds of "ea" (e.g. tea, head)
- The vowel combination "oa' (e.g. goal, coat)
- The vowel combination " ai" (e.g. mail, train)
- "Ed" at the end of the word (e.g. planned, sorted)
- Vowels followed by the letter "r" (e.g. bird, perm, curd, skirt, firm)
- Vowel combinations "ar" and "or" (collar, doctor)
- Soft "g' (Gerald went to Germanu to agitate the gentle gypsy); g followed by an i,e or y says "j" (as in jam)
- Soft "c" (Mice were recently seen eating celery in the cellar); c followed by i,e, or y says "s"
- Hard and soft "c" combinations (e.g. accident, hiccup)
- "tion, sion, cial, tial, cian" (sh sound)
- "le" at the end of the word (e.g. kettle, handle)

- The two sounds of " ow" (The cow wears a bow)
- "oi" and "oy" words (e.g. spoil, boy)
- "au" and "aw" (August, awful)
- "ew" (e.g. Andrew,new)
- The sound of the letter "a' when it follows "w" (Wash Walter from Washington, in warm water.)
- "qu", "qua" "squ" and "squa" (e.g. queen; quality; squid squash)
- The letters " ies at the end of a word (e.g. fries,prize)
- The letters "ied" at the end of a word (fried, carried)
- Silent letters "w" and "h" (e.g. write, whale)
- The letters "igh" (e.g. high, fight)
- The letters "ph" (e.g. phone, elephant)
- The letters "ive" at the end of the word (e.g. forgive, relatives)
- More silent letters: g (sign); gue (vague); k (knit), b (plumber); p (psychology, pneumonia)

Appendix D

Sample Learner Reading Profiles:

From: Jerkovic, N. (2016) Reading Connections. Calgary: CanLearn Society.

Background Information

The Simple View of Reading suggests the end goal of reading - reading comprehension - is the product of two basic abilities: decoding and linguistic comprehension.

Note: the word decoding is used to encompass all aspects of word recognition

Research shows that there are five essential components of reading:

1. Phonological Awareness: recognizing and using rhymes, syllables and individual sounds to create words in oral language.

2. Word Recognition Skills including phonics, sight word recognition skills and word analysis skills.

3. Vocabulary: the meaning of words.

4. Fluency: ability to read a text accurately, quickly, effortlessly and with expression.

5. Comprehension: understanding what one reads. This is the ultimate goal of reading.

What Is A Reading Profile?

A reading profile is a picture of reader's strengths and needs in the component skills.

Why Is A Reading Profile Important For An Adult Foundational Learner?

- Many adults with limited literacy skills function in everyday life by using compensating strategies and skills. However, when something in their life changes, for example they lose their job or end the relationship with a person they depended upon, things tend to fall apart.
- Many adults in foundational learning program are not able to make the best progress they could due to underlying reading difficulties. A common practice in adult literacy programs is to use functional assessments such as Read Forward, DALA or TABE. They include stimulus materials authentic to literacy demands experienced by adults – forms, documents, advertisements, newspapers. They provide information about how well adults use literacy in daily life and, as such, they are absolutely valuable. However, they do not necessarily correspond with reading instruction needs.
- A reading profile provides a guide for instruction. Once an instructor has assessed a learner's specific skills, she/he can plan explicit, systematic and targeted instruction.
- A reading profile also provides information about skills that underline reading ability that the learner already has (example, ability to rhyme words), which helps the learner build his/her motivation and self-determination.

- Last but not the least, reading profiles can help instructors to group learners with similar strengths and needs for more focused instruction.

Basic Reading Profiles

Profile 1: Both decoding and comprehension are strong

Profile 2: Both decoding and comprehension are weak

Profile 3: Decoding is weak but comprehension seems to be OK

Profile 4: Decoding is strong but comprehension is weak

Sample Learner Reading Profile

Profile 2

Reading Component	Score	Comments/Notes
Phonological Awareness - Rhymes	8/10	Confuses alliterations and rhymes (example: chair and cheese rhyme)
Phonological Awareness – Initial Sounds	**5/10**	Confuses letter sounds and letter names
Word Recognition – Sight Words	9/10	Better than expected
Word Recognition - Decoding	14/58	Severe difficulties; word recognition miscues involve guesses based on the first few letters of a word + attempts at sounding out Initial consonants: B, D, G J, QU, R, C, Y Ending consonants: d, x, g, -ss, -ll, b Consonant blends: sm, tr, gr, fr, fl, bl,-nk Consonant diagraphs: -ck, -ng, Much uncertainty about vowels, both short and long, especially A-E and I-E long vowel combinations
Vocabulary	N/A	Reading vocabulary not screened due to decoding difficulties Needs in the area of oral language vocabulary observed – many common words (example “attic”) are at the level of awareness without knowing what they mean
Fluency	N/A	Not screened due to decoding difficulties
Comprehension	N/a	Not screened due to decoding difficulties
ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS • Native English Speaker • Numerous adverse childhood experiences in childhood including the experience of homelessness • Changed schools frequently; attendance at times was sporadic • Difficulties with learning started in early grades, were persistent; dropped out in Grade 9 • In addition to academic challenges, experienced behavior issues • Attempted to learn to read as an adult twice but both times dropped out because “other people could read better than me and I couldn’t cope” • Referred to the program by Child and Family Services; was not able to cope with parenting program materials he needed to read in order to get back custody of his children. • Lost his driver’s license; attempted several times to take the written test but was unsuccessful • Experiences daily struggles navigating the digital world which impacts his ability to look for employment, access social assistance, etc. • Challenges with regards to articulating thoughts and understanding interview questions observed during the initial interview		

Appendix E

Memory "Tricks"

Many memory "tricks" involve making associations – new information needs to be "hooked" to something we already know.

Hook To a Sentence

Make up a sentence linking the words. Visualize the sentence as you repeat and rehearse it.

To remember a list of words, example: Buick, apple, alligator

- The **alligator** was sitting in the **Buick** and eating an **apple**.

To remember difficult spelling patterns:

- There are two **c**ots and two **m**attresses in a**cc**o**mm**odation.
- Sepa**rat**e is a **rat** of a word to spell.

Hook To a Story

Make up a sentence or story linking the words. Rehearse the story.
To remember: spider, window, hill, boy, picture, coffee, train, stool.

Story: As the train chugged up the hill, I looked out the window and saw a family having a picnic. A little boy stood on a stool and dropped a spider in his mother's coffee cup. Her shocked face was a picture to remember.

Hook To a Picture or Visual Image

As you listen to a story, visualize the action. Pair pictures with information you want to remember.

To spell homonyms, hook the spelling to picture cues:

Cents

Scents

Sense

Hook To a Rhythm, Melody or Rhyme:

Rehearse the rhythm, rhyme or melody and use it when you need the information.

"Stop stop stop the words
with a little dot
use a period at the end
so they'll know to stop."
(sung to Row row row your boat)

Hook To an Acronym

The first letters of each word needing to be memorized are linked together to form another word.

- **ROY G. BIV** – the colours of the rainbow, in order: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet
- **BEDMAS** – the order of operations: brackets, exponents, division, multiplication, addition, subtraction
- **HOMES** – the names of the Great Lakes in North America: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior.

Hook To an Acrostic Sentence

The first letter of each word needing to be memorized becomes the first letter of a word that is part of a sentence that will be memorized. Sometimes it is easier to remember a sentence than a group of words. The sentence becomes the connection to the terms needing to be memorized.

- Spelling of "Because": Big elephants can always upset small elephants.
- Names of the planets, in order: (Mars, Venus, Earth, Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto) - My Very Eager Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas.

Hook to a location

Choose a location that is very familiar and does not take time to remember, such as your bedroom or a hallway in your house. 'Attach' each piece of information to a particular location in the space you are visualizing.

For example, picture your bedroom and place the provinces in your bedroom.