



MultiLit

A newsletter for parents and teachers

December 2014

moments

'To e or not to e': improving spelling instruction

Robyn and Kevin Wheldall

Baby boomers sometimes like to claim that they are the last literate generation. Almost all of us learned to read, and to read well. Our grasp of grammar may not be perfect but we usually do know the difference between an adjective and an adverb ("no, you're not feeling good, you're feeling well").

But as for our spelling ... well, not so much! It is one of those curious ambiguities of life that, while few would admit to being illiterate, many of us will cheerfully admit that our spelling skills are a little shaky in some areas, whether it be the siren calls of double consonants or the bear trap of "to e or not to e" when constructing the plurals of nouns ending in a vowel.

Most of us were simply not taught very well, instruction comprising largely the rote learning of endless lists of spelling words with perhaps a few rules thrown in, and even those of doubtful utility.



Alison McMurtrie, Iain Rothwell, Dr Robyn Wheldall, Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM, and Dr Coral Kemp at the Spell-It launch

Many of us continue to inwardly chant "egg-wiped" when spelling Egypt or "neck-ess-ari" when spelling necessary. Moreover, few would be willing to mount an argument that spelling instruction has improved over the years or that today's children can spell any better. Many of us fear that their spelling is even worse.

Continued page 2...

Palmerston District Primary School: Our journey with MultiLit

**Tania Collis, Deputy Principal, and
Kirrally Talbot, Class Teacher**

As a school, we identified a need to address reading engagement and decided upon MultiLit to support some of our students. This program was identified in our school plan.

In 2011, two teachers were trained using the Reading Tutor Program (RTP). For two years, a small number of students participated in the program and the school began to see improvements in their reading. Students who had been over a year behind in their expected reading level had reached their peers and were reading at expected levels within 18 months. We saw that the program was working for our students. We learnt more about the programs and the

research behind them, and were pleased to see they were based on current best practice around the teaching of reading. Palmerston had a School Vision and plan to improve every child's literacy skills and a strong belief that early intervention was the key, so in 2013, with the help of a grant from our Directorate, we sent teachers off to be trained in the RTP and MiniLit.

Our first big step involved implementing the program in Year 1, with our teachers coming on board to differentiate their reading program across the class cohort to incorporate MiniLit groups. We used a range of assessments to decide who to pre-test using the MiniLit placement test and started with two groups. These were students who had been participating in great whole language classrooms,

but our testing showed they needed more. They needed a Tier 2 intervention which was systematic, consistent and regular. Within a few weeks, we began to see improvements. First it was in the students' confidence. The teachers teaching the MiniLit groups noticed students were more prepared to 'have a go' as they knew more of their letter-sound combinations and how to use word attack with unknown words. As they felt more confident to try and spell words themselves, their writing became more complex and longer. Writing samples over a 10-week period confirmed our observations. Then came the reading, and students began to tell us what they knew, they shared strategies and they made connections.

Continued page 4...

...continued from page 1

But learning to spell need not be the challenge it continues to be for most students. There is a systematic logic to the spelling rules of English that, once learned, takes away the strain of rote learning.

The problem remains that we can hardly expect students to learn the logic of spelling if their teachers remain ignorant of it themselves. Just as few teachers are taught how to teach reading effectively during their own teacher education courses, the same applies to the effective teaching of spelling.

What is needed then is a resource to assist teachers to learn the inherent rules of spelling logic for themselves and to apply this knowledge in teaching their students how to spell. And this is what Joy Allcock attempts to provide in her excellent spelling resource kit that MultiLit has adapted for Australian teachers and students, now known as Spell-It. Joy is one of those inspirational people who have spent thousands and thousands of hours passionately putting together ways to help teachers teach children.

Unlike other instructional materials MultiLit has developed for teachers and others, Spell-It is not a prescriptive program of instruction as such, but rather an approach to the teaching of spelling. We describe it as a resource; a resource upon which teachers may draw to provide effective instruction in spelling for their students. By attending the professional development course that is an essential prerequisite for the effective use of Spell-It, teachers will acquire the skills and knowledge that form the bedrock of effective spelling instruction.

One of the compelling reasons we decided to embark on the Spell-It project was that our dear friend and colleague, Dr Coral Kemp, advised us that, if teachers came to grips with the content that Joy had put together, then they would learn, not only about the spelling system that underpins written English, but about how words work. Apart from being essential to be able to teach spelling, this knowledge will also teach teachers how to teach reading.



Narelle Barbarino, Rose Ye and Alison McMurtrie celebrate the launch of Spell-It

According to Dr Google, Aristotle said, "Those who know do, those that understand, teach". Our sincere hope is that Spell-It will become an invaluable resource to thousands of teachers across Australia in assisting students to understand how to spell written English.

Dr Robyn Wheldall and Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM are respectively Director and Chairman of MultiLit. Visit www.multilit.com/spell-it for more information about Spell-It and its accompanying Professional Development Workshop.

Measuring progress of younger students: introducing the WARL

It has become common practice in Australian schools to identify struggling readers at the beginning of Year 1 to offer them an intervention. While it is preferable to catch students even earlier, regular screening after the first formal year of schooling is certainly recommended, to identify those who may be in need of Tier 2 intervention.

Up until now, how these young readers can best be screened and monitored has been something of a challenge. Traditional reading tests are less appropriate and less sensitive when used with very young children, and cannot be given repeatedly over short periods of time, because of practice effects setting in. They are also quite time-consuming for busy teachers who need to screen a whole class and then monitor the performance of low-progress readers.

MultiLit has now developed a reading assessment tool for younger students in Years 1 and 2, the WARL (Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists).

As a companion test to the WARP (Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages), the WARL provides a set of 100-word lists, which students read for just one minute. The number of words read correctly provides a measure of the student's

level of oral reading fluency, and the benchmarks provided allow for the easy identification of the bottom 25% of students.

As a fast and simple measure to administer, the lists can then be utilised on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to monitor the performance of individual low-progress readers.

The WARL will be officially released in January 2015. For more information, visit www.multilit.com/programs/warl and to pre-order, email multilit@multilit.com.

To learn more about administering the WARL and WARP, as well as a variety of other reading assessment tools, register for the Measuring Student Reading Progress for Schools Professional Development Workshop – find dates and locations for upcoming workshops, visit www.multilit.com/measuring-student-reading-progress-for-schools-pd-workshop/.



MultiLit Literacy Centre delivers significant gains for students

**Kevin Wheldall and Sarah McMurtry,
MultiLit Research Unit**

One of the key features that discriminates MultiLit from other providers seeking to help low-progress readers is our proud insistence on being scientific evidence-based in our approach.

Not only do we base our instructional programs on the evidence provided by contemporary research into how reading works and how it may best be taught (including our own research), but we also collect data to provide continuing evidence for the specific efficacy of our programs.

We have recently completed an analysis of the progress of the latest group of students who have attended for instruction in our MultiLit Literacy Centre. Over the past year or so, we have collected information about the reading and spelling performance of students both before and following programs of instruction. We focused on a group of 54 students, almost all of whom were in Years 2 to 6, who had completed two full terms of instruction (20 weeks) in our various programs on offer at the Centre.

At the beginning of their programs, the students were aged about nine-and-a-half, on average, and were typically about two years behind in their reading and spelling skills. Now, we know that low-progress readers like these do not typically make more than about three months progress over two terms in their regular schools without intensive instruction; about half the usual rate of progress. That's how they came to be low-progress readers. So, when we look at the gains this group of students have made as a result of MultiLit instruction, we need to bear this in mind.

Following 20 weeks of instruction, this group of students attending the MultiLit Literacy Centre made the following gains:

Enrol now for School Holiday Programs

The MultiLit Literacy Centre offers intensive two-week programs during the December/January school holidays. These include:

- A school readiness program for Kindergarten 2015, and
- Intensive intervention programs for primary and secondary students, who are reading at a level significantly below their peers.

Students complete a one-hour lesson each day for 10 or 15 days either at the MultiLit Literacy Centre (Macquarie Park), online, or a combination of both. Existing students also have the option of a one-week program.

Our School Holiday Programs provide similar benefits to our regular programs in an accelerated format.

For more information or to book a place, call 1300 55 99 19, email literacycentre@multilit.com or visit our website, www.multilit.com/literacy-centres.

- 20 months in nonword reading (a measure of how well students use phonics),
- 14 months in spelling,
- 14 months in single word reading,
- 11 months in reading accuracy,
- 11 months in reading comprehension, and
- 39% more words read correctly per minute (measuring reading fluency).

For the more technically minded, all of these gains were statistically significant with large effect sizes. In simpler terms, these students, on average, made gains of at least twice the average rate, and three to six times greater progress than they were typically making prior to receiving MultiLit instruction at the Centre.

We at MultiLit are proud of the great gains made and we congratulate our students on their fine performance.

Glen Innes reports success with MiniLit

Glen Innes West Infants School, in the Northern Tablelands region of New South Wales, is achieving great success with our MiniLit program, as reported in the local newspaper, the *Glen Innes Examiner*.

Two teachers at the school have attended the two-day MiniLit training to deliver the program, including Principal Robyn Parnell, who commented:

"This is a fantastic program and we are really pleased with the outstanding results we are starting to see. Students love the lessons and are excited to share their successes with their peers."

From the mouths of Glen Innes students:

"I love when we get to play the games in our MiniLit lessons." – Jazmyn

"MiniLit is fun, I like it when we get to say the tricky word cards." – Tarnicia

"The best part about MiniLit is the word races that we have." – Tekirri

"I like it when we get to write stories in MiniLit, I can spell all the words that I want to use." – Austin

"I love reading all the different books in our MiniLit lessons." – Shimmer



Training travels



Kate Glenn visiting Alice Springs (above) and a school in Bali (right)

Kate Glenn

MultiLit trainers travel far and wide delivering our Professional Development Workshops. As one of those trainers, I've been lucky enough to have travelled to some fantastic



places over the past 18 months, from Dubbo to Bali, Alice Springs to Christchurch.

A real highlight was visiting Normanton (and its 8m croc statue!), located in the Gulf of Carpentaria region of the Northern Territory. It's been a great experience seeing such varied spots, meeting and training dedicated and passionate teaching staff, and seeing how MultiLit is able to help low-progress readers across Australia, New Zealand and further afield.

MultiLit offers on-site training in areas where there is sufficient demand (approximately 10 staff from your school or neighbouring schools who are keen to be trained). To enquire, email multilit@multilit.com or call 1300 55 99 19.

Introducing Narelle Barbarino

MultiLit has recently welcomed Narelle Barbarino to the team, in the role of Sales Manager. With an extensive background in educational publishing, Narelle's focus will be building relationships in the field, to help bring the benefits of MultiLit programs, professional development training and Literacy Centre services to students, parents, schools and other allied professionals.

Narelle can be contacted by phone on **02 9886 6649** or **0408 108 436** or by email at narelle.barbarino@multilit.com. She is also available for school visits, so please contact her to book a time for an appointment.



...continued from page 1

After seeing the results in Year 1, we started the program with our Year 2 cohort and began to see the same results. At the same time, we had some older students participating in the RTP. They too enjoyed the learning and were showing improvements in their reading. We then heard that a new program had been developed for preschool and kindergarten – PreLit. We loved the idea that it was based on quality literature picture books and introduced the children not only to the mechanics of reading, but the love of a great story.

At the end of Term 1, 2014 we identified students in Kindergarten who had gained limited sound/letter knowledge understanding. Using our Kindergarten sound data, 10 students were identified to be part of the PreLit intervention program. After 10 weeks of PreLit operating in Kindergarten, we started to see great results with students' confidence and data showed sound knowledge increasing. Classroom teachers started to see an increase in the student's literacy skills and reading started to improve.

Why have the MultiLit programs worked for us? Firstly, as a school with a number of new educators, it provided excellent training in a systematic program for intervention with students who needed extra assistance in learning to read. The resources are great. They are easy to use, well-made and the children enjoy using them. The games in the MiniLit program are fun and the children don't realise they are helping them to hear sounds, make connections, and learn all their letter-name combinations in a very explicit way. With over 40% of our students coming from language backgrounds other than English, the extra explicit repetition

is exactly what they needed. Older students in the RTP feel that they are learning what they need to know and also feel more confident about their abilities.

Early intervention is the key in building successful skills for lifelong learning. PreLit is working for our school in Kindergarten, as it is explicit, systematic and consistent. Students have developed confidence and increased sound knowledge. All of our preschool staff are trained in PreLit and we have started implementing the quality literature component across our Preschool classes. The major focus is on building vocabulary. This is important and supports our EALD (English as an Additional Language or Dialect) learners in understanding.

As a Professional Learning Community, every teacher is responsible for every student and each child deserves the chance to be a successful reader and learner.

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