

The Story of MultiLit: Effective Instruction for Low-Progress Readers

by Kevin Wheldall and Robyn Wheldall

This is a story that we like to tell. We were walking down Eastwood high street one day in 1994 when Kevin suddenly announced: "I've got it. MultiLit – Making Up Lost Time In Literacy. There's the acronym – all we need now is the program to go with it!"

Like most good stories, it is slightly embellished but with a kernel of truth. That is where the name came from but we had been working on such a program for low-progress readers, or students struggling to learn to read, for some time. In fact, Kevin had conceptualized the basic underlying model before migrating to Sydney in 1990 to take up the position of Professor and Director of Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC). His idea had been to establish a Single Term Educational Program for Under-performing Pupils (or STEP-UP) for year (grade) 6 students in their final term of primary (or elementary) school as one last attempt to lift their basic skills performance before commencing high school.

Not long after arriving in Australia, we embarked on such a project, running a class for year/grade 6 students in the local high school in the term immediately prior to their formal entry. We developed a program incorporating everything we then knew about effective instruction in literacy and classroom behavior management for low-performing students. Subsequently we ran similar STEP-UP style classes for students with learning difficulties in the special school that formed part of MUSEC. In 1995, we formalized these activities under the umbrella title of the MultiLit Initiative. The early work on the development of MultiLit is reported in Wheldall and Beaman (2000).

The MultiLit Reading Tutor Program

The first instructional program we developed, based on our research, was the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program (or RTP), the first edition of which was released in 1998 (Macquarie University Special Education Centre, 1998; revised edition MultiLit, 2007). The aim of the program was to provide one-to-one individual instructional support in reading and related skills to older students experiencing reading difficulties. The overall orientation was avowedly non-categorical (Wheldall, 1994; Wheldall & Carter, 1996), a commitment to the conviction that all children can learn given effective instruction, while the generic classroom behavior management model underpinning the program was predicated upon the principles and methods of Positive Teaching (based on applied behavior analysis) (Wheldall, 1991). Our Positive Teaching model took careful account of the functional antecedents for classroom behavior and focused attention on the positive reinforcement of both appropriate on-task behavior and successive small increments in student reading performance. This behavioral approach also informed our non-categorical model of instruction, eschewing the category in favor of a concern for effective instruction for all students.

Our main target group was students in the later stages of their primary schooling and those who were making the transition into secondary/high school and who were performing significantly below their peers. This group was originally operationally defined as being at least two years behind in terms of reading age but was subsequently redefined as being in the bottom quartile.

Our contention was that if students could not read accurately and fluently then they would certainly struggle to keep up with their typically performing peers or, indeed, to access the high school curriculum. Students undertaking the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program received intensive, systematic, and direct instruction in three key areas of effective literacy instruction (Ellis, Wheldall, & Beaman, 2007). The key component consisted of a phonics program called the MultiLit Word Attack Skills program. The second component was the MultiLit Sight Words program. This program was designed to teach the 300 (200 in the second edition) of the most frequently occurring words in print by sight, with a high level of automaticity. As the Word Attack Skills program taught generative decoding strategies, the Sight Words program focused mainly on frequent irregular words (for example, *the, was, said*) that the students could recognize quickly. The idea was that if students could recognize these high frequency words they could have immediate access to connected text. The third element of the program was MultiLit Reinforced Reading, the text reading component of the program. This was where students put all the sub-skills learning of word attack and sight word skills into action in reading connected text, where the generalization of newly acquired skills could take place. Students read instructional level text supported in the process by a tutor who would use a variety of prompts. As well as focusing on reading accuracy and fluency, Reinforced Reading had a focus on reading comprehension. It is clearly not sufficient for a student to be able to decode text; they must be able to understand what is being read for the communicative purpose of reading to be met. (See Figure 1 for further details of the program.)

The strength of the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program was that it was composed of, in our view, the essential building blocks of literacy. The way the program was devised meant that students could work with another person (not necessarily a teacher) for only 30 minutes a day (for at least 4 days a week) to receive a program of reading instruction that was tailored for them and meeting them at their instructional level. Initial placement testing and daily monitoring of performance ensured that students were neither wasting time repeating lessons dealing with information they had already learned nor were students skipping important skills that they would need to read proficiently and independently.

Continued on page 34

FIGURE 1. The MultiLit Reading Tutor Program

The following description of the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program is edited and abstracted from the details provided on the website of MultiLit Pty Ltd at <http://www.multilit.com/programs/reading-tutor-program/>

The MultiLit Reading Tutor Program (RTP) caters to older students who have not acquired the basic skills needed to become functional readers.

Key Features

RTP reflects a contemporary approach to best practice literacy instruction as identified by international reading scientists and as reflected by the reports of the U.S. National Reading Panel (National Institute for Child Health, 2000), the (Australian) National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (Department of Education, Science and Training (2005), and the (United Kingdom) Rose Report (Rose, 2006).

Research shows that the most effective programs of reading instruction for low-progress readers involve intensive, systematic, and explicit instruction in three main areas:

1. Phonics (or word attack skills);
2. Sight word recognition; and
3. Supported book reading.

Teachers, tutors, and parents opting for remedial programs that incorporate these three elements are far more likely to be satisfied with the progress their students (or children) will make. The Reading Tutor Program incorporates all three key features: Word Attack Skills, Sight Words, and Reinforced Reading.

Word Attack Skills

When teaching students with learning difficulties to become independent readers, teaching phonic word attack skills is an essential component of any literacy intervention program. These skills help students decode text by associating sounds with letters or groups of letters.

The three components of Word Attack Skills are accuracy, fluency, and spelling.

A placement test is used to determine the appropriate starting point in the program. A specific sequence is adhered to and presented in hierarchical order of difficulty, where essential pre-skills knowledge is taken into consideration. It should be noted that the teaching intervention used in Word Attack Skills is explicit and systematic and takes a *synthetic* (blended) phonics approach in line with contemporary best practice.

Sight Words

The basic premise behind teaching a bank of high frequency sight words is to enable older, low-progress readers, who have previously had very little exposure to text, or, indeed, success in reading, to access text quickly. Knowledge of the most frequently occurring words in text allows poor readers to access a great deal of the text they encounter without having to resort to decoding skills that they might not have yet mastered.

Sight Words includes 200 words presented in 20 groups of 10 cards at each level. Sight Words is organized into three teaching sections: Current List, Revision, and Cumulative Review. These sections incorporate learning the new words, achieving automaticity, and ensuring the words are in the student's longer-term memory.

A placement test is used to determine the appropriate starting point in the program.

Sight Words is an important component of the Reading Tutor Program but it is important to note that the implementation of Sight Words should not replace instruction in phonological recoding skills, the remedy for the key deficit in reading. Rather, it should function as a complementary component, along with Word Attack Skills and Reinforced Reading.

Reinforced Reading

One of the single most important things we can do to help low-progress readers is to hear them read every day, for as little as 15-20 minutes, using a set of tutoring strategies known as Reinforced Reading. We call it Reinforced Reading for three reasons:

1. The reader and the reading is supported or reinforced by a trained tutor;
2. The low-progress reader is positively reinforced for good reading by means of highly specific and contingent tutor praise; and
3. The learning of sight words and word attack skills is reinforced by the supported reading of real words in real text in context.

Reinforced Reading is predicated on the set of tutoring strategies for use with low-progress readers known as Pause, Prompt, and Praise (PPP), a technique used and researched extensively since the early 1980s and revised in the light of current research and the findings of the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy.

We developed the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program in the special school that we operated at Macquarie University Special Education Centre. During those years we were educating children with a variety of special educational needs from reading delay to autism spectrum disorders. We were privileged to work with a talented team of special educators and were able to trial and refine the Reading Tutor Program over successive years. Our early work on MultiLit and our findings regarding efficacy are reported in Wheldall and Beaman (2000).

It soon became clear that there was a greater demand for the program than we could provide in the special school so we established the MultiLit Clinic, also on the campus of Macquarie University. The MultiLit Clinic has been operating on a fee for service basis continuously since 1996 and thousands of children and their families have benefited from the programs offered. Most recently we have developed an online interface for the Reading Tutor Program enabling students distant from the University with the means to engage with MultiLit tutors through the Internet. We have students in other capital cities and rural areas of Australia, as well as some international students.

Perhaps the most significant uptake of the Reading Tutor Program has been in the schools sector in Australia. In every state of the country there are schools using our program to good effect. MultiLit provides training in the use of the program and teachers, teacher assistants, and parents are assisting children who struggle to learn to read. We have recently completed, with our former doctoral student, Jennifer Buckingham, a small but rigorous randomized control trial (RCT; employing a crossover design) of a group instruction version of MultiLit RTP in a primary school setting (Buckingham, Beaman, & Wheldall, 2012; Buckingham, Beaman-Wheldall, & Wheldall, submitted). In brief, we found that when the groups experienced our program, they made substantial gains in phonological recoding (nonword reading) and other measures of reading performance. (See Figure 2 for further details.)

The Schoolwise Program

Not long after we launched the MultiLit Initiative at MUSEC, we formed a relationship, and indeed friendship, with Rev. Bill Crews, a man who works with homeless people and “street kids” via his Exodus Foundation. Rev. Crews told us that many of the young people he worked with were only partially literate, at best. Together we established a program called Schoolwise (“From Streetwise to Schoolwise” was the slogan) as a preventive measure designed to provide support for students in danger of slipping through the net into substance abuse and street life (see Barwick & Siegel, 1996). Rev. Crews provided the venue for a tutorial center for socially disadvantaged students. We provided instruction based on the MultiLit RTP. Established in 1996, the program is still going today and continues to provide 20 weeks (two school terms) of basic literacy instruction to successive half-yearly intakes. Thousands of students have been involved in the program over the past 18 years. Additional centers have been established in Sydney and in Darwin, catering to Indigenous populations of students. Reports of our earlier work with the

Exodus Foundation are provided in Wheldall and Beaman (2000) and Wheldall (2009) provides details of more recent results. In essence, we showed that these socially disadvantaged students can make extraordinary progress when offered effective instruction. This finding was confirmed by the results of a quasi-experimental waitlist (i.e., the control group receives the intervention after the study is over) control study in which the experimental group was found to have made far greater gains in reading and related skills than those made by the control group. When the control group subsequently received the Schoolwise program, they too made large gains on all measures.

Working with Boys

It is widely believed that boys are a special case for literacy teaching, needing different and more “boy-orientated” forms of instruction. Consistent with our non-categorical approach to instruction (Wheldall, 1994; Wheldall & Carter, 1996), we have always doubted the need for this. With former doctoral research student, Lisa Limbrick, we have shown that effective instruction as provided by the MultiLit programs are equally beneficial for boys and girls; both groups made substantial gains on measures of reading and related skills (Wheldall & Limbrick, 2005; Limbrick, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2012). Effective instruction is effective instruction.

Working with Indigenous Students

Early on in the Schoolwise project, we ran a small scale study that showed that Indigenous students made gains of just as great a magnitude as their non-Indigenous peers in the program (Wheldall, Beaman, & Langstaff, 2010). This finding confirmed our belief that Indigenous students, like all students, simply need effective evidence-based instruction to succeed.

Consequently, we were delighted when the opportunity arose of working with the prominent Aboriginal leader, Noel Pearson, in schools in remote Indigenous communities in Cape York in far North Queensland. Mr. Pearson had been impressed by our results with MultiLit and the Schoolwise program and managed to obtain federal funding to trial our methods with remote schools in Cape York. Some of our early work in this area is reported in Wheldall and Beaman (2011), again showing that these socially disadvantaged Indigenous students make rapid and large gains when provided with effective instruction.

What is MiniLit?

In Australia, as in many Western countries, the most popular and most widely used remedial reading program is Reading Recovery (RR), devised by the late Dame Professor Marie Clay. In common with many other reading scientists, we have doubts about the utility and efficacy of this program (Reynolds & Wheldall, 2007). Although Marie Clay was doubtless a pioneer in her day, her failure to accommodate and incorporate the findings of accumulating scientific research evidence over 30 or more years severely compromised her model of reading instruction and, hence, her RR program. In the early 1990s, we

FIGURE 2. Recent randomized control trials of the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program (RTP) and MiniLit

Over the years we have conducted numerous field trials of both MultiLit RTP and MiniLit. These have involved many hundreds of students. Over the past four years we have completed, with our former doctoral student, Dr Jennifer Buckingham, modest but rigorous RCTs of both programs, MiniLit, and the small group version of MultiLit RTP.

Both RCTs were carried out in the same school in a socially disadvantaged area of New South Wales and both followed the same basic design structure. Students deemed eligible for the program (being in the bottom quartile for reading performance) were randomly allocated to experimental (*treatment*) and control conditions. The students in the experimental condition received the programs in small groups for an hour each day for three school terms while the control group continued to experience their usual classroom literacy activities. At the end of three terms the conditions were reversed: the original experimental group now received regular classroom literacy instruction while the original control group now became experimental group 2 and received the programs in small groups. Instruction then continued for three more school terms. Students were tested initially on a battery of tests of reading and related skills, and then retested again after three terms and then again after another three terms. Participant attrition occurred in both trials as a result of students no longer being of an appropriate age for the program or because they left the school to attend high school or for other reasons, a fairly common occurrence with students in this demographic.

MiniLit

The findings from the two phases of the MiniLit crossover design study are reported fully in two articles by Buckingham, Wheldall, and Beaman (2012) and Buckingham, Wheldall, and Beaman-Wheldall (in press). This RCT initially comprised 22 students with 14 students remaining for the second phase of the trial, equally distributed across the two conditions.

In the first phase of the study (three terms of instruction), the original MiniLit treatment group made substantially greater gains than the control group. Large and statistically significant mean differences in gain between the groups were evident for two tests measuring phonological recoding and single word reading. Large effect sizes were apparent for all four literacy measures employed.

In phase two of the study, the former control group, now experimental group 2, made very large (and significant) gains in phonological recoding, so that they were no longer significantly different from the original experimental group. Both groups continued to gain on the other three literacy measures so that the original experimental group maintained its advantage over the other group (control/experimental 2).

MultiLit RTP

The findings from the two phases of the MultiLit RTP crossover design study are reported fully in two articles by Buckingham, Beaman, and Wheldall, 2012; submitted. This RCT initially comprised 30 students with 26 students remaining for the second phase of the trial, equally distributed across the two conditions.

In the first phase of the study (three terms of instruction), the original MultiLit RTP treatment group made greater gains than the control group. Large and statistically significant mean differences in gain between the groups were evident for the measure of phonological recoding with a large effect size. Small effect sizes were apparent for two of the four other literacy measures employed favoring the treatment group but they were not statistically significant.

In phase two of the study, the former control group, now experimental group 2, had now also made very large (and significant) gains in phonological recoding (with a large effect size), so that they were no longer significantly different from the original experimental group. Experimental group 2 also significantly outperformed the original experimental group on three of the four other literacy measures, with moderate or large effect sizes, clearly demonstrating the efficacy of the program.

were commissioned to complete an evaluation of the program for our state government's department of education. In our report, we stated that RR was expensive, effective for perhaps only one in three of children who undertook it, and, moreover, effective only for those with less severe reading problems. Our report was never officially released for reasons best known to the department, which continues to fund RR to this day, but our research was published in the Reading Research Quarterly and elsewhere (Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred, & McNaught, 1995; Wheldall, Center, & Freeman, 1993).

We assumed that a more cost effective and more effective alternative to RR would be developed. By the mid-2000s, it

became clear that this was not the case, so we decided to develop our own Tier 2 small group program, working with our then doctoral student and now colleague, Merece Reynolds. (In this context, Tier 2 within a Response to Intervention model refers to small group intensive instruction for those failing to make good progress during Tier 1, whole class literacy instruction.) MiniLit (MultiLit, 2011) stands for Meeting Initial Needs In Literacy and is an early literacy intervention program. It is designed to be delivered daily, for one hour, to small groups of up to four year/grade 1 students who have struggled to make adequate progress in learning to read during their first year of schooling.

Continued on page 36

The program is informed by the findings of scientific research, conducted over the past 40 years, into how reading works and how it may best be taught. It is also in accord with the recommendations of national reports into effective reading instruction that have emphasized the five key pillars of reading instruction (sometimes known as the “five big ideas”), namely: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The relevant research and the findings of the national inquiries are reviewed in Reynolds, Wheldall, and Madelaine (2010a; 2011a).

MiniLit consists of 80 carefully structured lessons (sufficient for at least two terms of instruction) in an easy to hard sequence divided into two levels, Levels 1 and 2, with 40 lessons at each level. Each lesson has three main components, all of which should be carried out on each occasion that a MiniLit lesson is taught. These three main components are:

- Sounds and Words Activities
- Text Reading, and
- Story Book Reading.

(See Figure 3 for further details of the program.)

Ideally, young struggling readers should be identified at the commencement of the second year of formal schooling. Preliminary benchmarks for early identification have been established on several literacy measures (Reynolds, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2011b). A weekly curriculum-based measure of early reading progress has also been developed to monitor the progress of struggling readers (Reynolds, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2009) (see below). Successive iterations of the MiniLit Program have been continually revised following efficacy trials (Reynolds, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2010b). A small-scale RCT has also recently been completed confirming the efficacy of the program (Buckingham, Wheldall, & Beaman, 2012; Buckingham, Wheldall, & Beaman-Wheldall, in press). (See Figure 2 for further details.)

PreLit

One of the initiatives that emanated from our work in Cape York with Indigenous students was a program to develop the oral language and phonological skills of young children prior to school entry, in an attempt to level the playing field before they started learning to read alongside their more advantaged

FIGURE 3. MiniLit Program

The following description of the MiniLit Program is edited and abstracted from the details provided on the website of MultiLit Pty Ltd at <http://www.multilit.com/programs/minilit-program/>

MiniLit is an evidence-based, effective, and cost-effective early literacy program. It is a practical, systematic, and explicit model for teaching reading skills.

MiniLit targets the bottom 25% of students and is specifically aimed at struggling year 1 readers, but may also be appropriate for “at risk” kindergarten, and some struggling year 2 students. It is a Tier 2 school-based, small group program (up to four students per group) within a Response-to-Intervention framework.

MiniLit is an integrated and balanced program of 80 carefully structured lessons, divided into two levels of 40 lessons each:

Level 1: Teaching the basics of letter/sound knowledge and decoding skills for CVC words

Level 2: Extending word attack knowledge by teaching commonly used digraphs and longer words

Key Features

The program takes around 20 weeks to complete, with four lessons (each up to 60 minutes) per week, and includes regular curriculum-based measures to monitor the progress of the students. The entry point into the program is flexible and, based on students’ assessment scores, can be anywhere within the 80 lessons. Each lesson comprises three main components:

- Sounds and Words Activities
- Text Reading
- Story Book Reading

MiniLit is designed to be delivered to small groups of up to four students, but it can also be used on a one-to-one basis. Well-trained teachers or paraprofessionals with teacher support can deliver the program.

Key Benefits

- Evidence-based, best practice program designed for year 1 students
- May be appropriate for at-risk kindergarten and some struggling year 2 students
- Aimed at early struggling readers who are in the bottom 25% of students
- Highly cost effective small group instruction program with low ongoing operating costs
- Comprehensive training equips teachers with the skills they need to help struggling readers
- Detailed and proven lesson plans are provided
- Easy to adopt in a classroom environment by teachers or teacher aides

FIGURE 4. PreLit Program

The following description of the PreLit Program is edited and expanded from the details provided on the website of MultiLit Pty Ltd at <http://www.multilit.com/programs/prelit-program/>

PreLit is a skills-based, early literacy preparation program for preschool children in the year before school. It is designed to complement a play-based learning environment and provides children with a sound foundation for learning to read.

PreLit can be taught to a whole class, small groups, or individually for all children in the year prior to entering formal schooling. It may also be suitable for children who come to school without the necessary prerequisite literacy skills in place. PreLit can be delivered by preschool teachers and child care center staff as well as teachers and parents who want to make sure their child is ready for school.

Key Features

The program is systematic and skills-based, and it is taught in a hierarchical sequence designed to complement a play-based learning environment. It has two main components:

1. Phonological awareness. This component focuses mainly on identity tasks, blending and segmenting, as well as print awareness.
2. Oral language development through Structured Book Reading. This component uses an interactive/dialogic reading technique. There is a strong emphasis on explicit vocabulary instruction and, again, a focus on print awareness.

Key Benefits

- Evidence-based, best practice program for preschool children in their year before formal schooling
- Appropriate for kindergarten students who have started school without the necessary emergent literacy skills
- Appropriate for all children regardless of skill level
- Highly cost effective small group or whole class instruction program with low ongoing operating costs
- Comprehensive training equips teachers with the skills they need to prepare children for reading at school
- Easy to adopt in an early childhood or school setting.

peers. The result was PreLit: Early Literacy Preparation Program (MultiLit, 2012), initially designed for preschool children in the year before school but also suitable for many children commencing kindergarten who are ill-prepared for school. It is designed to complement a play-based learning environment and provide early childhood educators with the tools necessary to teach pre-literacy skills and concepts in a fun and engaging way. (See Figure 4 for further details of this program.)

WARP and WARL: Assessment and Monitoring

As well as researching and developing literacy intervention programs, we and our colleagues in the MultiLit Research Unit have been working on tools for the assessment of reading and, not least, for monitoring reading progress. Our aim has been to devise simple and straightforward measures for use by teachers by which to determine quickly which students are in need of intervention and then to monitor their progress regularly over the course of their programs of instruction.

Our first assessment tool is known as the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages (WARP). Following a long period of development to establish its psychometric credibility (in which former doctoral student and colleague, Alison Madelaine, played a leading role) (Madelaine & Wheldall, 1998; 2002a; 2002b; Wheldall & Madelaine, 1997; 2000; 2006), the WARP was finally published last year (Wheldall, 2013; Wheldall & Madelaine, 2013). The WARP is essentially a curriculum-based measure (CBM) that uses a set of standardized 200-word passages of equal difficulty level.

Unusually for a CBM, the same passages are used over grades 2 to 5 or, to put it more precisely, they are used to track the progress of low-progress readers across the levels of reading performance typically commensurate with those grade levels. The number of words read correctly in one minute forms the index of progress.

One of the key features of the WARP has been the development of a set of three Initial Assessment Passages and ten (weekly or biweekly) Progress Monitoring Passages of very similar difficulty level that has been established empirically rather than by simply relying on the notoriously unreliable readability formulas commonly employed to determine passages of similar difficulty level.

Following on from the WARP, we realized that we also needed a measure that was sensitive to growth in younger students in K–2. Consequently, we developed (again with Meree Reynolds and Alison Madelaine) the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists (or WARL) (Reynolds, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2009). The WARL comprises three Initial Assessment Lists and 10 Progress Monitoring Lists of 100 single words in increasing order of frequency of occurrence in children's books. Again, the lists have been determined empirically to give very similar results by trialing them on samples of young children.

Our aim next is to develop a test of reading comprehension. Tentatively entitled the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Comprehension (or WARC), the measure we are developing will comprise a further series of parallel passages, following the curriculum-based measurement model for reading

Continued on page 38

comprehension that employs the cloze procedure. (This procedure requires a student to read a passage of text where certain words are left blank and the student has to select the correct response from several alternatives provided.)

The Latest Developments and the Future

It has to be said that, in a way, we have been working backwards regarding reading instruction. We started off working with older, low-progress readers, upper primary students who were struggling to learn to read, because, at the time, that was what we knew about; that was our specialty. As we have already said, we felt almost forced into developing MiniLit for younger low-progress readers, as a result of our dissatisfaction with RR. Then when we began working with socially disadvantaged Indigenous students in remote communities, we realized that these young children were ill prepared for starting formal schooling so we developed PreLit. It should, perhaps, come as no surprise, then, that our current mission is to develop a whole class program of initial instruction in reading and related skills for young children starting school in kindergarten and continuing through to the end of year/grade 2, the transition point from learning to read to reading to learn. Provisionally entitled InitialLit, this program will provide the bedrock of exemplary, scientific, evidence-based, best practice literacy instruction upon which a true Response to Intervention model must rest. It is the final, but vital, piece in our puzzle.

Once again, the reason for deciding to develop this program is the current lack of an Australian program of initial literacy instruction that meets what we believe to be the essential criteria. This is not meant to suggest that there are not several other excellent such programs developed in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, for their respective populations. But as “nations divided by a common language” (Attrib: Shaw, Wilde, and Churchill), there are cultural and linguistic differences that may have an impact when teaching children to read. Australians like to joke about the effect of the New Zealand accent when teaching phonics; for example, when they say fish and chips we hear “fush and chups.” But there are also significant differences in vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and usage across the different, if overlapping, “Englishes.”

When we have completed InitialLit, and if it were to become widely adopted, we would expect to see far less demand for MiniLit and MultiLit. But then, as we have always said, our aim is to make ourselves redundant. Our mission is to contribute to the goal of ensuring that all children, regardless of background or circumstances, should become skilled readers.

References

Barwick, M. A., & Siegel, L. S. (1996). Learning difficulties in adolescent clients of a shelter for runaway and homeless street youths. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 6, 649–70.

Buckingham, J., Beaman, R., & Wheldall, K. (2012). A randomized control trial of a MultiLit small group intervention for older low-progress readers. *Effective Education*, 4, 1–26. doi: 10.1080/19415532.2012.722038 (Published 2013)

Buckingham, J., Wheldall, K., & Beaman, R. (2012). A randomized control trial of a tier two small group intervention (‘MiniLit’) for young struggling readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 17, 79–99.

Buckingham, J., Beaman-Wheldall, R., & Wheldall, K. (Submitted). *Evaluation of a two-phase, crossover study of a small group (‘MultiLit’) reading intervention for older low-progress readers*. Submitted for publication.

Buckingham, J., Wheldall, K., & Beaman-Wheldall, R. (In press). Evaluation of a two-phase implementation of a tier 2 (small group) reading intervention for young low-progress readers. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*.

Center, Y., Wheldall, K., Freeman, L., Outhred, L., & McNaught, M. (1995). An evaluation of Reading Recovery. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30, 240–263.

Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). (2005). *Teaching reading: Report and recommendations*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.

Ellis, L., Wheldall, K., & Beaman, R. (2007). The research locus and conceptual basis for MULTILIT: Why we do what we do. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 12, 61–65.

Limbrick, L., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2012). Do boys need different remedial reading instruction from girls? *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 17, 1–15.

Macquarie University Special Education Centre (1998). *The MultiLit reading tutor program*. Sydney: Macquarie University Special Education Centre.

Madelaine, A., & Wheldall, K. (1998). Towards a curriculum-based passage reading test for monitoring the performance of low-progress readers using standardised passages: A validity study. *Educational Psychology*, 18, 471–478.

Madelaine, A., & Wheldall, K. (2002a). Establishing tentative norms and identifying gender differences in performance for a new passage reading test. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 7(1), 40–45.

Madelaine, A., & Wheldall, K. (2002b). Further progress towards a standardised curriculum-based measure of reading: Calibrating a new passage reading test against the New South Wales Basic Skills Test. *Educational Psychology*, 22, 461–470.

MultiLit (2007). *The MultiLit reading tutor program (Revised)*. Sydney: MultiLit Pty Ltd.

MultiLit (2011). *MiniLit early literacy intervention program*. Sydney: MultiLit Pty Ltd.

MultiLit (2012). *PreLit: Early literacy preparation program*. Sydney: MultiLit Pty Ltd.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Reynolds, M., & Wheldall, K. (2007). Reading Recovery twenty years down the track: Looking forward, looking back. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 54, 199–223.

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2007a). Developing a ramp to reading for at-risk year one students: A preliminary pilot study. *Special Education Perspectives*, 16, 39–69.

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2007b). ‘Meeting Initial Needs In Literacy’ (MINILIT): Why we need it, how it works and the results of pilot studies. *Australian Journal of Special Education*, 31, 147–158.

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2007c). ‘Meeting Initial Needs In Literacy’ (MINILIT): A ramp to MULTILIT for younger low-progress readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 12, 67–72.

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2009). Building the WARL: The development of the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists, a curriculum-based measure designed to identify young struggling readers and monitor their progress. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 14, 89–111.

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2010a). Components of effective early reading interventions for young struggling readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 19, 35–57.

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2010b). An experimental evaluation of the efficacy of an intervention for young struggling readers in year one. *Special Education Perspectives*, 19(2), 35–57.

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2011a). What recent reviews tell us about the efficacy of reading interventions for struggling readers in the early years of schooling. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 58, 257–286.

- Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2011b). Early identification of young struggling readers: Preliminary benchmarks for intervention for students in years one and two in schools in New South Wales. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 16, 127–143.
- Rose, J. (2006). *Independent review of the teaching of early reading: Final report*. Retrieved August 31, 2012, from <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/0201-2006PDF-EN-01.pdf>
- Wheldall, K. (1991). Managing troublesome classroom behaviour: A positive teaching perspective. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 38, 99–116.
- Wheldall, K. (1994). Why do contemporary special educators favour a non-categorical approach to teaching? *Special Education Perspectives*, 3, 45–47.
- Wheldall, K. (2009). Effective instruction for socially disadvantaged low-progress readers: The Schoolwise program. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 14, 151–170.
- Wheldall, K. (2013). *The Wheldall assessment of reading passages (WARP) presentation book*. Sydney: MultiLit Pty Ltd.
- Wheldall, K., & Beaman, R. (2000). *An evaluation of MULTILIT: 'Making Up Lost Time In Literacy'*. Canberra, Australia: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Wheldall, K., & Beaman, R. (2011). Effective instruction for older low-progress readers: Meeting the needs of indigenous students. In C. Wyatt-Smith, J. Elkins, & S. Gunn (Eds.), *Multiple perspectives on difficulties in learning literacy and numeracy* (pp. 255–273). New York, NY: Springer.
- Wheldall, K., Beaman, R., & Langstaff, E. (2010). 'Mind the gap': Effective literacy instruction for indigenous low-progress readers. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 34, 1–16.
- Wheldall, K., & Carter, M. (1996). Reconstructing behaviour analysis in education: A revised behavioural interactionist perspective for special education. *Educational Psychology*, 16, 121–140.
- Wheldall, K., Center, Y., & Freeman, L. (1993). Reading Recovery in Sydney schools. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 17, 51–63.
- Wheldall, K., & Limbrick, L. (2005). "I can hardly believe it has turned out like this": A lighthouse school for boys' education. *Education Today*, 55, (1), 4–13.
- Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (1997). Should we measure reading progress and if so how? Extrapolating the curriculum based measurement model for monitoring low-progress readers. *Special Education Perspectives*, 6, 29–35.
- Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2000). A curriculum-based passage reading test for monitoring the performance of low-progress readers: The development of the WARP. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 47, 371–382.
- Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2006). The development of a passage reading test for the frequent monitoring of performance of low-progress readers. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 30, 72–85.
- Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2013). *The Wheldall assessment of reading passages (WARP) manual*. Sydney: MultiLit Pty Ltd.

Kevin Wheldall, Ph.D., AM, is an Emeritus Professor of Macquarie University and the Director of the MultiLit Research Unit (MRU).

Robyn Wheldall, Ph.D., is an Honorary Fellow of Macquarie University and is the Deputy Director of MRU.

Disclosure: Kevin and Robyn Wheldall are both directors of MultiLit Pty Ltd (www.multilit.com), a former spin-off company of Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.

Explanatory note and acknowledgement: The work reported here was carried out by members of the MultiLit Research Unit comprising Kevin and Robyn Wheldall, Alison Madelaine, Meree Reynolds, and Sarah McMurtry (manager), and associated research students over the years including Simmone Pogorzelski, Lisa Limbrick, Jennifer Buckingham, and others. We would like to acknowledge and to thank them for their contributions to this program of research. (Dr. Robyn Wheldall was formerly known as Dr. Robyn Beaman.)



Postscript, May 2015

Since this article was first written (in 2013, published 2014), MultiLit has released additional programs/products.

The first is a professional development workshop for primary school teachers on the skills of effective classroom behaviour management. Based on the original 'Positive Teaching Package', researched and developed in the UK by (now Emeritus) Professor Kevin Wheldall and the late Dr Frank Merrett, the new, thoroughly revised, 'Positive Teaching Workshop' draws on research completed in Australian schools by Professor Wheldall and Dr Robyn Wheldall (formerly Beaman) (Wheldall, Wheldall, & Merrett, 2014). The full day workshop comprises four sessions and emphasises the ABC of classroom behaviour management – the antecedents for behaviour (A), the behaviour per se (B), and the consequences following behaviour (C).

Teachers are shown how increased levels of on-task behaviour may be achieved with their classes by paying careful attention to both the ecological conditions in the classroom (such as classroom seating arrangements) and teacher responses to student behaviour (such as the effective deployment of teacher praise and reprimands). By means of Positive Teaching, teachers may achieve a more positive environment that is beneficial for both teachers and students, providing the necessary (but not of course sufficient) conditions for effective learning to take place.

The second new product we now offer from MultiLit is known as 'Spell-It' (Alcock, 2014). This program constitutes a version

of a set of materials originally developed in New Zealand by Joy Alcock, revised and developed for use in Australian schools by the MultiLit product development team. Spell-It is designed to address the needs of older primary (and early years of high school) students who are struggling with learning to spell. In some respects, Spell-It is different from other MultiLit programs in that it is not a scripted, sequenced program per se; rather it comprises a set of spelling resources from which teachers may select to meet the specific needs of their students.

The WARL test, referred to in the main article, has now also been published (Wheldall, Reynolds & Madelaine, 2015) and is available from MultiLit. Development and trialling of a small group program for low-progress readers and the InitialLit program for initial reading instruction, our two current major research and development initiatives, is continuing.

References

- Alcock, J. (2014). *Spell-It: An explicit approach to teaching spelling*. Sydney: MultiLit Pty Ltd.
- Wheldall, K., Reynolds, M., & Madelaine, A. (2015). *The Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists (WARL)*. Sydney: MultiLit Pty Ltd.
- Wheldall, K., Wheldall, R., & Merrett, F. (2014). *Positive Teaching for effective classroom behaviour management (primary schools)*. Sydney: MultiLit Pty Ltd.

For further information regarding all MultiLit products, see: www.multilit.com