



MultiLit

A newsletter for parents and teachers

October 2017

moments

First-of-its-kind evaluation of what works to help Year 1 children catch up

Our MiniLit program for Year 1 children who are falling behind in their literacy skills, is to be independently evaluated by Evidence for Learning (part of Social Ventures Australia) in collaboration with the NSW Department of Education and Communities.

MiniLit targets students leaving Kindergarten in the bottom 25% of readers and helps them reach a reading level where they can participate in class on a par with other students by the end of Year 1.

This is the first time in Australia that an independent randomised controlled trial has tested a program that teaches key reading elements such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The evaluation will be conducted by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Centre for Program Evaluation at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. The trial is currently running in nine NSW public schools with over 200 students taking part.

Evidence for Learning director, Matthew Deeble, said: "The results of this first-of-its kind trial will generate solid evidence of the best way to improve reading skills for our students.

"Recent international tests show that Australian high school students are up to one school year behind the reading performance of their peers in the world's best performing

countries. We can have a big impact on this if we address problems early with evidence-based programs.

"Too much of the debate never moves beyond opinion and guesswork. Trials like this build up the evidence base to ensure that governments and schools can make decisions based on what works instead of who shouts the loudest.

"MiniLit is a promising program to help struggling Year 1 readers get back on track. This trial will compare its impact with a control group to measure the degree of the benefit.

"We will independently report on the results in 2018 showing both learning gains and costs to implement. The trial will provide valuable information to schools and parents about how to help every child get a great start at school.

"We run this kind of trial so we can arm our teachers with access to the latest proven strategies – what works and, just as importantly, what doesn't. Good quality research conducted in Australian schools provides the best possible information to make education choices for our students.

"Only investing in proven approaches ensures no child is left behind struggling with reading."

MultiLit is, of course, delighted by this initiative and has donated the materials and training for the schools involved.



Staff from the Bill Crews Charitable Trust MultiLit Literacy Centre at Marsden Road Public School getting into the spirit of Book Week. If you guessed Roald Dahl was the common author, you are correct!

InitialLit–Foundation How to find out more

With the upcoming release of the InitialLit–Foundation program, MultiLit will enter a new era, moving beyond programs only for struggling readers into initial literacy instruction.

InitialLit is a three-year, evidence-based whole-class literacy program which will provide all children with the essential core knowledge and strong foundations to become successful readers and writers.

InitialLit–Foundation will be officially released in November, to enable schools wishing to implement the program from the beginning of the 2018 school year to have their teachers complete the compulsory two-day training.

If you're interested in finding out more about InitialLit–F:

1. Visit multilit.com/initialit for an InitialLit-F program factsheet, Frequently Asked Questions, pricing information and order form.

2. Register for an InitialLit–F webinar. We are hosting 45-minute information sessions via webinar to provide an opportunity for interested schools to hear directly from MultiLit product development manager Alison McMurtrie about the program, and to ask any specific questions about its approach to literacy instruction and implementation.

Webinars will be held:

- Monday 9 October, 3:30pm
 - Friday 20 October, 1:30pm
 - Wednesday 25 October, 3:30pm
 - Friday 3 November, 1:30pm
 - Wednesday 8 November, 3:30pm
- (All times are AEDT.)

To register, please email multilit@multilit.com with your preferred session.

We are now accepting orders for InitialLit–F, which will begin shipping in November to coincide with the commencement of Professional Development Workshops.



Upcoming InitialLit–F Professional Development Workshop dates

- 16-17 November 2017, Sydney (Macquarie Park)
- 4-5 December 2017, Perth
- 30-31 January 2018, Brisbane
- 5-6 February 2018, Sydney (Macquarie Park)
- 7-8 February 2018, Perth
- 13-14 February 2018, Adelaide
- 20-21 February 2018, Melbourne
- 6-7 March 2018, Sydney

Year 1 Readers coming soon

Can Super Pug save the day? What will the Fig Tree Club kids discover in the forest? What do owls get up to a night?

We are excited to announce the release of a second series of 60 decodable readers – this time for students in Year 1.

InitialLit–1 Readers (Levels 10-16) follow on from the first series of Readers released by MultiLit last year for the Foundation year (Levels 1-9).

Students can enjoy the beautifully-illustrated selection of stories as they read about Burt's Monster, the Rainy Day Express and more. Children also learn about their world, its amazing animals and unique ecosystems in the series' six non-fiction titles.

We are now taking pre-orders for the InitialLit–1 Readers (Levels 10-16), which will be available for shipping from mid-November 2017.

To find out more and place an order, visit www.multilit.com/initialit-readers.



Crap detecting for beginners

Kevin Wheldall

A recent Four Corners program featured the results from a 'shadow shop' of 240 pharmacies conducted by Choice. Pharmacists were asked to recommend something for these actors posing as shoppers who claimed that they had been "feeling really stressed lately". Twenty-six per cent of pharmacists recommended Bach Flower remedies, a product for which there is absolutely no scientific evidence for efficacy. Another 3% recommended homeopathic products.

Non-evidence based fads like this predilection for so-called 'natural' remedies are widespread. But it is in educational interventions and therapies for children with developmental disorders that we see some of the looper manifestations of this generic, worldwide, anti-scientific trend.

To help us sort the wheat from the chaff, we now have a new, all-encompassing, reference resource that is destined to become our future 'go to guide' when we are confronted with an intervention for children with developmental disorders that we have not previously encountered.

Their new text, *Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders: A guide for parents and professionals*, is destined to become the field guide for amateur and professional crap detectors everywhere. It is remarkably inclusive. As an enthusiastic crap detector myself, I came across coverage of many interventions that I knew little about or had not heard of before at all. Take FODMAPS, for example. It was only a month or two ago that I first heard this term, from my haematologist. I did not know then, but I do now, that low FODMAPS diets are being promoted as a treatment for children with autism spectrum disorders (or ASD).

What is or are FODMAPS? FODMAPS are, wait for it, 'fermentable, oligo-, di-, monosaccharides and polyols'. FODMAPS refers to fermentable, poorly absorbed, short-chain, carbohydrates but I prefer Caroline and Pamela's no-nonsense description: "FODMAPS are in disreputable farty-foods like beans,



Kevin Wheldall, Ellen Fanning, Pamela Snow and Caroline Bowen at the launch of the book

onion and broccoli, and also in milk, apples, wheat, high-fructose corn syrup, and more". They go on to comment, and I quote:

"The casein-free (CF), GF (gluten-free), and GFCF (gluten-free and casein-free) diets have a new competitor for consumer moolah in the ASD food fad field: the low-FODMAP diet. For years, ASD advocacy groups, families and clinicians have fallen for sharp advertising of the GFCF diet, with scientific-sounding phrases: 'evolving paradigm', 'promising research trend', 'new understandings', 'latest discoveries' – but soon, the Low FODMAP diet may become the new black, despite no demonstrable link as yet, between FODMAPS and ASD."

I have quoted this passage at length to give you a flavour of the engaging style in which this book is presented. It is lively and opinionated, in the very best sense, and is clearly written by human beings rather than by academic Daleks, the preferred speech style preferred by so many wannabe authorities.

In the epilogue, they provide two extensive lists of programs and procedures. The first (shorter) list is headed 'Could try harder' and puts on notice the developers of interventions

that might show some promise but which are in sore need of sufficient quality evidence for efficacy. Here we find, for example: controlled crying, Lindamood Bell, the Orton-Gillingham/Multi-Sensory Structured Language Program, Positive Behaviour Support and Triple-P Positive Parenting, to name but five.

In the second, far longer list, headed bluntly and unequivocally 'No convincing evidence', we find, for example, many old friends such as: BrainGym, Fast ForWord, the Arrowsmith Program, behavioural optometry and, last but not least, Reading Recovery.

I could go on. There is so much to delight and intrigue in this book. So much crap to detect and so little time. Let me finish by saying this: "Buy this book." In fact, buy two copies and give one to a friend. They'll thank you for it.

Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders: A guide for parents and professionals by Caroline Bowen and Pamela Snow is published by J & R Press Ltd.

[This is an edited version of the speech Professor Wheldall gave at the launch of this book in May 2017.]

Training in the Torres Strait

John Warburton

Tagai State College provides primary and secondary education to the children of the Torres Strait in one of Australia's most remote, challenging and beautiful environments.

Recently, MultiLit was fortunate enough to be asked to train some of the college's teaching and learning leaders, teachers and teachers' aides in the delivery of its early-intervention MiniLit program via a two-day workshop at the main campus on Thursday Island. Trainees included staff from a number of the college's 16 outlying campuses.

Reaching TI (as Thursday Island is known locally) is an adventure in itself, involving two flights from Sydney and a ferry ride across invitingly turquoise but reputedly croc-inhabited waters. The island, which is the centre of the Torres Strait administrative region, is home to some 2600 permanent residents and a large number of temporary residents who come there to access medical and education services. Its wharves are the focus of a constant movement of goods and people to and from the Australian mainland, 40 kilometres away, and the outer islands.

Although TI is relatively close to the tip of Cape York, the Torres Strait archipelago stretches almost all the way to Papua New Guinea. Some of the Tagai campuses are located just a few kilometres from the PNG mainland, and many islanders speak at least one local language as well as English. Kala Lagaw Ya and Meriam Mir are the main indigenous languages, while Torres Strait Creole, of which there are several dialects, evolved as a way for people from remarkably diverse backgrounds to communicate with each other. Speakers often switch in and out of languages mid-sentence, depending on who they're talking to, to the bewilderment of outsiders.

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Explaining why Tagai had selected MiniLit to help its younger struggling readers, Meiko Stephen, one of the college's literacy and numeracy coaches, said the decision was the result of a search for an evidence-based program that provided explicit instruction in basic reading skills. She said MiniLit's direct instruction approach made the program suitable for delivery by teachers' aides as well as by fully qualified teachers – an important consideration given the considerable challenges posed by the region's diverse cultural and linguistic make-up.

Tagai State College was also one of the first schools anywhere in Australia to receive the new MiniLit Story Book Cards, which have been developed by MultiLit to support delivery of the Storybook component of the program and are designed to be used in conjunction with 40 popular and readily available children's titles.

Commenting after the workshop, one of the teachers from Horn Island campus said she was looking forward to seeing MiniLit build her students' confidence, helping turn them into "deadly readers".

MultiLit hopes to soon be back in the Torres Strait to train more staff as Tagai evaluates the impact of MiniLit across the first few campuses to implement the program.

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