moments

University research changes lives:
MultiLit in new video series from Universities Australia

MultiLit was recently chosen to feature in an award-winning video series created by Universities Australia. The #UniResearchChangesLives campaign was initiated in 2018 to highlight some of the tens of thousands of university researchers working on life-changing research. The latest series of videos was launched at Parliament House in Canberra on 23 July 2019 by Education Minister Dan Tehan.

The video features Dr Robyn Wheldall, MultiLit founding director, deputy director of the MultiLit Research Unit, and honorary research fellow of Macquarie University, together with Alice and Matilda, a parent and student from our Literacy Centre, who kindly agreed to share their MultiLit experience.

"MultiLit was thrilled to be honoured in this way by Universities Australia. We would like to acknowledge the support of Macquarie University as the incubator for MultiLit when it began in 1995. Stories like Matilda's are what keep driving us forward in our mission to ensure that all children learn to read," said Dr Wheldall.

On the launch, Universities Australia CEO Catriona Jackson said these stories showed how profoundly the work of university researchers improves the lives of everyday Australians.

"From IVF to a cervical cancer vaccine and countless other life-saving advances, Australian researchers have led extraordinary developments that have changed the world.

"Over three decades, Australian university researchers have tested, refined, and continued to enhance a world-leading program to help young children who have fallen behind on literacy. One of the stars of this new series of videos is young Matilda – who used to struggle with literacy but
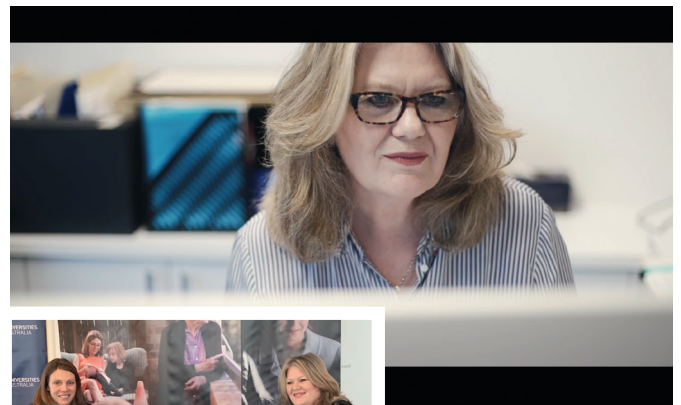
(above) A still from the video; (left) Alice Ilaug, Minister Dan Tehan, Matilda Ilaug, Professor Felicity Baker, and Dr Robyn Wheldall

thanks to this program is now an avid reader and reads to her younger brother. It's amazing what Matilda and her Mum Alice have achieved, with the tools developed by the MultiLit program founded at Macquarie University by Professor Kevin [Wheldall] and [Dr] Robyn Wheldall.

"This research has transformed the lives of tens of thousands of Australian children who would otherwise have fallen years behind their classmates."

Visit **www.uniresearchchangeslives.com.au** to see the video.

Dr Jennifer Buckingham and Five from Five join the MultiLit family

Long-time associate of MultiLit, Dr Jennifer Buckingham, joined the team in May as senior research fellow and director of strategy.

Buckingham completed her PhD on effective instruction for struggling readers under the supervision of Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Wheldall, co-founders and directors of MultiLit.

She previously spent two decades with the Centre for Independent Studies, as a research fellow and founder of the Five from Five project. Buckingham is also a board member of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, and has provided advice on reading instruction and policy to the NSW,

Research briefing: MacqLit in schools

By Nicola Bell and Kevin Wheldall

MacqLit, or the 'Macquarie Literacy Program', was designed to target literacy skills in readers who have not shown adequate progress during the first few years of school. The program is typically delivered to small groups of four or five students in Year 3 and above. As such, it's seen as the first line of support for those in middle primary school, who are struggling to learn to read despite exposure to good whole-class instruction.

Since the release of MacqLit in 2016, we have loved hearing from teachers who have implemented the program and found it successful. However, as a company founded on delivering evidence-based programs, MultiLit has also been very keen to back up this positive anecdotal feedback with hard data. With that in mind, we've recently taken a close look at the data collected while running MacqLit programs in schools across Sydney.

The analysis included 292 students, from Years 3 through 6, who attended MacqLit at school for two terms. Trained MultiLit tutors delivered the program for roughly four hours per week during the semester, and trained MultiLit testers collected the assessment results at the beginning and end of the program.

According to the raw score results, the students made substantial and statistically significant gains across the semester in word reading accuracy, nonword reading accuracy, spelling accuracy, passage reading fluency, passage reading accuracy, and reading comprehension. These improvements were all associated with large effect sizes.

Where standardised scores were available (i.e., for measures of nonword reading accuracy, passage reading accuracy and reading comprehension), the results again indicated that improvements were statistically significant. Critically though, using standardised scores shows that, not only did the students' scores improve, but they improved relative to what would be expected just based on age-related change.

One of the biggest improvements was in students' nonword reading ability. At the start of the program, the average reading age of the group was 7 years, 3 months. By the end, they had made a huge leap to 9 years, 1 month. Although reading ages give only a crude indication of the developmental stage at which a child is performing, an improvement roughly equivalent to 22 months is still very positive to see. Nonword reading performance indexes skills in how well a reader can decode unfamiliar words, using knowledge of letter-sound correspondences. Given how important these skills are to overall reading comprehension, it's pleasing to note that such improvements are associated with exposure to a semester's worth of MacqLit instruction.

It's important to note that, for these newest analyses, only students receiving MacqLit instruction were included, meaning there was no control group with which to compare our results. However, the findings are supported by two small randomised control trial (RCT) studies, which were conducted in 2014 with an earlier iteration of the MacqLit program. Hence, based on all the available research – including the newest analyses reported above – there is strong evidence that MacqLit is an effective program to target the reading skills of older low-progress readers.

Launch of InitiaLit–2 completes program suite

Over the last five years, the MultiLit Product Development team has been hard at work creating InitiaLit, our whole-class program for initial instruction in literacy. That work will culminate in the release of InitiaLit–2 in November 2019, completing the three-year program suite.

As by Year 2 many children are becoming more independent readers, InitiaLit–2 takes a slightly broader approach than the previous two years, covering four components:

- Spelling, teaching the advanced alphabetic code, as well as new spelling rules and morphological concepts.

- Reading comprehension and fluency, with explicit instruction on comprehension strategies and how they should be applied to different types of text, and reading fluency practice.

- Grammar, teaching key grammatical features and how to apply them to a writing task.

- Vocabulary, oral language and comprehension, through detailed lessons on 15 popular children's literature titles. Two novel studies are also included for use towards the end of the year.

To date, over 350 schools have embraced the InitiaLit program, and we look forward to welcoming many more. We have recently established a Facebook group, InitiaLit Community, for teachers and schools looking to share information about their experiences implementing InitiaLit. To find out more about InitiaLit, including the forthcoming release of InitiaLit–2, please visit www.multilit.com/initialit or email multilit@multilit.com.

Online programs now available during school hours
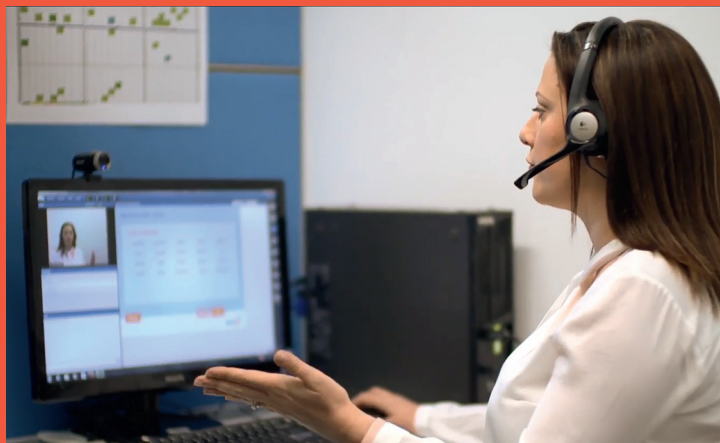
Following an upgrade to a more sophisticated and user-friendly online lesson platform, MultiLit Literacy Centres can now offer literacy intervention programs for primary and secondary students (Year 3 and above) at school during school hours. Assessment, monitoring and reporting are included as part of the tuition service.

The service is ideal for schools that need additional one-on-one (Tier 3) support for students requiring intensive intervention, and for students who cannot attend a Literacy Centre for face-to-face lessons due to distance or other logistical constraints.

One-to-one instruction with experienced, qualified tutors is available for students either two, three or four times a week. Consultation and advice regarding ongoing student learning needs for supervising school staff is also provided by MultiLit staff as part of this online lesson service.

For more information about online literacy programs, call 1300 55 99 19 or email literacy.centre@multilit.com.

Tales from the MultiLit Literacy Centre

By Kevin Wheldall

There's a seven year-old boy I know very well, who was just starting Year 2 in 2018, and who felt really bad about himself. His mother tells the story of one morning when he refused to go to school. The boy said he was stupid, he'd never learn to read properly, he was the worst reader in his class (he wasn't), he'd never get a job, and so he'd never be able to buy a house. He sobbed at the terrible future he envisaged for himself. It broke his mum's heart.

So he came to the MultiLit Literacy Centre and did most of his sessions online. His initial assessment showed that he was not nearly as bad at reading as he thought himself to be, but he was certainly behind and struggling.

I'd love to be able to tell you how he immediately loved MultiLit but he didn't.

He tried to get out of it whenever he could; tantrums, tummy aches, the lot. But Mum and his excellent MultiLit tutor persevered and he slowly began to enjoy it – when he wasn't trying to get out of doing it.

He started to make great progress, also helped by a series of comic books about 'Dogman', which he adored. He actually began to read them by himself. And his confidence soared.

After about three terms, I had a chat with him and asked him how he was getting along with his reading.

"Great," he said. "In fact, you know I'm probably the best reader in the class now."

I was delighted to hear this but was not totally convinced. "Really? That's great," I said. "What makes you think you are the best reader in your class?"

"Well," he said. "When the other kids all have to do work, my teacher asks me to come out and read to her."

Who would have the heart to disabuse him of this? Recently, he was asked to read in Assembly which he did with aplomb. He said it was one of the best days in his life.

From the Twittersphere

We found this on Twitter recently and thought we'd share it with you.

One of my first graders lost his [mum] two years ago, as did I. On Wednesday he gave me a handwritten card saying both of our [mums] are angels together. Through tears, I tell him I'm having trouble reading it. He says to me, "Just sound it out."

Victorian, South Australian and federal governments.

Five from Five was launched in 2016 with the aim of providing information on evidence-based reading instruction to a wide audience. It began with a website and the *Read About It* report, and since then, has held multiple events with government ministers and international speakers, as well as running Phonics Roadshows around Australia. Five from Five now engages with thousands of teachers around the world via social media, and has been advocating strongly for the adoption of the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check.

Previously supported by the Centre for Independent Studies, Five from Five has now been acquired by MultiLit, which will continue to support the work of this important initiative under the leadership of Dr Buckingham.

"Five from Five is a valued source of information and advice for many teachers, school leaders, parents and policy developers, who are hungry for evidence-based resources. It is fantastic that MultiLit has decided to support the Five from Five project into the future – it seems to me like the ideal home for it," said Buckingham.

"MultiLit has always played an important advocacy and education role in publishing research that supports

effective reading instruction," said Iain Rothwell, MultiLit director. "With Five from Five, we can now continue this role on a much broader scale, providing resources that inform policy and key decision-makers in school education."

One of Five from Five's first activities in its new 'home' has been the release of *Shortchanged: Preparation to teach reading in initial teacher education*, a report by Dr Buckingham and Dr Linda Meeks on how literacy instruction is being addressed in education degrees around the country, which has attracted nationwide media attention.

Visit the Five from Five website at **www.fivefromfive.org.au**.

MultiLit moments

MultiLit expands to the west

MultiLit has opened a new Perth office and training facility at Suite 1, Level 14, 256 Adelaide Terrace in Perth. Based in the Perth office will be a product development team headed by Simmone Pogorzelski, product development manager, Western Australia. To celebrate the opening of the new office, MultiLit held a cocktail party at the very hip Wolf Lane bar in April to coincide with the 2nd DSF Language, Literacy and Learning conference. "Our team in the new Perth office provides us with local capability to train and support Western Australian schools across the full suite of MultiLit programs," said Iain Rothwell, MultiLit director. We look forward to supporting the many advocates of evidence-based literacy instruction in the west.

Alison McMurtrie & Simmone Pogorzelski

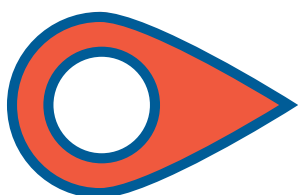Jennifer Buckingham, Alison Madelaine & Jodie Watson

Vanessa Comito, Simone Cartwright, Kristie Sadowski, and Antoinette Buiks

Nicola Bell & Colette Read

Roslyn & Bob Neilson

Susan Main, Kathleen Ward & Lorraine Hammond

On the move

MultiLit's head office and Macquarie Park Literacy Centre is on the move. From Monday 12 August, we will be in new premises located at:

Suite 2, Level 7, Building C, 11 Talavera Road, Macquarie Park.

All other contact details remain the same.

Thought on reading for children

By Mark Seidenberg

"Whereas talking with children guarantees that they will learn to speak (in the absence of pathological interference), reading to children does not guarantee that they will read. Children learn a spoken language through exposure and use, but reading requires systematic guidance and feedback, more than occurs in casual reading to children. In short, reading to children is not the same as teaching children to read. I emphasise this point because the mantra about reading to children makes it seem that this is all that is required. A child who has difficulty learning to read therefore must not have been read to enough. Among the first questions that will be asked of the parents of a child who is struggling is whether they read to the child and if there are books in the home. Reading to children is important but not sufficient; some children benefit from it, some quite a lot, but it neither obviates the role of instruction nor vaccinates against dyslexia. Children who are read to until the cow jumps over the moon can still have difficulty in becoming readers."

Where are they now?

Are you or do you know a former MultiLit student, who attended one of our Literacy Centres or a school-based program? In 2020, MultiLit will celebrate its 25th anniversary, and we would love to hear from past students about their experiences and achievements for a special anniversary project. We are also seeking students from the original AIM and FAST programs at Macquarie University Special Education Centre. If you are interested in being involved, please email freya.purnell@multilit.com.