



# moments

## Results revealed for InitialLit-2

By Nicola Bell

Towards the end of 2019, MultiLit was proud to release InitialLit-2 – the third program in our whole-class initial literacy instruction suite. InitialLit-2 has strong emphases on reading fluency, reading comprehension, grammar and spelling. Alongside InitialLit-F (for Foundation) and InitialLit-1 (for Year 1), the InitialLit-2 program is designed to equip students in the first few years of school with the skills to become independent readers and writers.

In the years of development before its release, InitialLit-2 was subjected to a great deal of field testing. The aim of the trialling process is to see how students respond to the instructional content, and also to check that teachers can implement the program in real classroom settings.

A trial of the program in 2019 involved 153 Year 2 students from three separate schools, all of which were implementing a final-draft version of InitialLit-2. At the start of the year, the students were assessed on their literacy development, using measures of phonological decoding (i.e., nonword reading), real word reading, spelling, passage reading accuracy, passage reading accuracy and passage reading fluency.

Over the course of the school year, the students made gains ( $p < .001$ ) on all raw score measures. These gains were associated with large effect sizes (Cohen's  $d > 1.0$ ), indicating that the differences in students' average abilities between the start of the year and the end of the year were meaningful and substantial.

Reading age equivalent gains were also impressive. In the nine months between pre- and post-test time points,



average age equivalent scores increased by 20 months for phonological decoding, 21 months for word reading, 17 months for spelling, 17 months for passage reading accuracy, and 15 months for passage reading comprehension. Although reading age equivalent values are only approximate representations of true skill, the significant increases across all measures do suggest that the students improved beyond what might be expected based only on increasing chronological age.

The observed improvement in phonological decoding ability might be considered surprising, since there is not a strong focus on teaching this in InitialLit-2. However, the cohort who participated in the 2019 research trial attended schools

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## Research published on Reading Tutor Program for students with Down Syndrome

A study by researchers from the University of Sydney and Macquarie University evaluating the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program for a group of individuals with Down syndrome has found their phonological awareness, word reading accuracy, and word spelling accuracy all improved significantly, with large effect sizes, over

the course of the 12 week program.

No statistically significant changes in literacy skills had been observed during a control period prior to the commencement of instruction.

The MultiLit Reading Tutor Program is a one-to-one reading intervention, designed for students from Year 3 onwards. It has been used in thousands

of schools in mainstream and special education settings, and forms the basis of many of our Literacy Centre programs (see page 4 for the latest analysis of Literacy Centre results).

The paper, by Lisa Lim, Joanne Arciuli, Natalie Munro and Linda Cupples, was published in *Reading and Writing* (issue 32, 2019, pp. 2179-2200).



## Staff profile: Emily Garlan

Emily Garlan has recently joined the MultiLit team in the newly created role of Sales Manager – here we find out why she was attracted to MultiLit and how she plans to use her previous experience as a teacher to help others to adopt our evidence-based literacy programs.

### MM: Tell us about your background.

EG: I was born and raised in the northern suburbs of Sydney and attended both public and private schools. I always had a passion to work with children, so decided to pursue a career in primary education. I studied at Macquarie University and was delighted to train at my own local primary schools for the practical component of my degree. After graduating with a double degree in arts and primary education, I taught in several primary schools in both Sydney and the UK, but decided to pivot from teaching and moved into a sales role with a children's publisher. In this role, I further developed my understanding and interest in early learning – it provided a great opportunity to hear direct from the teachers what they felt was required to enable best practice learning outcomes, as well as understand the alignments and disparity in the literacy resources available.

### MM: What attracted you to MultiLit?

EG: I started following the MultiLit Facebook page in early 2019. I was really impressed with the research summaries, science and vision behind the development of the programs and I knew I wanted to be involved with the positive change that MultiLit has brought to reading instruction in primary schools across Australia.

### MM: What does your role involve and how do you hope to work with schools?

EG: My role as Sales Manager is focused on building relationships with Australia's early childhood, primary, secondary and learning/literacy support teachers to ensure they have access to best practice reading instruction programs and resource options. Additionally, I will work with our amazing professional development team to build and support school partnerships with the aim to improve the quality of reading instruction throughout Australia and provide all children an equal opportunity to become skilled, lifelong readers.

### MM: How do you keep up with the latest developments in literacy?

EG: As mentioned, I follow the MultiLit Facebook page which regularly posts links and academic articles about literacy. I also follow Five from Five [now a division of MultiLit], SPELD Australia and the NSW Department of Education to stay up to date on research and studies into effective literacy instruction. I recently came across the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* which has fabulous articles that I wish I had known about and read when I was teaching. It is such a great resource of information for supporting all students in the classroom.

### MM: What do you find most rewarding about working in education?

EG: As a critical thinker, I value the evidence, initiative and proactive outcome-based approaches that align with MultiLit's rationale. I believe education is a conduit for positive societal change and feel we are in an exciting time of change in Australian schools, thanks to modern technology, knowledge, evidence and a growing community of sharing of best practice is at the fingertips of teachers and parents. It's rewarding to play any part, big or small, in closing the gap in reading for all Australian children.

## Why take-home reading matters

By Alison McMurtrie

Whether we are learning to play the piano, kick a ball or learning to read, there is no doubt that success breeds further confidence and motivation. Imagine a class of eager-beaver Foundation children, full of anticipation about learning to read and write! Their teacher has read the research and knows the best way to teach reading. She (or he) understands the importance of teaching the code explicitly and systematically. There are beginning to be some light bulb moments as children realise they can actually work out a word by applying sounds to letters. Eureka! There is a sense of "I can do it!". And then books are sent home for home reading.

Suddenly all the good work is in danger of being undone. Instead of home readers aligning to what children are learning about the code, schools are sending home levelled readers. What is wrong with that, you may ask? There are loads of

them in the classroom; they have always been sent home; parents expect them.

But when a levelled reader is presented to a young child who has learned only a handful of letter-sound correspondences, they will not be able to work out a word with more complex code. Words such as 'aeroplane' or 'elephant' will pose a tremendous challenge if children only have eight or 10 letter-sound correspondences under their belt. They are likely to stare at such words blankly until prompts such as "Look at the picture", or "What do you think that word might be? Have a guess", or "Look at the first letter" are offered. The child is now thrown into reading uncertainty. Why bother to learn the sounds when guessing is the way to go? I thought I was getting it, but now I don't know! They lose confidence in the system.

We need to appreciate that the type of words used in a levelled reader do not fit in with a systematic, explicit phonic

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that implemented InitialLit–F and InitialLit–1 in 2017 and 2018, respectively. Both of these programs emphasise systematic synthetic phonics instruction, which means the students started InitialLit–2 with strong skills in phonological decoding.

The gain in nonword reading ability might therefore be due to the continued application of those decoding skills to reading comprehension, reading fluency and spelling tasks. As such, the results highlight the importance of a comprehensive program for beginning readers – one in which students develop and then build on foundational literacy skills. The three programs in the InitialLit suite fit this purpose very well.

The above results from our preliminary trial of InitialLit–2 are very promising, and we look forward to seeing the results of a more formal research trial of the program in 2020.

A full description of the results from the 2019 InitialLit–2 trial, conducted by the MultiLit Research Unit, is available on the MultiLit website: <https://multilit.com/programs/initiallit>.

approach to reading instruction. They undermine the very thing we are trying to teach well, which is the critical concept that reading is about paying attention to the printed word and applying our knowledge of the code to work words out. This is what good readers do and is supported by what we know about how the brain learns to read. Yes, reading will be slow and effortful at first for most young children, but with practice and good instruction the process will become more automatic as they progress through the early years. Eventually (usually some time during Year 1), children will know enough of the code to work out unfamiliar words and will be able to read any book of their choice.

Until they reach that point, they need carefully sequenced decodable readers to take home that allow them to proudly show Mum, Dad, Nan or big sister how they can, indeed, read the words on the page. This is a much more desirable situation than children giving the illusion of reading as they guess (or memorise) their way through an early levelled reader, only to find that, down the track, when text becomes more difficult and is not supported by pictures, they need intensive reading support.

## Positive Teaching methods receive support from large-scale US study

In a landmark confirmatory study published in 2020, researchers in the US spent three years observing 2356 students from K to Year 6. Dr Paul Caldarella and his colleagues found that training teachers in how to use praise effectively to reinforce appropriate classroom behaviour and to minimise their use of reprimands led to substantially higher levels of engagement by students. You can read a brief report here:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/01/200129091430.htm>

and the full paper here:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01443410.2020.1711872>

Sound familiar? That's because these are the very skills that we advocate and teach at MultiLit as the backbone of all of our programs. We call it Positive Teaching. In order to teach effectively, it is essential to have good classroom behaviour management skills so that students remain engaged throughout the lesson.

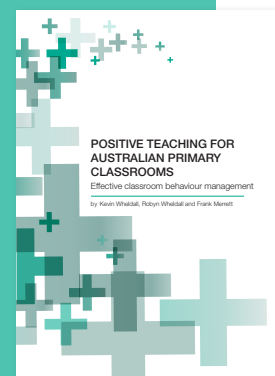
The new online training course in Positive Teaching will be available from MultiLit shortly. To accompany the course, Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Wheldall have revised and rewritten a new edition of an earlier text. Their new

book, entitled *Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Classrooms*, will be released in May.

Is it any good? Well, let's leave the last word to Dr Kelly-Ann Allen, treasurer of the Australian College of Educational and Developmental Psychologists and currently editor of the *Educational and Developmental Psychologist*.

“Challenging behaviour in the classroom is common, but less common are teachers who feel confident and equipped to tackle varying student needs and behaviours. Every teacher wants the time to teach and build important relationships with their students. Disruptive behaviours can steal this time and *Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Classrooms* is a resource that gives it back. This book is suitable for all teachers, needed for all students, and essential for the inclusion in every tertiary teacher training program in the country. Every school needs positive teachers.”

To register your interest in the Positive Teaching eLearning Modules or purchasing the book, *Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Classrooms*, please email [multilit@multilit.com](mailto:multilit@multilit.com).



This means that schools making the switch to InitialLit or any other code-based program will need to invest in a large selection of decodable reading books so that there are suitable books for reading in class and for taking home. Transitioning from a whole-language approach to a more scientific approach to reading involves looking at everything that happens around literacy, including what is being read at home. Providing suitable home readers (and in some cases, for use in reading groups), is, in our experience, often the missing piece of the puzzle. Children need practice that is closely aligned to instruction.

One more thing: parents should always be encouraged to read vocabulary-rich storybooks to their child. In this way, children will be getting the best of all worlds: they will be receiving the vital practice they need to become proficient, accurate readers, as well as being exposed to great children's literature, cultivating a love of books more generally.

For further information about effective reading instruction, visit [www.fivefromfive.org.au](http://www.fivefromfive.org.au) and [multilit.com](http://multilit.com).

Alison McMurtrie is product development manager, MultiLit.



# Great results from the MultiLit Literacy Centre

A recent study by the MultiLit Research Unit has confirmed that students undertaking the Reading Tutor Program (RTP) at MultiLit Literacy Centres make great gains after only two terms of tutoring, usually for just two 50-minute sessions per week.

The analyses included assessment results from 164 students who attended tutoring in the last five years (2015 to 2019). All were new to the Literacy Centre and were in Years 3 through 6. The majority (61%) attended sessions in person, rather than via online lessons (28%) or a combination (11%).

The results showed that the students made significant improvements in their reading skills. In fact, they made average 'age equivalent' gains of between 11 and 18 months on all literacy measures – far exceeding the actual duration of instruction (i.e., approximately 6 months).

The biggest improvement was in decoding ability, as measured by nonword reading accuracy. To decode unfamiliar words, readers need to be familiar with the relationships between letters and sounds. Students in the study made an average of 18 months' progress on this measure, which represents a huge acceleration in the speed of learning these foundational skills.

Students also made an average of 11 months' progress in reading comprehension ability. This finding was very pleasing to see, since the ultimate goal of decoding print is, after all, to understand the text meaning.

Interestingly, the results from this recent set of analyses suggest that our online and face-to-face students progressed similarly over the two terms. This means parents can expect good outcomes regardless of the mode by which the program is delivered.

On the whole, the results provide evidence for the RTP program's effectiveness, either when delivered online, or when it is delivered in person at one of MultiLit's two Literacy Centre locations.

## Summary of average progress made by Literacy Centre students over two terms

- 13 months gain in word reading
- 13 months gain in spelling
- 18 months gain in decoding (i.e., nonword reading)
- 13 months gain in passage reading accuracy
- 11 months gain in passage reading comprehension

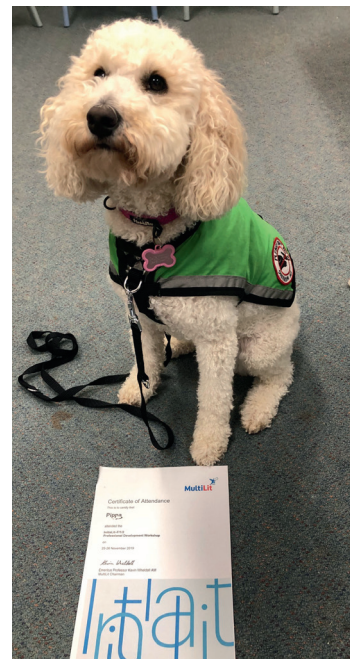
## Paws, prompt and praise

By John Warburton

One of our InitialLit workshops late last year was attended by an unusual trainee.

Pippa, a diabetic-service dog, accompanied her human to a two-day workshop in Cummins, South Australia, and proved to be so attentive and well-mannered that she was presented with a certificate at the completion of the session.

We hope Pippa will enjoy applying her new-found literacy skills as her school begins implementing InitialLit this year.



Pippa waiting for her PAT-R

## Expressions of interest now open for NSW Phonics Screening Check trial

In Term 3, NSW government schools will be trialling the Phonics Screening Check – a short, simple assessment that tells teachers how students are progressing in blending sounds together to read words. Conducted by classroom teachers, the check takes 5-7 minutes per student. Teachers then analyse the results and plan for any additional support that students might require.

Schools with Year 1 students can participate in the trial by completing an online Expression of Interest at <https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5452768/phonics-check-trial>. They will be provided with professional learning on how to administer the check and analyse results.

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