

# MULTILIT<sup>□</sup> Moments

The Newsletter of MULTILIT<sup>□</sup>

August 2003  
Volume 2, Issue 2



## A letter to low-progress readers

from Professor Kevin Wheldall

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Dear struggling reader

You might find it strange that I would write a letter to someone who finds reading so hard. If you could read this letter easily you probably would not need to read it at all! But I hope that someone will help you to read it, or that someone will read it to you, because I want to tell you a few things about reading that you might find helpful. A lot of what you have already heard may not be true. In fact, it may be plain wrong.

Let's start with all that nonsense about kids who find it hard to learn to read being stupid or lazy. Only lazy or stupid people who can't be bothered to think properly, but who are lucky enough to be able to read, would believe that! I have been working on the problems of students like you for many years and I know how hard you have tried to improve your reading. Kids like you, those I call low-progress readers, have to work so much harder than students who find it all so easy. It's not fair but it is true. I also know for a fact that there are many really smart kids out there who can't read very well. Ask your Mum or Dad or

your teacher to tell you about Richard Branson or Kerry Packer or Agatha Christie. These are just three examples of people who had great difficulties with reading or spelling at school but who made it to the top of the tree in their different ways.

You see, some kids, the really lucky ones, do not really need to try very hard at all. They were lucky enough to have been borne with the ability to learn to read very quickly and without a lot of help from teachers. Then there are lots of regular kids who will all learn to read without finding it too hard so long as they get a fair amount of help from their teachers.

And then there are kids like you who will always find it very difficult to learn to read. It's not your fault, you were probably just born that way. It is possible that you have a reading disability, what some folks like to call *dyslexia*. (The only other possibilities are that you missed an awful lot of school, perhaps because you were sick or moved school many times, or the way you were taught to read was not very effective.

*(continued on page 4)*

## MULTILIT.COM Goes Live!

MULTILIT<sup>□</sup>'s comprehensive new website went live in June. In addition to information about our clinic programs, professional development and consultancy services, you can also now order MULTILIT<sup>□</sup> publications and videos on-line.

The site includes abstracts of selected research articles and reports written or co-authored by Professor Wheldall and members of the MULTILIT<sup>□</sup> professional team. These can be downloaded in a PDF version.

Several parent visitors to [www.multilit.com](http://www.multilit.com) have given their child the practice WARP (Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages) test found on our site.

Other site features include: "News & Info", "MULTILIT<sup>□</sup> Consultancy Case Studies", "Frequently Asked Questions—FAQs" and "Staff Profiles".



## Making Up Lost Time In Literacy

"I'd rather be reading"

## FAQ's

**I don't live within a reasonable distance of MULTILIT. What options should I consider?**

Consider our MULTILIT Independent program. Following a training session, you will be equipped to deliver the program at home. Alternatively, you or your child's school can purchase the MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program kit.

### Schoolwise Success Story

The MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> Office recently received one of those out of the blue calls that make it all worthwhile. The parent of a child who was a Year 7 student in one of the early intakes into Schoolwise in 1997 rang in to say thank you 'for making his dream come true'. Her son is now at uni and is going to play football in England for a year next year.

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### Paws, prompt and praise?

So you need someone to hear your youngest read but you're cooking dinner, your significant other is working late, gran's out line dancing and the teenager from hell is sulking again....Help may be closer than you think - in the kennel. One of the latest ideas from the United States (where else?) is to involve dogs in 'hearing' reluctant readers read, the theory being that they will feel more relaxed reading to Rover than they would to you. It certainly brings a new meaning to that old jibe about 'barking at print'! But if it encourages young kids to read more, we're all for it.

## Special MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> Moments

MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> in Kuala Lumpur and Queensland Senior clinician, Simmone Pogorzelski, spent the winter school holidays conducting a pilot MULTILIT Clinic in Kuala Lumpur. Simmone conducted initial testing on 10 students and trained their parents to work with the children at home using the MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program.

Margrit Frischknecht and Glenys O'Riley from MULTILIT are providing further consultancy support to Gladstone Tutorial Centre in Queensland which was established as a MULTILIT centre with support in 2001. They are running Positive Teaching professional development courses to teachers in the Gladstone district, as well as providing consultancy support to the Tutorial Centre.

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### Professional Development Reminder

The last two MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> Reading Tutor Program Professional Development Workshops for 2003 will be held on Friday, 22 August and 14<sup>th</sup> November.

For information and registration, visit [www.multilit.com](http://www.multilit.com) or ring (02) 9850 9695.

## Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

By: J. K. Rowling

Three years was a long time to wait since the last volume in the Harry Potter series appeared. The obvious question is: was it worth the wait? And then there is the little matter of a book for children stretching to nearly 900 pages..... Can one have far too much of a good thing?

With her phenomenal success and the ballyhoo surrounding its release (comparable only to Dickens at the height of his fame), the temptation for the media to knock J. K. Rowling down, having built her up, must be enormous. But.....not this reviewer.

The latest Harry Potter is a tour de force and, much as I loved the first book, is the finest in the series so far. Much has already been made of its altogether darker feel and the theme of 'teenage angst', both true, but what struck this reviewer forcibly was its Orwellian tone. Rowling presents a

powerful critique of rampant authoritarianism, no less effective for being set within a school context and guaranteed to touch a nerve with any young reader who has suffered injustice at the hands of a power obsessed teacher. From her penchant for pink cardigans to her prissy 'hem hem' mannerism to her sadistic malevolence, Dolores Umbridge, the latest in a line of Defence against the Dark Arts teachers, is a villain for our times, of whom Rowling can justifiably feel proud. The desire to see her get her comeuppance was, at times, almost overwhelming.

Those of us working with low-progress and reluctant readers owe Rowling an enormous debt of gratitude. The desire to be able to read Harry Potter has provided the most powerful motivation for learning to read (or to read better) that I have witnessed in over 30 years working in education.

*Kevin Wheldall*

## Making Up Lost Time In Literacy



## What's hot and what's not in reading...

Every year for the past seven years 'Reading Today' canvassed the opinions of a panel of leading literacy educators from around the world on "what's hot and what's not" in reading research and practice. 'Reading Today' is the bimonthly newspaper of the IRA, by the way - no, not that IRA, the International Reading Association, based in the United States. The token Aussie on the panel is Professor John Elkins from the University of Queensland.

The reading experts are asked to select which topics on the supplied list are currently receiving more (and favourable) attention ('hot') and which are currently being viewed less favourably ('not hot'). The experts are then allowed to give their personal opinion of whether they think the topic *should* be hot or not.

So what do these reading gurus believe to be hot in 2003? Well, the seven hottest topics included direct instruction, early intervention, fluency, so-called 'high stakes assessment' (i.e., state administered standardised tests like our Basic Skills Tests), phonemic awareness, phonics and scientific research and practice.

Does this list sound at all familiar? Surprise, surprise - all of these topics are very dear to the hearts (and minds) of the MULTILIT team. These are the very topics we have been researching and teaching within MULTILIT for many years now. All the same it is gratifying to know that the rest of the world is at last beginning to catch up!

And what's not hot? Five topics came in as definitely and decidedly cold - gender issues in literacy, grouping, literature-based instruction, multicultural literature and, surprisingly, spelling. (Those of you wondering about the fate of so-called 'whole language' will be interested to know that this year it was eliminated from the list completely.) With the exception of spelling, it could be argued that these topics have perhaps sidelined teachers from the main game of teaching kids to read.

As for 'what should be hot', two topics listed as 'should be very hot' (with 100% agreement by the panel) caught the eye: struggling readers (grade 3 and above) and teacher education for reading. Amen to both of those.

*Kevin Wheldall*

## MULTILIT® in high school

Many teachers seem to be unaware that MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> is effective for high school, as well as primary school, students. Here is a recent letter from a special education teacher working at a private school...

*MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> is one of the main programs that we use with students from years 7-9 within their one-to-one program.*

*I was hesitant at first as initially I thought the program did not look appropriate for these older students. I thought that they would feel demoralised even though when tested these students had very low reading abilities.*

*It did not take long for me to be convinced that MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> is a very successful program with our students. They seem to enjoy doing it as they can also feel the gains.*

## Media attention for MULTILIT®



Over the past few months, Professor Wheldall has been featured extensively in the mainstream and educational media:

- "Education Horizons" magazine (Vol 7, No4, 2003) reprinted an article by Prof Wheldall summarising the main findings on the effectiveness of the MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> Program for older low-progress readers. "The New South Wales Education Magazine" (Term 2, 2003) also featured a similar article by Prof Wheldall.
- The April 2003 issue of "Educare News" ran a version of another article written by Prof Wheldall and Robyn Beaman about "MULTILIT for Boys".
- In July, Melbourne's "The Age" newspaper included extensive quotes by Prof Wheldall in an article entitled, *Phonic Youth*.



## Making Up Lost Time In Literacy

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## MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> for Boys

Professor Kevin Wheldall and Robyn Beaman made invited contributions to the 'Boys to Fine Men' conference on boys' education in Newcastle on March 28 2003. 'Boys, Books and Behaviour' was the focus of Professor Wheldall's address, followed up later in the day by a workshop jointly presented with Robyn Beaman on 'MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> for Boys (and Girls)'.

## Staff News

Welcome to staff who joined the MULTILIT<sup>®</sup> Clinic team since January:

- **Valerie Woods**  
Admin. & Marketing Coordinator
- **Jennifer Wendt**  
Publications Coordinator
- **Rita Carey , Keri Sheraton**  
**Frances Hutson**  
Associate Tutors

## A letter to low progress readers (continued from page 1)

Some children are born with disabilities that are obvious, so that most people can understand the problems these children face. If you cannot hear or see very well, or if you cannot walk or talk, then it is very unlikely that you would meet many people who would blame you for your difficulties or who would refuse to help you.

But you have an invisible disability. A reading disability is not obvious and it is one that most people will not understand. This is your bad luck and it is something that you will have to get used to. The important thing is that *you* know that you have a disability and that not being able to read very well is not your fault, in the same way as someone being deaf or blind is not that person's fault.

So what does this all mean to you? Does having a reading disability mean that you will never learn to read or spell? Does it mean that you might as well not bother trying any more? The simple answer is NO! What it does mean is that you will need special help, really good teaching, and that you will have to work harder than most other kids in order to learn to read well.

Most kids like you can learn to read, believe me. After working with low-progress readers for over twenty years, I know that if we provide you with really good teaching that spells out exactly what you need to know, and if you try really hard and pay attention, then over time, and it will take time, you will learn to read.

You might be thinking, "What does he know? He's a professor at a university - he can't know what it feels like to be me. He doesn't know how hard it is to be me." But I do know. I'm not dyslexic, it's true, but I have worked with so many kids who are. I also remember what it feels like to be a struggling reader because when I was in Year 1, I was way behind in reading too. I'd been away from school sick quite a bit and I had also moved school. All the other kids seemed to be finding it so easy but I felt like I was drowning. Sound familiar? My mum helped pull me through or I would not be here today writing this to you. It will probably be much harder for you than it was for me but not impossible. I know that most of you kids who struggle to learn to read can be helped.

With my best wishes for you learning to read,

**Professor Kevin Wheldall**

**Making Up Lost Time In Literacy**