



# MultiLit

A newsletter for parents and teachers

August 2020

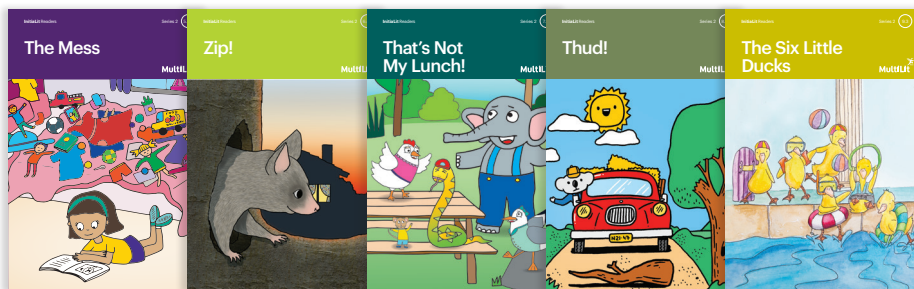
# moments

## New decodable readers hot off the press



MultiLit has launched a long-awaited parallel series of InitialLit Readers Levels 1-9. Ideal for students in their first year of school, these books are designed to be used alongside the InitialLit–Foundation program, for home reading, or with other synthetic phonics programs to give students additional practice as their decoding skills develop.

Created by our talented in-house Product Development team and Australian illustrators, InitialLit Readers Levels 1-9 Series 2 includes 60 decodable books following the InitialLit sequence of sounds. The series has both fiction and non-fiction titles, with colourful and charming illustrations to engage and entertain children as they learn to read. Readers can be purchased by schools, parents and allied health professionals. To find out more and to order, visit <https://multilit.com/programs/initiallit-readers/>.



## More success from the MultiLit Literacy Centre

By Dr Nicola Bell

Earlier this year, the MultiLit Research Unit (MRU) took a close look at how students in the Literacy Centre improved after two terms of instruction in the Reading Tutor Program. (For a summary of the results, see the March 2020 issue of *MultiLit Moments*.) More recently, the MRU has had the opportunity to see how our younger Literacy Centre students have responded to the MiniLit program.

These analyses included results from 47 students who received MiniLit tutoring between 2015 and 2019. All the students were in Kindy, Year 1 or Year 2, and they were newly enrolled at the time of their first assessment. Their tutoring was conducted in-centre, with the vast majority (94%) of students attending two sessions per week.

At the beginning of their program, all students were assessed on their skills in word reading accuracy, word reading fluency, nonword reading accuracy, spelling, and phonological awareness. To gauge progress, they were assessed again after

two 10-week terms in MiniLit, and these 'post-test' results were compared with those from 'pre-test'.

Like our older students, those in the MiniLit program made especially good gains (approximately 12 months' worth) on nonword reading accuracy. Scores on this measure represent a reader's ability to decode unfamiliar words, based on knowledge of letter-sound relationships. Such skills are foundational to broader text reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension.

As can be seen in Figure 1 (page 3), the majority of students entered the MiniLit program with phonological decoding scores that were in the bottom quartile (at pre-test).

After two terms of instruction, there is a clear shift in students moving from the bottom quartile (i.e.,  $\leq 25$ th percentile) to the middle range (26-74th percentile) and even the upper quartile ( $\geq 75$ th percentile). The group's decoding skills therefore didn't just improve over time – they improved over time beyond what you would expect of their same-aged peers.

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# Why is classroom behaviour management important?

By Micaela Rafferty and Jill Hellemans

Teaching is a complex business. Teachers are not only responsible for the academic progress of their students, but also their social and emotional well-being. We know that without effective classroom behaviour management strategies in place, teaching becomes all the more exhausting. When classrooms become chaotic and disorderly environments, teachers struggle to teach and students struggle to learn. Simply put, when it comes to mismanaged classroom behaviour problems, everyone suffers.

Poor classroom management and challenging student behaviour can have widespread, negative impacts on schools. Challenging behaviours can become persistent barriers to learning and participation, and this impacts the quality of life of the individual engaging in those behaviours, as well as those attempting to support the individual with behaviours of concern. Poor student behaviour and low student engagement and motivation can not only overwhelm teachers but can easily lead to less satisfaction in their role and increased likelihood that they resign from their positions (Mooney et al., 2008). Effective classroom and behaviour management techniques could very well be the most critical skillset a teacher has – not only to enhance student achievement but also to save their sanity!

Studies consistently show that effective classroom behaviour management is the necessary foundation for effective teaching and learning to take place (Marzano et al., 2003; Oliver, 2011). But creating well-managed classrooms is not a simple endeavour. It requires time and effort and of course a battery of effective strategies. Although school leaders may promote and employ school-wide approaches to behaviour management, without explicit teacher training that includes opportunities for practice and feedback, these specific skills may not filter into the classroom (Goss, 2017). Ultimately, it is the teacher who is responsible for creating an appropriate classroom environment that promotes participation and learning.

Further evident in the literature is the notion that problematic student behaviour within classrooms and schools relates heavily to issues such as teacher stress and burnout, job dissatisfaction, negative teacher perceptions, teacher attrition rates, hostile school environments and reduced student engagement (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Buchanan, 2011; Eick, 2012; Nobile et al., 2016; Oliver et al., 2019). Teachers claim to find managing classroom behaviour and student motivation as two of the most difficult aspects of their job and the components that may leave them feeling inadequately trained and unsupported in their roles (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2013). Without effective behaviour management strategies, clearly teachers are at great risk of becoming burnt out and leaving the profession.



Micaela Rafferty and Jill Hellemans

## So what can teachers do about it?

Let's start with the basics. The strategies listed below present universal, whole-class management strategies, proven to be effective at supporting student engagement and decreasing trivial misbehaviour. In short, consistent implementation of these strategies sets the scene for a classroom that promotes active learning and positive behaviour. We call this a Positive Teaching approach (Wheldall, Wheldall, & Merrett, 2020) and it has been the foundation of all of MultiLit's work from the outset. It is characterised by:

- Behaviour-specific praise
- Pre-correction/prompting
- Active supervision
- Opportunities for student responding
- Explicitly teaching and reinforcing classroom rules and expectations
- Instructional feedback
- Careful arrangement of the classroom environment

Consistent implementation of the Positive Teaching techniques above is the critical first step to taking control of classroom behaviour management. These strategies, as simple and logical as they are, should not be overlooked even when there are students presenting with more complex behavioural needs.

For a student (or students) requiring more individualised and intensive behavioural supports, there is a great deal of evidence available to show that the most effective classroom behaviour management strategies are those that result from functional behaviour assessment. A functional behaviour

assessment is a set of procedures that help to identify the likely environmental events that may predict and/or maintain challenging behaviour. This information can help teachers understand the 'why' behind a student's challenging behaviour. Once the purpose behind the behaviour is understood, more effective and correctly matched strategies can be planned for and implemented. This function-based approach will give teachers a scientific way to create positive and lasting behaviour change in their classrooms.

Teacher training tends to focus on how to assess academic difficulties but fails to provide training on how to effectively look at and understand challenging behaviour. Lack of training in a function-based approach to behaviour management often leads teachers down a slippery path toward the overuse of reactive and aversive strategies. In addition, without understanding or identifying the function of the problem behaviour teachers are more likely to inadvertently reinforce and strengthen those unwanted behaviours. Upskilling teachers to have an understanding of the basic procedures involved in identifying behavioural function assists them in avoiding this problematic cycle and instead develop and implement appropriate interventions (Moreno & Bullock, 2011).

Strong classroom behaviour management skills are essential to creating positive, safe and productive learning environments. Teachers can become agents for meaningful and lasting behaviour change in their classrooms by adopting the principles of positive teaching and looking into the function behind a student's challenging behaviour.

A function-informed approach to behaviour management that emphasises teaching new, more appropriate skills is a teacher's best weapon in the mission for effective classroom behaviour management.

*Micaela Rafferty and Jill Hellemans, Board Certified Behaviour Analysts and Special Educators each with over 16 years' experience in early intervention and school-aged intervention, recently joined MultiLit to lead the MultiLit Positive Teaching and Learning initiative. Together they have extensive experience in the assessment and treatment of behaviours of concern, development and monitoring of behaviour intervention plans, curriculum modification, literacy assessment and intervention, functional communication training and social skill instruction.*

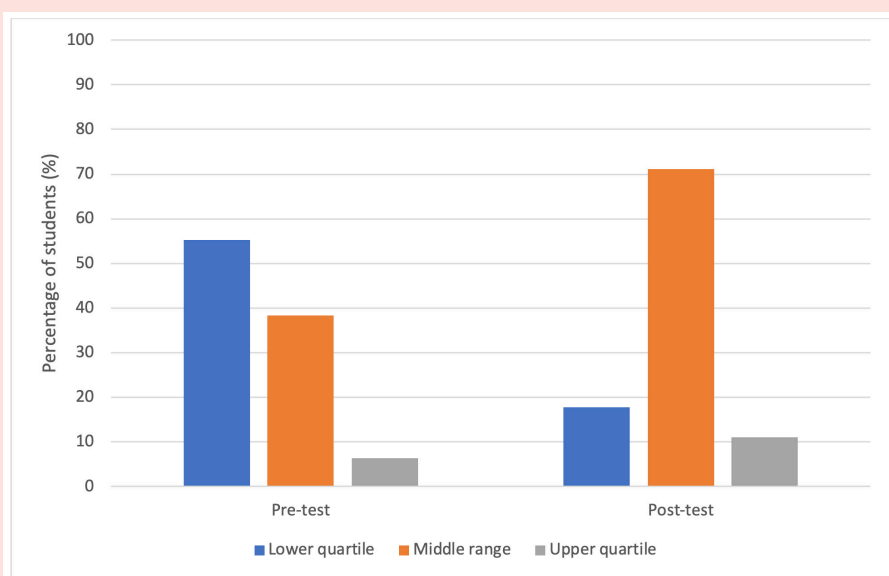
*The principles of Positive Teaching are taught through MultiLit's Positive Teaching for effective classroom behaviour management e-learning package, via on-site workshops, and through our book, Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Schools: Effective classroom behaviour management by Kevin Wheldall, Robyn Wheldall and Frank Merrett. Visit <https://multilit.com/professional-development/positive-teaching-pd/> or email [multilit@multilit.com](mailto:multilit@multilit.com) to find out more.*

*Full references for this article are available on request.*



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**Figure 1. Quartile distributions of phonological decoding measure**



**Note:** Pre-test median percentile = 19 (mean = 26.19, SD = 23.78); post-test median percentile = 47 (mean = 48.62, SD = 22.61).

There was also excellent progress seen in the students' other literacy skills. The score increases from pre- to post-test were associated with large effect sizes for real word reading accuracy (Cohen's  $d = 1.67$ ), spelling (Cohen's  $d = 1.70$ ), and phonological awareness (Cohen's  $d = 1.05$ ). These effect size values signify that the improvements were – on the whole – very substantial.

For word reading fluency too, the effect size associated with the score improvement was large (Cohen's  $d = 1.68$ ). On average, students improved by more than 150%, from reading 15 words per minute (wpm) to reading 38 wpm.

In summary, these results from the MRU provide excellent evidence for MiniLit efficacy. After just two terms of instruction in the program, our young Literacy Centre students have improved in several key areas of their literacy development. It is on the basis of these foundational skills that more meaningful connected-text reading and writing skills can flourish.

*Dr Nicola Bell is postdoctoral research fellow in the MultiLit Research Unit.*



## Bookworms on Manor

Emily Ong, a Senior Tutor in our Macquarie Park Literacy Centre, and her family used the COVID-19 lockdown period earlier this year to share the joy of reading with their neighbours – by setting up a street library!

“It’s been a fun little project born out of our need to self-isolate during this time. We usually frequent our local library to get new books, but when our library closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, we really missed it and struggled not having new materials to read. We realised we couldn’t be the only ones in the same situation. That’s how our little library, Bookworms on Manor, was born! At least within our neighbourhood we could exchange reading materials and keep up with reading even though we were all isolated,” Emily says.

## Teachers Zoom through professional development workshops

MultiLit’s Professional Development team celebrated an exciting milestone recently: more than 700 teachers trained via videoconferencing. This option was introduced in April to enable educators to continue to be trained in MultiLit programs while in-person training was not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Videoconference workshops have continued to be a popular option into Term 3, providing the same content and face-to-face interaction with our training staff, but without the need to travel. The response has been so positive to this training mode that MultiLit plans to keep videoconference workshops on our Professional Development calendar, and hope this mode particularly serves schools in regional and remote parts of Australia.

## InitialLit shortlisted for Educational Publishing Award

We are delighted that our three-year initial literacy instruction program, InitialLit, has been shortlisted in the 2020 Educational Publishing Awards Australia, for Outstanding Teaching Resource – Primary. The awards are organised by the Australian Publishers Association, and recognise excellence and innovation within the educational publishing industry. MultiLit is also a contender in the category of Publisher of the Year. Winners will be announced at an online ceremony in September.

# Getting ready for big school: PreLit at Appleseed Childcare

Appleseed Childcare in Epping adopted PreLit, MultiLit’s early literacy preparation program, back in 2018.

Jaclyn, Appleseed’s Preschool Room Leader, says, “We were looking to update and add to our preschool program in a way that would set us apart from other centres. PreLit was suggested to us by a parent who is a teacher.”

PreLit is a systematic, skills-based program that provides early childhood teachers with the skills to teach pre-literacy skills and concepts with a focus on phonological awareness and oral language development. The program is designed to complement a play-based environment and incorporates fun activities and popular children’s literature titles.

When selecting a literacy preparation program, Appleseed was looking for something that was fun and engaging for the children, and PreLit fitted the bill.

Currently, they do four sessions of the program a week for their school leaver group. This is a popular approach by early learning centres as they seek to prepare children for school.

“The children enjoy the storybooks, rhyming and games in the program. They are excited when they sound out letters, and

then realise they just read their first word!,” Jaclyn says.

The program has also been popular with parents.

“The parents of previous school leavers always tell us how much PreLit helped their child at school, especially during the introduction of sight words. The children would come home and say, ‘I already know this from PreLit at Appleseed’. It gave those children such confidence and self-worth.”

### Chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM

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