



moments

MultiLit visits Christmas Island

By John Warburton

At the beginning of Term 1, MultiLit was fortunate enough to be invited to Christmas Island District High School to train teachers and education assistants in the small-group MacqLit reading intervention.

This remote outpost of the Western Australian educational system lies 2600km northwest of Perth and more than 1500km from the closest point on the Australian mainland. Java, by contrast, is only 350km to the north. The nearest Australian school to Christmas Island is on the even more remote Cocos Islands, an hour's flight to the west.

Serving a community of just under 2000 people, Christmas Island's only school has an enrolment of about 270 students from pre-Foundation to Year 12. Reflecting the cultural diversity of the island's population, most of the students speak a language other than English at home. Accordingly, although English is the school's instructional language, there is also a focus on the development and promotion of Mandarin and Bahasa Malay, the languages of the two largest cultural groups on the island.

Despite – or perhaps because of – its remoteness, the school is extremely well-resourced. Many of its students go on to university, usually in Perth, which is connected via twice-weekly flights. Perth is also the source for most of the school's teaching staff, many of whom end up staying considerably longer than they originally envisaged, no doubt at least in part because of the island's relaxed lifestyle and strong sense of community. Education assistants (teacher aides), who will be responsible for delivering MacqLit lessons, are drawn from the local community.

continued on page 3



Reflecting the cultural diversity of the island's population, most of the students speak a language other than English at home



Christmas Island District High School is trilingual; staff at the conclusion of their MacqLit training

Sharing the Australian experience with The Reading League

By Alison McMurtrie

Dr Alison Madelaine, Senior Research Fellow, MultiLit Research Unit, and I were fortunate to attend the second annual conference of The Reading League which took place at the end of October 2018 in Syracuse, upstate New York. In spite of the dreadful jetlag, we enjoyed our time immensely!

The Reading League is a young, dynamic organisation established to “advance the awareness, understanding and use of evidence-based reading instruction”. Over the course of just

three years, this organisation has grown a membership base of thousands of teachers and other professionals working in the field of reading. It has established a reputation for promoting exemplary reading instruction through professional development events, partnering with schools and ensuring quality knowledge is easily accessible to teachers. Meeting Dr Maria Murray, The Reading League's founder and CEO, and her team was certainly an inspiration and a highlight of the conference.

On arriving, we found there were just five Australians in

...continued from page 1

attendance out of the 500-plus delegates and we were given the warmest of welcomes. It wasn't long before we realised we have much in common with our American colleagues. Like us, they have been battling for decades to effect change in the way early reading is taught in their schools. Like us, they have encouraging pockets of exemplary practice, but this is certainly not the norm. The research to practice gap in American schools seems to be as wide as it is in Australian schools. The conference theme was 'Advancing Evidence Into Practice: Effective Reading Instruction Begins With US'. This universal spirit of determination to make a difference to the students we teach was stressed time and again through the different presentations, incidental conversations and other conference activities.

The keynote speaker was Dr Louisa Moats, who needed no introduction to the assembled audience. Dr Moats has published widely and has an extraordinary ability to communicate complex concepts in an accessible way, enabling thousands of teachers to 'do better'. I was lucky enough to attend her presentations when she was in Australia in 2015 and it was a privilege to have another opportunity to hear her speak. This time, her address focused on her own professional journey, explaining how her understanding of the reading process has evolved over several decades. She spoke about the people who influenced her thinking, and her own contribution to practice and policy. It was a wonderful synopsis of the history of reading research over the last 40 years from the perspective of a leader in the field. Her reflections were at times humorous (her short-lived career as a singer/songwriter!), hard-hitting (her frustrations at the lack of application of the research), and frequently insightful (the enlightening moment when she was taught the complex structure of the English language, 10 years into her career). At the end of her presentation, Louisa was awarded the inaugural Benita A. Blachman Award for Advancing Evidence into Practice.

I also attended sessions by Dr Steve Dykstra, a psychologist who came to the reading debate because he met so many children who, in addition to complex mental health challenges, presented with reading difficulties and academic failure. He spoke about the role of reading and language in the development of children who have experienced trauma. In another session, he presented on how to judge research without getting 'put off' by the stats – navigating a research paper can be bamboozling for the uninitiated! This was an entertaining presentation with a practical,



(from left) Dr Alison Madelaine, Dr Louisa Moats, Mandy Nayton (DSF-SPELD, Perth) and Alison McMurtrie

serious message about how to read research with a critical mind, aware of the limitations and flaws of any study.

Alison and I had the opportunity to present at one of the workshops on the topic, 'Effective Initial Instruction in Reading: An Australian Perspective'. We spoke about the Australian landscape regarding reading instruction, teacher knowledge, and reported on data gathered in our InitialLit trials. There was particular interest in our InitialLit Readers, as American schools are also examining the important role of decodables in early reading. We enjoyed engaging with our audience.

During the conference Maria Murray shared the excellent news that The Reading League had been awarded a large grant, which will enable them to significantly increase their impact by training teachers and expanding their work with schools. There are exciting times ahead.

We felt very fortunate to have spent a couple of days enjoying the buzz and energy of committed and passionate educators and look forward to seeing The Reading League go from strength to strength. We finished our time away with three fantastic days in New York City which was the icing on the cake!

For further information and to join, do visit The Reading League website: www.thereadingleague.org. Membership is free.

Alison McMurtrie is product development manager, MultiLit.

HSC success

At MultiLit, we always love to hear about the achievements of our former students, and we were thrilled to receive this email from a parent of one of these students following the announcement of the 2018 HSC results in NSW (shared here with permission).

"I first had my son assessed by MultiLit on 4 March 2014 at age 13.10 years of age. He was in Year 8.

The Neale Analysis of Reading Ability showed his reading accuracy to be the equivalent of a 9.2 year old, and his comprehension that of a 10.4 year old. He attended the Literacy Centre for three terms.

When he finished at MultiLit he told me it was the most beneficial program he had been through.

We have just received his HSC results and could not be happier.

English Advanced	84/100
English Extension	40/50
Ancient History	88/100
Modern History	82/100
History Extension	42/50
Visual Arts	95/100

His ATAR: 88. He wants to be a teacher, and is now enrolled in the Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts at Macquarie University. **Thank you, thank you, thank you.**"

InitialLit in the Pilbara

By Simmone Pogorzelski

Wickham Primary, a small community school located 1500km north of Perth in the Pilbara region of Western Australia has a huge community spirit, as evidenced by one of the best school songs I've ever heard (www.wickhamprimaryschool.wa.edu.au/index.php). What Wickham Primary School lacks in size and number is more than compensated for by the energy of the principal, Mark Donaldson, and the wonderful teaching staff who have created a rich and supportive environment in which the children are excited and engaged about learning.

In November last year, the school hosted a two-day workshop to train their Pre-Primary and Year 1/2 teachers in our Tier 1 whole-class reading and spelling program, InitialLit. The teachers enthusiastically embraced the training, which culminated in a visit to their own Pre-Primary classroom where teacher Cynthia Donaldson modelled a dynamic and fast-paced InitialLit phonics lesson.

Cynthia had attended InitialLit training in Perth at the beginning of the school year and was more than happy to show off the skills her young students had mastered by the end of the program. Writing samples showing the broader application of these skills learnt as part of the reading and spelling program were proudly displayed around the room.

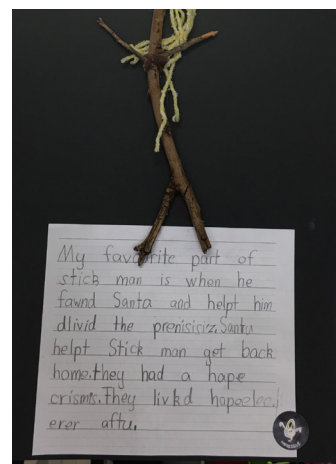
"InitialLit has been a comprehensive engaging phonics program which has been methodical and fun to implement within my Pre-Primary classroom this year. The program is well-resourced, students enjoy it and assessment through Progress Monitoring and Cumulative Reviews informs planning. I have been impressed with the decodable readers, and they are engaging and interesting for the students. We have achieved outstanding results and highly recommended InitialLit to schools that are looking for an engaging and innovative program that achieves results for students," Cynthia says.

As of the beginning of 2019, Wickham has now implemented a suite of MultiLit programs, including PreLit, InitialLit, MiniLit and MacqLit. A recent email from Mark reports that the school has grown significantly since last year, with numbers increasing to 352 students. News is travelling fast in the Pilbara Region – Wickham Primary School is the place to be!

Simmone Pogorzelski is product development manager, based in MultiLit's Perth office.



Cynthia Donaldson, Simmone Pogorzelski and Mark Donaldson



...continued from page 1

Of course it is impossible to write about Christmas Island without mentioning its extraordinary wildlife, which has been described by Sir David Attenborough as one of the wonders of the natural world. Red crabs are everywhere, carpeting the forest floor even outside the peak migration season, turning the roads into obstacle courses. Also ubiquitous are the smaller, shyer blue crabs and the giant (and fortunately very timid) robber crabs. Frigate birds ceaselessly patrol the skies above the coastline, hoping to ambush seabirds returning to land with their catch, while the fringing reefs teem with colourful sea life.

Apart from wildlife, the island is perhaps best known to mainlanders as the

location of one of Australia's offshore detention centres. Closed in September last year, by the time of MultiLit's visit in late January there were already rumours that the centre would soon be re-opened – rumours that proved to be accurate just a couple of weeks later.

MultiLit is delighted that MacqLit was selected by Christmas Island District High School to help deliver literacy support and would like to thank the staff for their hospitality and generosity. We wish them all the best with MacqLit and very much hope we might be invited back one day for further training!

John Warburton is a MultiLit trainer.

Supporting inclusive education

By Emily Ong

Not only does MultiLit have a mission to ensure that every Australian child learns to read, the company is philanthropic at heart. Last year, Pal Buddhist School (PBS), a not-for-profit secular school approached MultiLit directors, Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM and Dr Robyn Wheldall for sponsorship of raffle prizes at their November fundraising event, ‘Prince Siddhartha’s Gala by the Harbour’, which aimed to raise vital funds for the school to purchase a block of land, as it is outgrowing its current small rented premises in the suburb of Canley Vale in Sydney’s south-west. Australia’s much-loved hero in neurosurgery, Professor Charlie Teo AM, was patron of the event, which was held at Sydney’s Hyatt Regency Hotel. Without hesitation, Professor Wheldall and Dr Wheldall saw the way MultiLit and PBS aligned in vision, values and contribution to the society and thus generously donated a 10-week one-on-one individual tutoring program, and a full set of InitialLit–F and InitialLit–1 Readers for the event.

With great thanks to MultiLit’s donations, along with the support and donation of other sponsors and benefactors, the event raised a total of just over \$160,000 for the school land.

Pal Buddhist School, founded in 2013 by Mr Panha Pal, is Australia’s first and only primary and secondary Buddhist School. The school bases its culture and philosophy of guiding a new generation of children to possess a solid moral compass based on wisdom, as well as the diligence



Professor Charlie Teo (middle right) with PBS founding principal Panha Pal (left) and media representatives

to succeed academically. The school upholds that the key to creating resilient and fruitful people to lead and serve society are those who embrace the ‘four sublime virtues’ – compassion, loving-kindness, selfless joy and equanimity (calmness and composure especially in stressful situations).

Supporting the school through this event not only allows MultiLit to extend its educational mission further in the Australian community, but it also demonstrates the strength in unity: that the core of each organisation’s heart and work lies in the rewards of seeing a better version of society for tomorrow ... and the key to it is inclusive, holistic education.

Emily Ong is a MultiLit Literacy Centre tutor.

Bringing school and community together

Long-time MultiLit advocate Bernadette Kelly was recently awarded an ‘Excellence in Vocational Service’ award by the Rotary Club of Ballina-on-Richmond, for her tireless work as a Learning Support Teacher at Ballina Public School on the NSW North Coast, including running a volunteer program to involve members of the community in the delivery of the Reading Tutor Program.

“The award is the direct result of my discovering MultiLit, and needing to find enough tutors to train so no low-progress reader is left behind. Who knew you could be awarded for bringing your local community into your local school to reap the mutual reward that comes from teaching the most vulnerable children of the next generation to read. It is a joy and a privilege to facilitate this,” Kelly says.

She is quick to attribute the program’s success to the volunteers.

“Once again, we are seeing astonishing results in our Reading Tutor Program (RTP) kids this year. One boy was reading at a low Kindergarten level and barely looking up from the ground or speaking to anyone when he arrived in Year 6 at our school from a refuge this year. His attendance was erratic, and he only attempted the Placement Test after I showed him the data of so many other kids on the RTP over past years, and convincing him this would happen for him too.

“Three terms on, and he now holds his head high. His teacher told me that she can’t shut him up in class and he wrote (yes, wrote – she couldn’t get him to write anything for two terms!) in his Year 6 reflection for the yearbook that the best things about Year 6 have been getting better at reading and making friends. Thanks MultiLit!”



Chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall

Editor

Freya Purnell

Address

Suite 2, Level 3
75 Talavera Road,
Macquarie Park NSW 2113

Phone

1300 55 99 19

Fax

(02) 9888 3818

Email

multilit@multilit.com

Website

www.multilit.com

MultiLit® is a registered trademark. MultiLit is a research initiative of Macquarie University. © MultiLit 2019.

Reproduction in whole permitted for distribution to your networks.