

# Improving Literacy Standards: Yule Brook College and East Maddington Primary School working together

One of the major aims at Yule Brook College is “to raise the students’ expectations and the expectations their families have of them”.

There is strong evidence that students from a low SES or disadvantaged background are at much greater risk of experiencing literacy failure. There is also a great deal of evidence, both from research and practice that documents the importance of providing structured, sequential and explicit intervention for these students.

The teaching staff at Yule Brook College, in collaboration with East Maddington Primary School, have made a commitment to improving literacy for all their students, a commitment which includes the provision of a structured synthetic phonics program to those students identified as struggling with literacy.

The phonics program chosen at Yule Brook College is MultiLit (Making Up Lost Time in Literacy), a program developed to focus on the five key areas recognised as necessary for skilled reading development - phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency. In order for these programs to be effective they should be delivered in a sequential, cumulative and multisensory way. MultiLit is one of many successful evidence-based programs used in schools in WA and incorporates the principles of a highly structured synthetic phonics approach with the teaching of fluent reading and spelling. The school also incorporates a range of additional resources and strategies including the Dandelion, Totem and Talisman readers, the Nessy Program, WordShark and NumberShark.

In 2011, Yule Brook College, one of the 10 most disadvantaged schools in Western Australia, made a commitment to developing a whole school approach to literacy teaching that would improve the skills of all students in Years 8 to 10. Marie Adams, Literacy Coordinator, heads the Literacy Centre at Yule Brook. The staff in the Centre aim to assist students who need help with specific literacy skills, students with an ESL background, and students requiring extension.

The diverse student population at Yule Brook includes many with exceptionally high needs, including students referred by Juvenile

Justice, individuals with intellectual disabilities and a number of students who have been expelled from other schools. There are 160 students attending Yule Brook College, including 40% Aboriginal students (many from the Clontarf Academy) and 70% boys. The challenge was to inspire the students to attend school and motivate them to become independent life-long learners with positive aspirations towards employment. One of the major aims at Yule Brook is “to raise the students’ expectations and the expectations their families have of them”.

The approach taken was wide-ranging and included: extensive communication with feeder schools to exchange resources, ideas, and successful literacy teaching and learning practices; mentoring from the teachers at East Maddington Primary School and a commitment to continue the literacy intervention introduced in primary school; and, a high level of parental involvement through regular ILP (Individual Learning Plan) meetings and student exhibitions. In order to target all areas of deficit, Yule Brook aimed to provide highly structured lessons for low progress students; vocabulary extension in the students’ interest/subject areas; ATAS literacy lessons and intensive spelling instruction for all Year 10s. The MultiLit program has been used by both East Maddington Primary School and Yule Brook College to provide one on one support to those students struggling with literacy. Significant progress has been seen in the students’ reading and spelling skills and students themselves provide extremely positive feedback regarding the support they have received.





Students working with a staff member at the Yule Brook Literacy Centre



Student selecting a book at Yule Brook

The Deputy Principal at East Maddington Primary, Cheryl Schoch, believes that MultiLit has been successful and that it meets the requirements of an effective evidence-based intervention program. Since implementing the program at the school in 2009, Cheryl reports that over 40 students have participated and that "every one of the students involved has moved forward in their reading ages by more than 2 years".

For the purposes of this article, a number of the support teachers at Yule Brook were asked to reflect on the impact that the intervention program has had on their own teaching practices in addition to their students' reading and spelling skills. They also discussed the value of introducing a structured phonics program and their students' responses to the program. The teachers involved in delivering the intervention included Marie Adams, Marina Assenbruck, Samantha Garcia, Buffie Punch, and Angie Sexton-Finck

***What has changed in the area of literacy teaching at Yule Brook College since introducing a structured phonics program?***

The students have developed a greater awareness of phonics, spelling strategies, and syllabification, and have shown improvements in their literacy skills and confidence. Classroom teachers have also noticed an improvement in spelling although the biggest improvement has occurred in reading.

***What do you like about the structured phonics program?***

We like the fact that the program is Australian, well researched, and designed by literacy experts. The program uses a structured and developmental approach which is easy to use and is tailored to suit each student's needs both in pace and level. It is intensive, systematic, and methodical in nature, and the students

are able to learn the process quickly and feel safe as they build on previously learnt skills. The extension program also teaches advanced decoding skills, syllabification, and vocabulary building. We have had outstanding results in low progress readers and students with a specific learning disability.

***How have your students responded to the literacy program?***

The students have responded very positively to the program and many enjoy the one on one tutoring they receive. Even students who do not like reading aloud have become comfortable with it as they become aware of their own achievements and progress. As a result, the students' self-esteem has definitely improved.

***What aspects of the literacy program do the students most enjoy?***

Aside from the one on one tutoring, the students like the timed reading fluency "beat the clock" activities, the revision exercises, and the opportunity to record their own progress as they can see themselves improving and are motivated to progress further.

***Which specific aspects of the structured phonics program do you find most helpful/successful?***

The program is presented in a structured step-by-step manner with scripted lessons, and the goals of accuracy and fluency are clearly set out. All the rules and exceptions are specifically taught and it really helps students with decoding. The program can be self-paced and there are multiple opportunities to consolidate each unit through revision exercises.

***Other Comments:***

Overall, the feedback provided by the teachers was very positive. Examples of the comments made included the following:

"I cannot stress enough how using this program has saved some students from the likelihood of never succeeding at school. It has given them skills, self-esteem, and success with reading and, as a consequence, a brighter academic future." Marina Assenbruck.

"The program has helped Yule Brook College in the development of a cohesive approach to literacy. Staff and students have responded positively and with enthusiasm. The program has given students success, therefore increased confidence and a desire to improve their literacy." Marie Adams.

In addition to teacher feedback, Yule Brook provided examples of the progress that some of their students have made as a consequence of the programme.

**Case Study 1 "Harry" – from the support teacher's perspective**

It was noted by Harry's teachers that he was struggling with reading in Term 1. In May 2011, Steven was assessed and was able to read some CVC words (consonant-vowel-consonant) e.g. cat/hop/big, and identify most sounds. He started the MultiLit Word Attack Skills that same week.

As with many low progress readers, Harry started slowly, but once he had mastered 'blending three consonants' his progress was rapid. Harry progressed to Extension Manual in mid-September and by the end of the year was reading words such as captivity, delivery, hungrier and thoughtfully. His fluency is also progressing well

Harry's classroom teacher reports that he is developing well in class and has become more independent in subject work. His self-belief in his ability has improved significantly and he enjoys discussing the meaning of words and takes pride in finishing each level of MultiLit.



## Case Study 2 “John” – from the student’s perspective

You make it to Secondary School, and for whatever reasons, you’ve only just begun reading easy words. You don’t like reading aloud, and your confidence is low in most areas of literacy.

At the beginning of Year 8, you do a series of tests in spelling, reading and writing and you just know that you didn’t do too well.

After this bad start to the year, a different teacher comes up and gets you to sound out some letters and words and read aloud to them. Not too long after, they ask if you would like to learn to read better, really quickly. It’s easy to agree to this because you’ve seen the work and the books they expect you to be able to read in class.

So you start going to the Library four times a week for an individual lesson with your own reading tutor. You learn all about the sounds that letters make and how they can blend together. The practice you get with sounds and words makes it easier to tackle longer, more difficult words. Your tutor also times you reading word lists you’ve already learned. As you get faster at it you realise that you don’t have to sound the words out any more, you actually know it off by heart. Every session you do some reading as well and, although you find it difficult and tiring at first, you start to get better at it. You understand it!

In a couple of months, you are able to read more easily and you understand the meaning of words. You start using the vocabulary that you are acquiring and you and your tutor talk about your fluency and decoding words and you know what these terms indicate about your knowledge of language.

In less than 9 months of continuously doing this program you are reading words like ‘inconsequential’ and ‘advantageous’. You can decode them, define them, spell them and use the words at home with your Mum! You feel confident of your skills and suddenly, going into Year 9 doesn’t seem so daunting after all.

## Case Study 3 “Paul” – examining the data

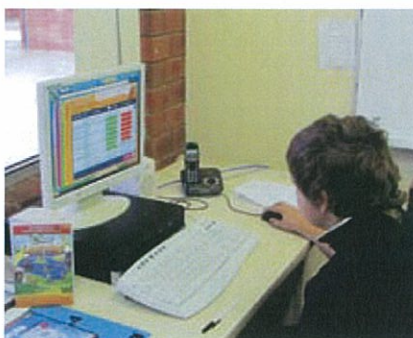
Paul completed 30 weeks of the MultiLit program over the course of 2011. He made rapid and significant gains in

his Word Attack skills, starting at Level 3.1 with words such as ‘hang’, ‘whiff’ and ‘shell’, and reaching Level 13 after 10 weeks in the program, where he was reading words such as ‘however’, ‘outback’, and ‘squirting’. Paul then progressed to the Extension Program and reached Level 12.2 by Week 3 in Term 4. At this level he was exposed to words such as ‘obtainable’ and ‘confidential’, as well as sentences and passages that included a wide variety of vocabulary, letter combinations, prefixes, and suffixes. Paul’s reading fluency also progressed significantly over this period.

Overall, Yule Brook College indicated that in 6 months students had completed up to 8 levels in their structured program; student reading ages had improved by approximately 3 chronological years; and spelling ages had improved on average by 2.5 years. Feedback from student surveys indicated that the students enjoy the extra support, perceive improvements in their literacy, have a positive attitude to learning, and are able to identify areas in which they would like further assistance.

These results are extremely positive given that it is not unusual for secondary school students with very poor literacy skills to become disenchanted with school and for their literacy levels to fall in comparison to those of their peers. The commitment made by the staff at both East Maddington Primary School and Yule Brook College to improve literacy rates for all students attending their schools appears to be working.

*Article written by Sarah Crawford, DSF Psychologist.*



*Student using the Nessy Program as part of his individual literacy program*

*Thank you to the staff and students at Yule Brook College and East Maddington Primary School.*

The current range of MultiLit programs include:

### READING TUTOR PROGRAM

The Reading Tutor Program (RTP) caters for students who have not acquired the basic skills needed to become functional readers and covers Word Attack Skills, Sight Words, and Reinforced Reading.

**Suitable for:** Year 2 through to 1st half of Year 8, Adults and EFL/ESL.

**For use by:** Schools and the MultiLit Reading Centre.

**PD:** MultiLit Reading Tutor Program (1 day or Advanced 2-day course).

### WORD ATTACK SKILLS EXTENSION PROGRAM

The Word Attack Skills Extension Program (WAS-Ex) will be of benefit to any older student who is experiencing on-going reading difficulties after mastering basic early reading skills

**Suitable for:** 2nd half of Year 3 through to Year 12, Adults and EFL/ESL.

**For use by:** Schools and the MultiLit Reading Centre.

**PD:** Word Attack Skills Extension Program (1 day).

### MINILIT PROGRAM

MiniLit is an evidence-based effective early literacy program for struggling young readers (bottom 25% of students).

**Suitable for:** Year 1, may be appropriate for “at risk” Pre-Primary, and some struggling Year 2 students.

**For use by:** Schools and the MultiLit Reading Centre.

**PD:** MiniLit Early Literacy Intervention Program (2 days).

### REINFORCED READING PROGRAM

One of the single most important things we can do to help low-progress readers is to hear them read every day, for a little as 15- 20 minutes. This program shows you how.

**Suitable for:** 1st half of Year 1 through to Year 12, Adults.

**For use by:** Schools and parents to support their children at home.

Regular workshops are run by experienced MultiLit presenters at DSF in South Perth.

For further information please email [customerservice@multilit.com](mailto:customerservice@multilit.com) or refer to the DSF website [www.dsf.net.au](http://www.dsf.net.au) or the MultiLit website <http://www.multilit.com/pd-workshop-calendar/>