



# MultiLit

A newsletter for parents and teachers

May 2022

# moments

## Reigniting a love of learning

To honour a treasured member of staff, Takayuki Fukuda, whom we sadly lost to illness in December 2020, the MultiLit directors established the Takayuki Fukuda Perpetual Scholarship. This scholarship offers specialised MultiLit tutoring through our Literacy Centres to help a deserving child who has a reading difficulty specifically as a result of illness or injury.

The first recipient of the scholarship, Jack Turbett, suffered a brain tumour, and was in hospital for over a year, missing all of Year 1 and part of Year 2.

“Jack had the very basics but had missed the fundamental literacy learning that happens during that time. He has significant disabilities – a severe brain injury, autism, ADHD, cognitive processing and working memory problems – lots of challenges. I was told as a result of his brain injury that he was never going to be able to learn to read,” says Jack’s mother, Jessica.

While the family had received funding for tutoring, they live in a small town two-and-a-half hours from Perth, so they couldn’t find appropriate support. The Ronald McDonald Learning Program Education Coordinator suggested an online program through MultiLit Literacy Centres, particularly because of our experience working with older children.

Jack’s first term of tutoring and holiday program in 2020 was supported by Ronald McDonald House Charities and Redkite funding. The Takayuki Fukuda scholarship then allowed Jack to continue to work on his literacy over the longer term.

“It has been really convenient to be able to do the program online. We do our lessons before school when he is fresh. It doesn’t matter where we are – we could be at hospital, on holidays, and can continue his sessions. We also really like the online library books that we can access,” Jessica says.



“The tutors we have had, particularly Kerry, are really patient with Jack. He can get a bit distracted, and she has been great at directing Jack’s focus back to his learning.”

Jack’s hard work and the support of his tutors and family is paying off, as he continues his program.

“It’s been life-changing for Jack. He has gone from being able to read a few simple words to reading a book on his own with little help. He has come further in the last year with MultiLit than he has in the three or four years that he has been back at school,” Jessica says.

“It has reignited his passion for learning. He is now able to read simple sentences about things that interest him, like dinosaurs and Lego. Looking at the delight in his face when he recognises a word in one of his own books is really fantastic to see. I would love for Jack to be able to reach his potential.”

## One step closer to Closing the Gap

The most recent Closing the Gap report found that one in four Indigenous students in Years 5, 7 and 9 are below the national minimum standards in reading. We’re hoping to change that.

With funding under the Australian Government’s Closing the Gap National Agreement, we have launched an initiative to boost literacy skills in majority Indigenous schools.

This year, 21 schools have signed up for our Closing the Gap initiative across Western NSW, South Australia, Brisbane, and Western Australia. Sixteen of these schools are already delivering MultiLit programs and five more are preparing through training.

The initiative’s project manager, Dr John Young, says there are many reasons why literacy levels are lower in these schools, such as school absences and

staff retention. MultiLit helps to address a number of these.

“Our scripted programs such as InitialLit and MacqLit support teachers, and their consistency helps reduce the effects of teacher turnover on the students,” says Dr Young.

He is very excited about visiting schools involved in the initiative, to check in on

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## New addition to our MultiLit Assessments & Monitoring suite

Language comprehension is foundational to the understanding of written text. Without comprehension of the written and spoken word, students will struggle in all areas of the curriculum and in social participation. Fluent reading with good comprehension speeds cognitive development, helps children develop empathy, improves vocabulary and concentration, and allows children to develop mental concepts.

Launched in January 2022, our new test, the Wheldall Sentence Comprehension Screener (WSCS), can identify young children who have difficulty with comprehension who may benefit from receiving targeted language comprehension intervention or support.

The screener will also identify children who may benefit from LanguageLift, an oral language intervention program for children in Kindergarten to Year 2, to be released by MultiLit later this year.

Using the WSCS, teachers and others can easily assess how well children in the first half of their Foundation year of school comprehend written and spoken language.

### Easy to use and more effective

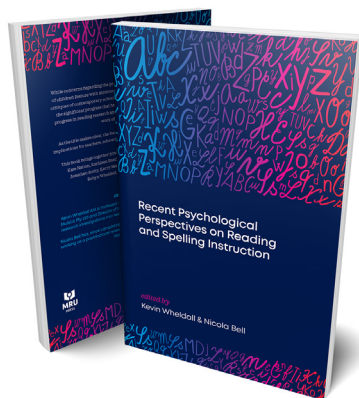
Brief and straightforward, the screener is geared to the needs of children, being child-friendly, engaging, with clear stimulus

pictures. For teachers and other educators, the test is easy to score and administer, taking just 5 to 10 minutes to complete. We ask the child to listen to a sentence, then to select (from four options) the picture that best represents that sentence. In total, there are 40 sentences of varying length and complexity. The WSCS provides valid and reliable Australian cut-off scores so educators can identify students who require further support.

In using the screener, educators can assess a child's understanding of a wide range of sentence structures. This in turn can help teachers to create an individualised approach to spoken language remediation.

We believe that, in using this simple screener, teachers will be able to quickly identify children who are at risk of poor reading outcomes and intervene earlier.

For more information, visit [multilit.com/wscs](https://multilit.com/wscs).



How do children learn to read? How can we as educators and scientists discover the most effective method for teaching children? Do all children learn to read in the same way, or are there differences we must embrace in order to teach effectively while maintaining classroom harmony?

The first of a planned series of academic books from MRU Press, the publishing arm of the MultiLit Research Unit, *Recent psychological perspectives on reading and spelling instruction* explores literacy from the viewpoint of educational psychology.

While many in the community have concerns about poor reading progress

## Research into practice

by too large a group of children, they are in danger of ignoring valuable work done by reading scientists. However, much of this research has yet to make its way into classrooms. Edited by one of our founders, Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM, and research fellow Dr Nicola Bell, this collection provides access to current research conducted by educational psychologists, cognitive scientists, special educators and speech pathologists, and offers some practical teaching tips proven to be effective.

The first chapter sets the scene with an explanation of the theoretical model of the Simple View of Reading (SVR), a model illustrating how two broad skills – word recognition and language comprehension – contribute to reading comprehension. The SVR model is a useful starting point that enables psychologists and other academics and educators to 'speak the same language' as teachers and others who work in classrooms with first-hand knowledge of reading and spelling challenges.

Another theme that crops up throughout the research is the inherent complexity of the English language, with no straightforward correlation between how words are pronounced and how they're spelled.

Through essays, research findings and case studies, scholars from the field of literacy research provide multi-faceted perspectives on what we now know to constitute effective instruction while outlining how to put this knowledge to practical use in education settings. All authors are experts in their respective fields of study, and some have worked professionally in schools.

We believe that *Recent psychological perspectives on reading and spelling instruction* will prove to be a valuable resource for teachers, educators and parents who wish to explore different global approaches to the effective teaching of reading and spelling for young children.

This book can be purchased from [bookshop.multilit.com](https://bookshop.multilit.com).

# Supporting literacy at home

While multilit.com primarily services schools, we understand that parents, educators and academics could benefit from access to the wealth of MultiLit resources currently available only to schools. Our new online store, The Bookshop by MultiLit, opens access to a treasury of literacy resources for children, parents, educators and academics. Parents can help their child at home and reinforce what their child has learned in school with decodable readers and Putto Press picture books.

Also available from the new online bookshop for parents to purchase will be various literacy resources like our spelling dictionary and our PreLit program for early literacy preparation. All our Bookshop resources complement MultiLit programs used in schools.

Through this new consumer-focused website, we'll be selling other children's literature titles that we typically recommend for use with our PreLit program for preschoolers and InitialLit program for Foundation to Year 2. Should parents be searching for high-quality picture books for home use, we can make recommendations on the most suitable purchases.

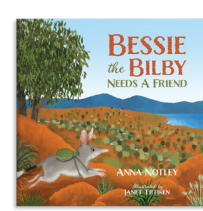
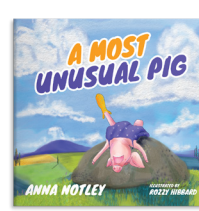
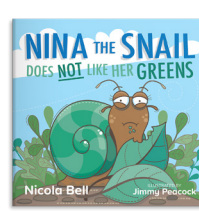
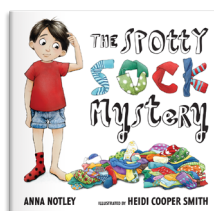
The Bookshop will also be home to a range of academic books published under our MRU Press imprint, which are edited and written by members of our MultiLit Research Unit and their academic colleagues.

## Learning at home with LanguageLift Picture books

Over the past two years, we have been developing our own resources to address oral language difficulties in young children from Foundation to Year 2 – the LanguageLift picture book series.

Picture books cover a diverse range of topics, expose children to words and language they might not hear normally in conversation, and teach children how reading works.

Reading picture books with your child will inspire them to learn to read on their own, and experience the pleasure of reading. Our picture books were designed to accompany the LanguageLift program (due for release in Term 3). However, children will also enjoy the books separately as they learn how to tell a good story.



Published under our new Putto Press imprint, these engaging picture books exemplify a range of typical narrative structures, from rhyming verse to stories of everyday activities. The LanguageLift books, read aloud as intended, help children develop and hone key listening comprehension and story retelling skills. Developed for children aged four to eight years, these charming books each introduce different concepts and vocabulary, and explores different language elements, from adjectives and prepositional phrases to expressions of time.

We don't aim to teach children to read purely as an academic exercise. Proficient readers have access to a wealth of information that not only helps them learn about who they are, but also about the world around them. We envisage educators will be able to use all the LanguageLift books as springboards for lessons on different language elements that will support early reading and writing.

Our goal in launching our online bookstore and the new LanguageLift books is to help families and educators by giving them access to high-quality resources to support children as they learn to read. We believe that every child should – and can – learn to read.

Parents and educators can now buy books individually or as a pack from our new online store.

Visit [bookshop.multilit.com](http://bookshop.multilit.com)

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their progress and get a bit of red dirt on his shoes.

"It's part of the support we provide. We want to listen to how they're going, talk to the teachers and kids to see what else we can do to help," says Dr Young.

Over the next four years, MultiLit will be rolling out this initiative to more schools, visiting them and measuring and researching their results along the way.

In phase two of the project, beginning in 2023, we will work with up to 45 schools.

"Being part of this initiative is very exciting for me," says Dr Young. "I've been teaching since the '80s and I have a lot of passion for literacy education in regional schools. So to get the opportunity to continue my work and address this issue is just wonderful."

MultiLit hopes to give Indigenous students and teachers the best opportunity to

improve reading and literacy levels. We recognise that a multi-level approach is needed to make meaningful change and truly close the gap, and we feel privileged to play a small part in it.

MultiLit acknowledges the traditional owners as the original custodians of this land and the country on which we reside. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



## Meet our Team: Carina McSweeney

**Carina McSweeney taught in public schools for 20 years, including 10 in learning support, before joining MultiLit as a Trainer and Schools Partnerships Officer. Learn more about her role with MultiLit.**

### **Q: What inspired you to get into education?**

I had been working in research and sales in a film and photo library, and having just had my first child, I was open to a career change. I was initially inspired to train in primary education to be able to share my love of the visual arts and literature with children.

### **Q: Tell us a bit about your background and experience.**

My teaching career spanned 20 years, including 10 years as a learning support teacher and coordinator across two schools. When I first started working with the children who were struggling with reading, I realised I had a lot more to learn about literacy difficulties, so I devoted myself to reading about reading and took every professional learning opportunity. I also returned to Macquarie University for some more formal postgrad study in special education and learning difficulties.

I gained knowledge and confidence to lead professional development within my schools and in the wider network on dyslexia, autism and other support needs and I worked closely with the students and their teachers in mainstream classrooms. Confronted by the large numbers of children struggling with reading, spelling and writing, I was motivated to establish and teach the MacqLit and MiniLit programs for intervention, and committed myself to supporting my colleagues locally and in wider networks to learn more about evidence-based literacy instruction in the classroom.

During this time, it was alarmingly obvious to me that school leaders and teachers (those with years of experience and also the new graduates) in too many schools were yet to fully embrace, or even be made aware of, the research that would ensure better literacy learning for all students.

In my own schools, I advocated for the staff to learn more about effective literacy instruction and mentored those who were keen to learn more. There were some successes and some frustrations along the way, and eventually I made a big decision to move on. I was fortunate to be offered a position at MultiLit where I could do even more to support the teachers – and ultimately more students – with reading instruction.

### **Q: What are some of the key responsibilities of your role?**

As a Trainer with the School Partnerships team, I deliver the full-day and two-day workshops for schools taking on any of the MultiLit literacy programs. The school leaders, teachers and support staff in our workshops are skilled up to understand the research base, the effective assessment and explicit instructional approaches to deliver the programs successfully. In this role, I enjoy the responsibility of delivering training, either via videoconference or in face-to-face settings, and really love the opportunity to share my experiences in as much as I can empathise with the challenges teachers face. It's a particular joy and a privilege to go into schools to deliver InitialLit training for those working towards their whole-school approach to improve their instruction for all students.

Another key responsibility is to ensure teachers are supported beyond the training days and to develop our partnerships with schools to facilitate their ongoing successful implementation of MultiLit programs. I regularly consult with principals and others in school leadership, and I provide responsive and professional support pre- and post-training. I'm an administrator of the vibrant InitialLit Community Facebook group and am actively engaged in other online communities where I can further indulge my passion for sharing good information to help teachers teach reading.

### **Q: What's one thing you wish more people knew about literacy?**

More people need to know about the way the brain learns to read, so that all children receive effective instruction that actually works! There are so many freely available articles, videos and webinars online for teachers (and parents) to learn from the science, explained beautifully by experts such as Stanislas Dehaene and Maryanne Wolf and others, including our own Dr Jennifer Buckingham via Five from Five. It's fascinating and potentially life-changing stuff!



## Schools embrace Five from Five seminars

Since the Five from Five Professional Learning Series was launched late last year, both the open Zoom webinars and the whole-school sessions have been popular.

There are now three seminars in the series – 'The Science of Reading: Essential Knowledge for Teachers' (90 mins), 'Deep Dive into Systematic Synthetic Phonics' (two hours), and 'Reading Fluency: Evidence-based Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention' (60 mins).

More seminars will be added throughout this year. More than 1300 attendees have joined these seminars since October last year.

### **Chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd**

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM

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