



MultiLit

A newsletter for parents and teachers

August 2015

moments

MultiLit heads for the Hills

Having operated a Literacy Centre for many years in Macquarie Park, MultiLit has now opened a second Literacy Centre in the Hills District.

Located at Bella Vista, the new centre will enable parents and students from a wider geographical area to access our programs, delivered within the context of a genuine MultiLit centre.

MultiLit welcomed parents, teachers and allied health professionals to an open evening on 19 June at the new Bella Vista Literacy Centre. MultiLit directors Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM, Dr Robyn Wheldall and Iain Rothwell gave attendees an insight into the MultiLit philosophy and approach to reading instruction, while Literacy Centres director Renae Watkins and expert tutoring staff were also on hand to explain the programs on offer through the new Centre.

The MultiLit Literacy Centres at both Macquarie Park and Bella Vista offer a range of individualised term and intensive holiday programs for primary and secondary students. Programs are delivered face-to-face, online, or in a combination.

The new MultiLit Literacy Centre is located at 2/105 Celebration Drive, Bella Vista. To find out more about MultiLit Literacy



Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall, Renae Watkins and Iain and Kylie Rothwell with their sons at the Literacy Centre opening.

Centres, visit www.multilit.com/literacy-centres, and for other enquiries or to book an assessment, call 1300 55 99 19 or email literacycentre@multilit.com.

Is MultiLit like Spaghetti Bolognese?

Kevin Wheldall

When I was a small boy growing up in Derby in the UK, Heinz Spaghetti Bolognese was available from the local shops in tins. The tins proudly displayed the name on the label and, for all I knew, what was in the tin was, in fact, Spaghetti Bolognese. I didn't like it much. I thought it was quite yucky, in fact.

Fast forward about 10 years until I was in my late teens and started going (very occasionally) to restaurants where I found this dish on the menu of what I thought was a very posh Italian restaurant. I forget what it was that prompted me to eschew gammon and chips with pineapple in favour of Spaghetti Bolognese but it was a revelation to me. It was very good. And it bore no resemblance to the yucky stuff in the tin!

And so I learned that things are not always what they seem and not to be fooled by what it might say on the label ...

Patience exhausted, you must be thinking what on earth is he rambling on about now ...? My point is this. Just because you are told that your child is receiving instruction in MultiLit does not necessarily mean that they are. So when is MultiLit instruction not really MultiLit? When, in fact, is it merely the tinned version ...? Here are some helpful ways of telling whether you are getting the real McCoy.

Content

Most of our MultiLit programs consist of several components. The Reading Tutor Program, for example, for older low-progress readers, comprises three elements: MultiLit Word Attack Skills (or

phonics instruction); MultiLit Sight Words (to teach some very common words quickly to allow access to real texts); and MultiLit Reinforced Reading (to provide practice in generalising the skills learned into the reading of real books). None of these components are optional. All three components are important, not to say essential, if older low-progress readers are to begin to make good progress in learning to read.

A report on how MultiLit was being implemented in state schools as part of the National Partnerships funding scheme was commissioned by the NSW Department of Education and Communities. The consultants who wrote the report found that whereas the vast majority of schools deploying

Continued page 3...

The Dyslexie font: does it work for children with dyslexia?

Dr Eva Marinus

You may have seen recent media reports on a special font, called 'Dyslexie', developed by Dutch artist Christian Boer to help children and adults with dyslexia to improve their reading. Even 'the Fonz' (actor turned children's author and dyslexia advocate, Henry Winkler) is advocating the font and has had some of his children's books published in Dyslexie.

Boer, who struggles with dyslexia himself, contends that the letters of the alphabet are too similar for people with dyslexia. He therefore designed the font to make letters more easily distinguished (for example, by alternating tail lengths and giving them a heavy baseline to prevent confusion of letters).

The results of decades of research into reading and dyslexia, however, clearly show that these ideas are not supported by scientific evidence. There are also barely any published studies which have directly tested the efficacy of Dyslexie font.

The dyslexiefont.com website states that, "Representative research among many dyslexics has shown that the font Dyslexie actually helps them with reading text faster and with fewer errors". Very little serious research has been conducted on Dyslexie, however, and it seems that the research referred to on the website was mainly based on the results of a survey in which children reported that they could read faster.

Despite this patchy research evidence, in the Netherlands, schools have started to use the Dyslexie font for computerised reading exercises, while internationally publishers are using it in books.

To provide a more objective evaluation of the effectiveness of Dyslexie font and to better understand why such a special font might work for children with reading difficulties, we conducted a study in which we compared reading speed for texts written in Arial and in Dyslexie font.

In addition to distinctive letter shapes, Dyslexie also employs larger spacing both within and, especially, between words. As recent studies have shown that children with dyslexia benefit from increased spacing, our research explored two questions:

1. Does Dyslexie result in faster reading than Arial for children with Dyslexia?
2. If so, is this benefit a function of the increased spacing of the font (and not the distinct letter shapes)?

Participants in the study were recruited via MultiLit and tested by Michelle Mostard (pictured) from Radboud University Nijmegen (the Netherlands).

Our research found that low-progress readers read Dyslexie text more quickly than Arial text, when matched on absolute letter size. When general spacing was also matched, the performance difference became smaller. Finally, when both the within and between word spacing was matched, the children performed the same on the Arial text as they did on Dyslexie text.

From these results, we can conclude that Dyslexie font is easier for low-progress readers to read than Arial font of the same size, but only because of its increased spacing between words and within words rather than from the special letter shapes in the font per se. Therefore there seems to be no need to use Dyslexie, as spacing can be adjusted with every font.

This study was conducted by Emeritus Prof Kevin Wheldall and Dr Alison Madelaine from MultiLit, together with Dr Eva Marinus from Macquarie University ARC Centre of Excellence in Cognition and its Disorders and Michelle Mostard and Associate Professor Eliane Segers from Radboud University (Nijmegen, the Netherlands). We would like to thank all parents and children who were involved in this study.

The results were presented at the Australasian Experimental Psychology Conference in April 2015. The abstract by Marinus, Mostard, Segers, Madelaine & Wheldall can be found here: www.psych.usyd.edu.au/epc2015/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Final-Abstracts.pdf.

More information about the font can be found here: www.dyslexiefont.com/en/dyslexia-font/.

Dr Eva Marinus is from the ARC Centre of Excellence in Cognition and its Disorders, Macquarie University.



Save the date: 20 years of MultiLit conference

As part of MultiLit's 20 year celebrations, we will be holding a half-day conference in November. Featuring presentations from practitioners, we are hoping this event will highlight ways in which MultiLit programs and resources are lifting the literacy skills of low-progress readers. This free event will be held on Saturday 7 November at Macquarie University. Please save the date, come to the conference and join us for a light lunch afterwards so that we can mingle and chat about our shared passion for helping students reach their full potential. Please register your interest in this event by emailing multilit@multilit.com.

...continued from page 1

MultiLit implemented the Word Attack Skills component, only about 70% were also using the Sight Words and Reinforced Reading components. The highest degree of inconsistency in implementation was found with Reinforced Reading. Most MultiLit Coordinators and tutors said they usually did Reinforced Reading, but a number said there was often not enough time in the session to do this component fully, or even at all. A small caveat is needed here: not all students will need MultiLit Sight Words or may need to do it for only a short time because they already know most of the Sight Words. The placement test will determine this.

Take away message: All components of the program must be taught for it to be effective (except Sight Words for some students who already know them).

Session length and frequency

The same survey reported that only 16% of schools were implementing MultiLit RTP for the recommended 35-40 minutes per session. A further 19% delivered it for just under the recommended time, 30-35 minutes whereas 42% spent only 20-30 minutes, and 23% less than 20 minutes.

Ideally, the program should be delivered daily. Of the teachers surveyed, only just over half (55%) delivered the program for at least four times per week; 42% delivered it three times per week, and 3% only twice per week.

We recommend that older low-progress readers need a minimum of 35-40 minutes of instruction per day for at least four days per week and that this should be continued for at least two school terms, for good results to be realised.

Take away message: The program should be taught for a minimum of 35-40 minutes daily for at least two terms.

Training

One of the biggest mistakes we made when we first released the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program was not to require training for those who purchased the program. Similar programs we have subsequently released, such as MiniLit, include mandatory training for purchasers. This is now our standard practice.

Far too frequently, training in MultiLit RTP has taken the form of 'Chinese Whispers', a fine children's game but not an appropriate model for training teachers and others to use carefully designed instructional programs in the way in which they were intended. If (with luck) Teacher A attends the course and then passes on what s/he believes to be the essential content, together with their own spin, to Teacher B, who passes it on to Teacher C and so on, then the key messages are highly likely to be distorted along the way. Now, MultiLit RTP is a robust program, and it has been shown to be highly effective for teaching older low-progress readers for 20 years. But it has to be delivered as designed to be optimally effective.

We can guarantee that the MultiLit programs delivered by our own, carefully trained, staff in our own Literacy Centres will be presented exactly as the programs were designed. We can offer similar guarantees about the programs delivered by our staff working in centres for which we are commissioned to provide the literacy instruction (in Exodus Tutorial Centres, for example).

But, with the best will in the world, we cannot guarantee that MultiLit programs provided by others will be delivered with the same degree of fidelity. This is much more likely to be the case, however, if the teachers or tutors have been specifically trained in how to deliver the programs by our MultiLit training department.

Take away message: The program must be taught by a teacher or other who has been specifically trained in how to deliver the program effectively.



Monitoring

How can we tell if our low-progress readers receiving MultiLit instruction are actually improving? Anecdotal reports are notoriously unreliable. It is quite possible that teachers and parents, and even the students themselves, may believe that progress is being made when in fact there has been little or no change in performance. Liking or believing in a program is no substitute for hard evidence of efficacy and that means collecting data on performance.

It is good practice to test reading performance before and after the student has received instruction, at the end of every one or two terms, for example. But do we really want to wait a whole term to determine whether the child is making progress or not? Low-progress readers need to make accelerated progress if they are ever going to catch up with their classroom peers and they have no time to waste on ineffective instruction. This is why we at MultiLit strongly recommend more frequent, regular monitoring of reading performance. To this end we have developed two measures of reading performance: The Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages (or WARP) for older low-progress readers and the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists (or WARL) for young struggling readers. We use these measures on a weekly or fortnightly basis to check that our students are benefitting from the instruction they are receiving. Typically, we plot the results on a simple graph so that we can see at a glance whether students are making good progress as shown by a rising line on the graph. A graph showing no upward trend (or 'flatlining') suggests that some sort of modification to program delivery is needed; greater intensity of instruction, for example.

Take away message: Students' reading performance should be monitored regularly to track progress and to ensure that real progress is being made.

To sum up

To make Spaghetti Bolognese that is worth eating requires that first class quality ingredients are prepared by a cook who knows what they are doing, who leaves nothing out and who cooks for the correct amount of time, checking the sauce for taste and consistency throughout the process. The same may be said to be true of effective reading instruction using our MultiLit programs. Bon appétit.

Strengthening phonics and phonemic awareness in the Australian curriculum

Recently there has been a great deal of debate about the teaching of reading in our schools with associated criticism of national and state curricula. In 2014, the Australian Government commissioned a review of the Australian Curriculum: English.

As a result of the review, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has been exploring ways to strengthen the presence of phonics and phonemic awareness in the Australian Curriculum: English. One initiative taken by ACARA was to hold a forum on 20 March 2015, bringing together a range of phonics experts. These experts included Dr Meree Reynolds, who is a member of the MultiLit Research Unit and consultant to MultiLit, and Dr Jennifer Buckingham, who has conducted research into the effectiveness of MultiLit and MiniLit in a disadvantaged school.

ACARA's view was that, whilst the Australian Curriculum: English does include phonics and phonemic awareness, actions to strengthen the curriculum content, improve explanatory text and ensure the glossary includes all relevant terms, will improve the curriculum. A number of key messages emerged from the



Dr Meree Reynolds (centre) and Dr Jennifer Buckingham (on screen) with fellow experts at the ACARA phonics forum.

forum and these were used by ACARA, along with feedback from other consultation, as the basis for changes to the content and structure of the curriculum.

Subsequently, a draft revised version of the Australian Curriculum: English has been developed and was circulated to key personnel and stakeholders for consultation during April and May 2015. Recommendations for changes to the content have been made for presentation to the ACARA Board, and, if approved, will be presented to Education Ministers following this. It is anticipated that the revised version will be published on the ACARA website by the end of 2015.

Dr Meree Reynolds is a member of the MultiLit Research Unit.

MiniLit a great success at Christian Brothers College

Gai Kingham

At Christian Brothers College Junior Campus in Adelaide, we have been running the Reading Tutor Program since 2008. We were excited about starting MiniLit in June last year to provide support for our younger students, and commenced with two groups of five boys in Year 1. They quickly made progress and their teachers could definitely see the improvement in their reading, writing and confidence in the classroom, specifically in:

- The quality and quantity of writing tasks,
- Spelling, with students applying their new skills (sounds) when writing,
- Comprehension, in understanding of text, applied knowledge, predicting and re-telling,
- Applying reading strategies, such as re-reading and self-correcting, and
- Increased vocabulary.

There was also a marked increase in their reading levels in all cases, to within a normal year level range.

The boys loved the sessions, and were always keen to come along. One of the boys even used to play MiniLit at home with his toys! At the end of last year, we held a MiniLit party.

Our first group for 2015 has just completed Level 2, and received their certificates at assembly at the end of Term 2. Afterwards we had their families join us in our MiniLit room for lunch. It was a wonderful way to celebrate the success of the students. We are now going to monitor their progress using the WARP assessment tool, the newest addition to our CBC MultiLit family.

Our second group will complete Level 2 early in Term 3, and we have now commenced two more groups of Year 1 students. I love the program,

and am blessed to be in a school that believes in and supports early intervention so strongly and passionately. Our next step is to introduce PreLit into our Reception classes.

Gai Kingham is Learning Support Teacher at Christian Brothers College Junior Campus.



Chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd

Professor Kevin Wheldall

Editor

Freya Purnell

Address

Suite 2, Level 3
75 Talavera Road,
Macquarie Park NSW 2113

Phone

1300 55 99 19

Fax

(02) 9888 3818

Email

multilit@multilit.com

Website

www.multilit.com

MultiLit® is a registered trademark. MultiLit is a research initiative of Macquarie University.

© MultiLit 2015.

Reproduction in whole permitted for distribution to your networks.