



MultiLit

A newsletter for parents and teachers

April 2015

moments

“It was twenty years ago today ...”

No, not Sergeant Pepper, us!

In 2015, we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of MultiLit. The Making Up Lost Time In Literacy Initiative was launched by (now Emeritus) Professor Kevin Wheldall, then director of Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC), early in 1995.

The story goes that Kevin and Robyn Wheldall (formerly Beaman) were walking down Eastwood high street one day when Kevin is said to have proclaimed: “I’ve got it! MultiLit – Making Up Lost Time in Literacy. There’s the acronym; all we need now is the program!”

Like all good stories, this one may have grown in the telling. But while there is a kernel of truth in the tale, the facts are that Kevin had been researching in the areas of both Positive Teaching and the tutoring of reading for many years, including the period before he moved to Macquarie from the UK in 1990. He had harboured a dream for some time of a program to help upper primary school students who were still struggling with reading and related skills, before they hit high school. At Macquarie, he was able to trial a version of such a program in the early 1990s, then called STEP UP – a Single Term Educational Program for Under-achieving Pupils. The rest, as they say, is history ...

Kevin and Robyn subsequently trialed various versions of the model in the school for children with special learning needs at MUSEC and, from 1996, also in the Schoolwise Program, a tutorial centre they ran for the Exodus Foundation (and which continued until 2014). The MultiLit Clinic, as it was then

known, first began operations in 1996 and the first edition of the Reading Tutor Program was published in 1998. And this was only the beginning ... To come was the creation of professional development programs for teachers, consultancies to Noel Pearson’s Cape York Partnerships (among others), and the development of MiniLit, the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages (WARP), the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists (WARL), and PreLit.

Kevin and Robyn are always quick to point out that none of this would have been possible without the combined strengths of a great many talented colleagues over the years, too numerous to mention. And it goes without saying that they have been encouraged and supported by the hundreds, if not thousands, of teachers, parents and others who have provided valuable feedback and support for the work of MultiLit. As Sergeant Pepper would have it:

*“You’re such a lovely audience
We’d like to take you home with us
We’d like to take you home.”*

MultiLit will be holding several events during 2015 to celebrate its 20th anniversary – further details to follow.

Footnote: Kevin and Robyn Wheldall were recently invited by the International Dyslexia Association to write an article about MultiLit for the Association’s journal, ‘Perspectives on Language and Literacy’. It is entitled ‘The Story of MultiLit: Effective instruction for low-progress readers’ and copies are available on request from multilit@multilit.com.

Bringing PreLit to Katuuso Primary in Uganda

In September 2014, Mrs Kate Chauncy, director of teaching and learning at Gib Gate Primary School in Mittagong, packed her bags with a PreLit kit (donated by MultiLit) and quality Australian literature, and headed to Katuuso Primary School in Uganda.

Katuuso is located on 10 acres of land in a rural area approximately 1.5

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Another brick in the WARL

Kevin Wheldall

*"We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control"*

Pink Floyd, 'Another Brick In The Wall (Part II)'

I have never been a fan of Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick In The Wall', a deeply cynical song. Perhaps you "don't need no education"* if you get lucky and become a rock star, but a lack of education will not protect you against "thought control"; quite the reverse, in fact. It is by being educated that we learn to think for ourselves and this is achieved, to a very large degree, by learning to read and then reading, reading and yet more reading.

In fact, I would go so far as to say that learning to read is the very essence of education; the *sine qua non*. It follows, then, that ensuring that all children learn to read easily and quickly must be our primary goal for the first few years of schooling. But, sadly, we know that an unacceptably large minority of children struggle to learn to read and that far too many remain as poor readers for the rest of their school careers and, indeed, subsequent adult lives.

If we were able to identify those students who are likely to struggle with reading before they even begin to learn to read, we could offer additional assistance right from the start. Unfortunately, while there may be possible indicators of likely problems (such as poor reading running in the family, for example), we do not really know for sure whether children will or will not experience difficulties until they actually commence instruction in reading. The trick then is to identify, and provide additional support for, struggling students as early as possible.

This was the reasoning underpinning our development of the WARL (the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists) over the past six or so years, published by MultiLit in January. Essentially, the WARL is a measure of word identification fluency (WIF). Traditional reading tests are not only less suitable for very young readers whose skills are very limited but they are also very time-consuming, especially when attempting to screen a whole class of children. Measures of WIF, on the other hand, like the WARL, typically take only a few minutes to administer. Students are presented with a list of 100 frequently occurring words typically found in children's literature. The number of these words read correctly in one minute provides an index of the child's current reading performance.

Many teachers are surprised that a simple WIF measure can provide a reliable and valid measure of a child's developing reading skills but the research clearly shows that WIF measures generally are not only highly reliable but are also found to correlate well with other more complex measures of reading, demonstrating good validity. This is also true, specifically, for the WARL that comprises 13 parallel lists of words, of very similar difficulty level.

Three of these lists are used to provide an initial baseline

assessment of reading skill and are used for screening purposes. By administering these three lists to whole classes of young children at, say, the beginning of Year 1, following the first full year of instruction in reading, struggling readers may readily be identified for additional support. This is done by comparing the average number of words read correctly across the three lists with the benchmarks provided in the manual that show the cut off points for the bottom 25% of young readers. These Initial Assessment Lists may also be used as a before and after measure to assess the efficacy of the reading interventions that the teacher may put in place for young struggling readers.

A more sensitive measure of progress, however, may be achieved by using the other 10 lists to track progress over time. Struggling students receiving a reading intervention are tested using the lists either by giving one list per week or, alternatively, by administering two lists per fortnight and averaging the result. The scores achieved may be graphed to provide a simple visual record of each child's progress.

By using the WARL in these ways, teachers can track whether the children in their classes are making good progress in learning to read.

"Hey teacher, leave them kids alone."

I don't think so.

[*And, of course, if you "don't need no education" then logically you need some, as our English teachers would have informed us when discussing double negatives!]

Further information about the WARL is available from www.multilit.com/programs/warl/.

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM is Chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd and Director of the MultiLit Research Unit. You can follow him on Twitter (@KevinWheldall) where he comments on reading and education (and anything else that takes his fancy). He also has a blog, 'Notes from Harefield: Reflections by Kevin Wheldall on reading, books, education, family, and life in general': www.kevinwheldall.com. Email: kevin.wheldall@pecas.com.au



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hours' drive west of the capital city of Uganda, Kampala. The curriculum is delivered in English, which is the second language for teachers and students. Therefore 'upskilling' the teachers and providing them with the knowledge and understanding of the English language was vital.

Katuuso is the first school built by the School for Life (SFL) Foundation, founded and directed by young Australians Annabelle Chauncy and Dave Everett. School for Life strongly believes that all children everywhere, boys and girls alike, deserve access to a full course of primary schooling. SFL believes that education empowers children, their parents and the whole community with new opportunities, and that knowledge protects children against exploitation in a variety of areas including child labour, sexual exploitation, and armed conflict.

Kate has been part of the team at her school which has used every program developed by MultiLit since 2004. She saw the benefits of introducing this program at Katuuso after working with teachers and students at Gib Gate, as PreLit can be taught to a whole class, is highly cost-effective and is appropriate for all children regardless of skill level.

In addition the program is systematic, skills-based and taught in a hierarchical sequence and designed to complement a play-based learning environment.

As a volunteer and experienced teacher, Kate spent two weeks in the September vacation teaching the teachers how to implement the programme into their literacy sessions on a daily basis. PreLit has now been successfully implemented into every classroom from Kindergarten (Pre-Primary) to Year 4 at Katuuso. The teachers are supported by Head Teacher Janepher Nansubuga Kintu who spent time with Kate during her stay in Uganda in 2014 and with teachers at Gib Gate when she visited in 2013.



MultiLit mentioned in the House of Representatives

Federal Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Christopher Pyne, recently announced in the House of Representatives that the Education Council of Ministers had unanimously endorsed the proposed actions of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority to implement the Australian Government's response to the Wiltshire-Donnelly curriculum review. Pyne said this decision will result in the "decluttering" of the primary school curriculum, so that less content can be covered with more depth. He also commented:

"Importantly, for parents around Australia who have been

crying out for this for a long time, it will ensure an appropriate emphasis is placed on phonics and phonemic awareness in the Australian curriculum in English, which will specifically mean the involvement of Macquarie University and their MultiLit program in the training of school students in how to read and write. So it acknowledges for the first time and puts at the centre of the curriculum the acknowledgement that reading and writing, and emerging from school being able to do so, is so important that students should be trained in the practical application of how to do so through phonics and phonemic awareness."

Spell-It Cards now available for purchase

For users of the Spell-It Program, we now have available Spell-It Cards for purchase. While the Cards are still available from the Members Area of the MultiLit website as a free downloadable, in response to requests from our customers we have also now produced a durable boxed set of Cards, priced at \$195.

Visit www.multilit.com and download our Product Order Form to purchase the cards or email multilit@multilit.com.

Recent awards

MultiLit Chairman Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM has been honoured by his peers with several awards. In September last year, Kevin was presented with the inaugural Australian Association of Special Education (AASE) NSW Award, recognising his Outstanding Contribution to Special Education.

Kevin has also been presented with a Special Award by Learning Difficulties Australia, in recognition of his services to the association, and particularly to its publications, most notably in his role as Editor of the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*. In announcing this award, LDA paid tribute to Kevin for his “depth of knowledge in the areas of reading and learning difficulties” and his “ongoing commitment to informing public debate on issues relating to evidence-based practice, the effective teaching of reading, and strategies for improving student learning”.



Congratulations Jackie French

Author and Australian National Children's Laureate Jackie French was named Senior Australian of the Year on Australia Day 2015. French, who is dyslexic, has written over 140 books, and is a passionate advocate for literacy and support for children with learning difficulties. As the Children's Laureate, her

role is to promote the importance and power of reading, creativity and storytelling amongst young Australians. Her 2014 book, *I Spy a Great Reader: Unlock the Literary Secret and Get Your Child Hooked on Books*, which provides advice for parents on how to encourage reluctant readers, mentions MultiLit in its list of resources.

In the media

What can happen when a passionate parent who also happens to be an education policy expert and commentator teams up with a committed principal at a primary school serving a low income area? A feature in *The Australian Financial Review* on 24 January 2015 told the story, outlining Dr Jennifer Buckingham's work with John Picton at Raymond Terrace Public School to improve student outcomes, including the implementation of the MiniLit and MultiLit Reading Tutor Programs. Buckingham's doctorate was supervised by Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Wheldall.



MultiLit treks to restore sight

On March 6, two teams from MultiLit walked 55 kilometres along the coastline from Palm Beach to Balmoral for Sydney Coastrek, raising funds for the important work of The Fred Hollows Foundation.

MultiLit Director Robyn Wheldall, who initiated MultiLit's involvement in the event, was joined by staff members Renae Watkins, Rose Ye, Sarah Arakelian, Madisen Clark, and Freya Purnell for the trek, as well as Lucinda Beaman (video presenter for MultiLit) and Sarah Perini (formerly MultiLit research assistant and most recently Director of the Macquarie University Anxiety Clinic).

Having put in many hours training on hot beaches and steep headlands over summer, the teams completed the event in 17 hours and 20 minutes. But more importantly, together they raised over \$6300 – which will enable 252 people who are needlessly blind to have their sight restored.

Congratulations to both teams for their outstanding physical and fundraising efforts!



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