



MultiLit

A newsletter for parents and teachers

Special PreLit Issue

October 2012

moments

PreLit is finally here!

MultiLit is proud to announce the release of its new PreLit program. PreLit is a program specifically designed to help preschool children learn the basic pre-literacy skills of phonological awareness as well as concepts about print and vocabulary knowledge through storybook reading. It will also prove invaluable for use with young children entering kindergarten with limited skills in these critical areas. **See inside for further details.**

Exodus continues to excel in MultiLit instruction

MultiLit founders Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Wheldall (Beaman) have been working with Rev. Bill Crews of the Exodus Foundation to provide MultiLit and MiniLit programs to socially disadvantaged low progress readers for nearly 18 years.

A recent report compiled by the MultiLit Research Unit (MRU) highlights the success of their partnership. Over the period 2009-2011, the Exodus Foundation used MultiLit and MiniLit programs to provide remedial literacy instruction to well over 500 socially disadvantaged and Indigenous students in their various tutorial sites in Sydney and Darwin. The MRU report summarises overall student progress based on accumulated data collected and analysed by MRU over that period.

Students participating in the Exodus Foundation Tutorial Centres in Sydney, Redfern and Darwin over the period 2009-2011 were assessed at the commencement and conclusion of two term periods of intensive literacy instruction using the MultiLit and MiniLit programs. There were 362 older, low progress readers who attended the MultiLit program at the various Exodus centres during this period and for whom data from pre- and post-testing were available. They attended for three hours of instruction per

day. Complete pre- and post-testing data was available for 161 of the struggling younger students who attended the MiniLit program in all Exodus centres during 2009-2011. These younger students attended for one hour of instruction per day.

On the basis of their statistical analyses, MRU summarised its main conclusions as follows:

- The very large gains made provide convincing, consistent evidence for the continual high efficacy of the MultiLit and MiniLit programs (as delivered by the Exodus Foundation) in redressing reading difficulties in socially disadvantaged and Indigenous children.
- The gains made were consistent across the three main sites in Sydney, Redfern and Darwin.
- Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups of students undertaking the MultiLit and MiniLit programs made very similar and very large gains in reading and related skills.
- The programs appear to be just as effective for Indigenous as for non-Indigenous students.

A PDF copy of the full report is available upon request.

Top marks for Alison

Alison McMurtrie from our Product Development and Training team has had an exciting few weeks of late. Not only has she completed her Master of Special Education at Macquarie University, but she has also been elected to the position of Secretary of Learning Difficulties Australia.

Alison's hard work and dedication to her studies has certainly paid off. She has been awarded the Vice-Chancellor's Commendation for Excellence for maintaining a grade point average of 4.0 throughout her Master's degree.

Learning Difficulties Australia (LDA) is the key professional organisation for those specialising in working with students with learning difficulties. Alison was elected Secretary at the LDA Annual General Meeting in Melbourne in September.



PreLit

a new *early literacy preparation* program for preschool children

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.

Key benefits

- Evidence-based and best practice
- Systematic, cumulative and skills-based
- Taught in a hierarchical sequence
- Two main components:
 - Phonological Awareness
 - Structured Story Book Reading
- Oral language development
- Oral blending and segmentation activities
- Uses a fun game format
- Whole class, small groups or individually
- Comprehensive PD Workshops are available

Who is it for?

PreLit is appropriate for all pre-school children regardless of skill level and is also appropriate for kindergarten students who have started school without the necessary emergent literacy skills. The program is easy to adopt in an early childhood or school setting.



Program components

- One-day PD workshop (highly recommended)
- PreLit Starter Kit:
 - Teacher manual
 - Lessons book
 - Sound snap presentation book
 - Letter cards
 - Alphabet picture cards
 - Picture cards
 - Shared story book reading cards

More information

To find out more or purchase a Starter Kit and register for the one-day PD Workshop, please contact us by phone, fax or email, or visit our website www.multilit.com.



LDA Tertiary Student Award 2012

Congratulations to Jennifer Buckingham, who was presented with the 2012 Tertiary Student Award of Learning Difficulties Australia (LDA) at a formal presentation on 8 September 2012 at the LDA Annual General Meeting, held at Treacey Conference Centre in Melbourne.

This award is presented to a tertiary student in recognition of significant research that has advanced the understanding of theoretical and practical issues in the field of learning difficulties and is based on the submission of a research article to the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*.

Jennifer is completing her doctoral research at the Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC) on 'Literacy and Social Disadvantage: Evaluations of Literacy Intervention Programs for Socially Disadvantaged

Preparing pre-school children for learning to read

Kevin Wheldall

If we are serious about ensuring that all children learn to read within their first few years of schooling, we should make sure that the basic building blocks of literacy are in place for all children when they begin formal schooling. The research shows clearly that children commencing school with both phonological awareness and well-developed general language skills are far more likely to learn to read easily and quickly.

If all children were to receive a program of instruction in these essential prerequisites in the year prior to commencing school, far fewer children would struggle to learn to read. It would also mean a levelling of the playing field so that all children, regardless of their family background, would be starting to learn to read from a more similar knowledge base. It is currently the case that many children from less advantaged home backgrounds beginning school are already way behind their more advantaged peers in these key pre-literacy skills.

The idea of teaching these skills to pre-school children may sound off-putting to some, but there is no reason why these skills can't be taught effectively in an engaging, play-based way that is more appropriate for young children. An effective pre-literacy program for pre-school children should comprise instruction in the two key areas identified by research as the most important prerequisite skills for learning to read.

First, they should be engaged in games and play-based routines that systematically teach the skills of phonological

awareness, so that children come to school already able to break up words into their component sounds and manipulate the sounds in words. The second key component is an emphasis on developing good oral language skills more generally, including explicit vocabulary instruction. The best means of achieving this is by structured story book reading activities where children are encouraged to engage with the story being read, to answer questions about the story and to relate the events in the story to their own lives. A focus on these two prerequisite skill sets provides an excellent foundation for learning to read. This conceptualisation of what constitutes the best preparation for learning to read forms the basis for our new pre-school program, known as *PreLit*.

PreLit is an *early literacy preparation program*, designed to be delivered the year before children start formal schooling. It will also prove useful for teaching children who come to school without the necessary prerequisite skills in place. The purpose of the program is to facilitate literacy development in the early school years by laying the foundations for good phonological awareness and other language skills in young children. *PreLit* is particularly focused on improving the learning outcomes for those children considered at potential risk of long-term reading failure, but will provide a good grounding in the key prerequisite skills for literacy for all children about to begin school.

PreLit instruction is based on the findings of the accumulated research with this age group and will provide early childhood teachers with research-based teaching strategies and an effective model of delivery for the teaching of phonological awareness and oral language. It is designed to complement a play-based learning environment through brief periods of daily instruction.

You can follow Kevin Wheldall on Twitter (@KevinWheldall) where he comments on reading and education (and anything else that takes his fancy). You can also follow his blog, 'Notes from Harefield: Reflections by Kevin Wheldall on reading, books, education, family and life in general' (www.kevinwheldall.com).



Students', under the supervision of Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Wheldall, Director and Deputy Director respectively of the Multilit Research Unit.

Jennifer's research study was commended for its experimental approach in examining the effectiveness of MiniLit to assist children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds experiencing difficulties learning to read in their first years of school.

Her research article based on this study, authored jointly with her supervisors, has now been accepted for publication in the LDA journal, the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*.

Buckingham, J., Wheldall, K., & Beaman-Wheldall, R. (2012). A randomized control trial of a tier two small group intervention ('MiniLit') for young struggling readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 17, (in press).

What's new in MRU?

Recent MRU Publications and Research Reports

Refereed journal articles (in press)

Limbrick, L., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2012). Reading and related skills in the early school years: Are boys really more likely to struggle. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 59.

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

Buckingham, J., Beaman-Wheldall, R., & Wheldall, K. (2012). A randomized control trial of a MultiLit small group intervention for older low-progress readers. *Effective Education*.

Other publications

Wheldall, K., (2012). MUSEC Briefing No. 33. Behavioural Optometry. Sydney: Macquarie University Special Education Centre.

If you are interested in reading any of the above listed articles, please contact Sarah McMurtry (sarah.mcmurtry@multilit.com) who will send you a copy.

Conference paper

Buckingham, J., Wheldall, K., & Beaman, R. (2012). A randomized control trial of a tier 2 (small group) reading intervention for young low-progress readers: Findings at follow up and implications for classroom practice. Paper presented to the 2012 Australasian Special Education Conference held at the Esplanade, Freemantle, WA, 17-19 September 2012.

Recent Media Publicity

Prof Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Wheldall: Jennifer Buckingham comments on the results of the recent report released by the NSW Auditor-General. She reiterates findings that poor Indigenous literacy is due to poor instruction and mentions successful work carried out by Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Wheldall with Indigenous students. 'Why our kids still cannot read', *The Australian*, 10 August 2012.

Prof Kevin Wheldall: Professor Kevin Wheldall gave a radio interview on Indigenous literacy and the need to focus on effective instruction rather than culturally appropriate instruction. 'The Wire', *2SER*, 9 August 2012.

Prof Kevin Wheldall and MultiLit: An editorial refers to Professor Wheldall and MultiLit's achievements in improving literacy skills of Indigenous students without culturally appropriate instruction following a report revealing the lack of progress made in closing the gap. 'Low expectations must be lifted' *The Australian*, 9 August 2012.

Prof Kevin Wheldall and MultiLit: Professor Wheldall was quoted in a front page article on the failure of culturally appropriate literacy instruction for Indigenous students in closing the gap. This follows the release of a report by the NSW Auditor-General on the lack of progress made by Indigenous students despite aims to close the gap. 'Literacy problems not black and white, say experts', *The Australian*, 9 August 2012.

MultiLit: The Reading Tutor Program is mentioned in connection with the founders of the Indigo Express foundation and the collaborative literacy program being piloted with the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence. 'Kids in philanthropy', *The Circle, Channel 10*, 19 June 2012.

Dr Robyn Wheldall (Beaman): Article quoted research conducted by Dr Wheldall, Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Coral Kemp on the incidence and type of troublesome behaviours that teachers face. 'Confronting the real problems in the nation's schools', *The Australian*, 16 June 2012.

Dr Robyn Wheldall (Beaman): Dr Wheldall and colleagues (Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Coral Kemp) were quoted on the types of classroom behaviours that teachers struggle with. 'Kids will be kids', *The Australian*, 16 June 2012.

MultiLit: The success of several schools in Western Australia using the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program is reported and provides positive comments on several individual student experiences. 'Improving literacy standards: Yule Brook College and East Maddington Primary School working together', *The Bulletin, Dyslexia SPELD Foundation*, 46, Autumn 2012.

MultiLit: The MultiLit Reading Tutor Program is mentioned as the tool for improved literacy skills at Canterbury Boys' High School. 'Secret to boys' test success', *The Canterbury Bankstown Express*, 13 March 2012.

MultiLit: MultiLit Professional Development workshops praised. 'Teachers give 2012 MultiLit professional development a thumbs up', *Compass (University of Sydney)*, 8 March 2012.

MultiLit: Year 3 stroke victim Emily Billiau started the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program online program to improve her literacy. 'Disabled stroke victim, 8, makes up lost time', *Inner West Courier*, 23 February 2012.

MultiLit: Lyndal Irons commented on the success of the Exodus Foundation using MultiLit programs in improving literacy for disadvantaged students. 'Positive effects', *Insights Magazine*, 2 February 2012.

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