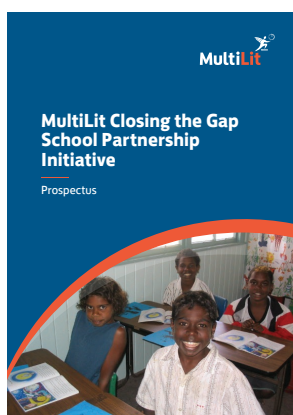


moments



MultiLit to provide programs under Closing the Gap Implementation Plan

MultiLit is delighted to have been invited by the Australian Government to provide reading and spelling programs for students in majority Indigenous schools as part of the school education measures outlined in the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan.

including InitialLit, MiniLit Sage, MacqLit and the forthcoming LanguageLift program, professional development training, school partnership support, and online literacy tutoring via the MultiLit Literacy Centres for students requiring specialist Tier 3 intervention.

Dr John Young will be joining MultiLit from January 2022 in the role of project manager for this initiative. Dr Young has been Principal of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic College – a MultiLit customer – in Wadeye in the Northern Territory since 2012 and will be relocating to Sydney for the role. Trainer and school partnerships officer John Warburton is serving as project manager prior to Dr Young's commencement and will have an ongoing role in the project.

MultiLit has a long history and deep experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and educators in both urban and remote settings.

The four-year partnership will see MultiLit work with up to 25 schools in the first year of the initiative, expanding to 40 schools from the second year. The objective is to have all students in participating schools reading at a minimum level that is within the average range for their age and year cohort – closing the gap on the reading performance of Indigenous students compared to non-Indigenous students.

Schools will be provided with MultiLit literacy programs

...continued on page 3

MiniLit Sage

In 2011, MultiLit launched MiniLit, our effective, evidence-based group intervention program, designed to support struggling readers in the initial stages of literacy (up to Year 2). A decade on, we have released the first major revision of the program, MiniLit Sage, informed by the latest evidence on the science of reading. The changes also bring MiniLit Sage's scope and sequence into alignment with InitialLit, our whole-class literacy program, providing an integrated approach to early literacy, giving students who might otherwise fall behind their peers a boost.

In late September, the MultiLit Perth team, which led the development of MiniLit Sage, celebrated the launch of the program and the presentation of the first face-to-face training workshop with a small gathering of workshop participants, invited guests from the MiniLit Sage trial schools, and the Perth team. It was a great opportunity to showcase the Perth office and some bright new artwork from the forthcoming LanguageLift picture books.

More than 550 schools have purchased the new program to date.

...continued on page 2



Amanda Simpson, Kathleen Ward, Simmone Pogorzelski, Renee Chakaodza and Anna Taylor



Morpheus Foundation funds MultiLit programs in schools

With a background in early childhood and maths education, Judy Tertini understands the value of literacy in creating opportunities. Born in Goulburn – an area with a low socioeconomic profile and a large correctional centre – she wanted to do something for the community: “If I can help the kids with their literacy, it will help keep them away from drugs and crime.” So, in 2017 the Morpheus Foundation was born.

Since then, the Morpheus Foundation, a self-funded charitable organisation named for the Greek god of dreams, has given more than \$1 million to initiatives supporting literacy learning across Australia. This includes a large number of grants to schools in the Goulburn area (with an ICSEA score of under 1000) to support the acquisition of MultiLit programs and resources – including InitialLit, InitialLit Readers, MiniLit Sage and MacqLit – and accompanying professional development training. In the 2020/21 financial year, 15 schools received this funding.

The Morpheus Foundation also provides support to a number of special schools and the Indigenous Literacy Foundation.

Judy originally contacted MultiLit regarding a partnership in 2019, and has since worked with the MultiLit team on

several rounds of grants – a relationship she describes as “fantastic”. The Morpheus Foundation board are keen to learn more about education, so Dr Jennifer Buckingham, Director of Strategy and Senior Research Fellow, and Kyle Pitt, Training Development Manager, presented to them last year.

Judy has an ongoing relationship with the schools receiving funding, and says visiting the schools and hearing of their amazing results gives her “goosebumps”.

“In one of the schools in Goulburn, teachers are doing withdrawal lessons throughout the whole school, and the delivery is fantastic. At a special needs school we work with, in the past kids would go to school and come out at 19, having not really learned anything. The kids are now actually learning to read.”

Goulburn High School, which is implementing the MacqLit program with a group of Year 7 students, has also reported remarkable progress, bringing students’ reading ages up by several years in some cases.

“I am hoping all the kids doing MultiLit [programs] will be able to read once they get to high school,” Judy says. “I’m very involved with the schools and it takes a lot of time, but I just love doing it.”

...continued from page 1

What the program covers

MiniLit Sage has 100 lessons, divided into two parts of 50 lessons each.

Part A: Teaches the basic phonic code for reading and spelling, starting with single letter-sound correspondences, then moving onto common digraphs. Useful irregular high-frequency words to ensure early access to connected text are also taught.

Part B: Teaches the more useful digraphs from the advanced phonic code for reading and spelling, with a focus on accuracy and fluency for text reading. Irregular high-frequency words continue to be taught.

A placement test will indicate the ideal starting point on the program for each student, with criteria provided for grouping students according to instructional level. Regular assessments administered throughout the program will monitor progress.

The program is designed to be delivered in a 45-minute session, 4-5 times per week. These sessions comprise:

- A Working with Sounds and Words component (30 minutes), focusing on developing phonemic awareness and decoding

and encoding skills for reading and writing, and

- A 15-minute session comprising either practise of reading sounds and words and/or connected text reading for improved reading accuracy and fluency.

To find out more, visit www.multilit.com/minilitsage.



MiniLit Sage in progress at Yates Avenue Public School

...continued from page 1

These efforts began in the early 1990s, when MultiLit directors and co-founders, Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM and Dr Robyn Wheldall, worked with the former Redfern Public School to improve the literacy outcomes of their students.

Professor Wheldall and Dr Wheldall went on to collaborate with Indigenous leader Noel Pearson on pilot studies in 2005 using MultiLit programs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Coen, Cape York. In 2007, this relationship was formalised with the funding of MultiLit programs in four Cape York schools by the Commonwealth Government as part of the Welfare Reform Trial. The project saw MultiLit tutorial centres operating in three school sites in Cape

York – Hope Vale, Mossman and Coen – from 2008, with an additional school site, Aurukun added in 2009. These tutorial centres offered formal literacy programs, including the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program and MiniLit program, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to help fast-track their reading and related skills.

MultiLit partnered with the Exodus Foundation over a 20-year period to offer the Schoolwise Program, primarily at sites in Sydney's Ashfield and Redfern, to students at risk of becoming disaffected with school. This partnership included work demonstrating the efficacy of MultiLit's programs with Indigenous students, and in 2009 the program was expanded to three sites in Darwin, sponsored in part by the Commonwealth Government, with a specific focus on supporting Indigenous youth.

MultiLit also collaborated with the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence in 2012 on a trial of the online Reading Tutor Program with Indigenous students in remote locations across Australia, as well as a trial of the MacqLit program with the Northern Territory Department of Education.

Most recently, in 2021, MultiLit commenced a research and implementation partnership with a multi-campus flexible learning centre in the Northern Territory, which caters predominantly for marginalised Indigenous young people. "MultiLit looks forward to working with majority Indigenous school communities to provide the highest quality literacy instruction for their students. We know successful literacy outcomes underpin all other academic achievements," said Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM.

More 2021 releases

It has been a busy year for new product releases for MultiLit, with the WARN, the MultiLit eLibrary and a new series of InitialLit Readers – The Wattle Series – joining MiniLit Sage.

WARN

An addition to the MultiLit Assessments and Monitoring product suite, the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Nonwords (WARN), was launched in April. Created and extensively trialled by Kevin Wheldall, Mereë Reynolds, Alison Madelaine and Nicola Bell, the WARN is a curriculum-based measure of nonword reading (or phonological recoding) fluency for use with students in Foundation and Year 1. It may also be used as a predictor of students' success in the Phonics Screening Check. The WARN is included with new purchases of InitialLit–Foundation and MiniLit Sage.



MultiLit eLibrary

School closures over the last two years have intensified demand for online resources, particularly for decodable readers. In response, MultiLit launched the eLibrary in March this year – a digital 'home' for the full collection of InitialLit Readers, available on an annual subscription basis. With access to 240 titles, the eLibrary is a great way for schools to provide students with

decodable texts for home reading. Multi-user subscriptions are currently available for schools. We will have single family subscriptions available soon for parents to purchase – watch this space!

InitialLit Readers Levels 10-16: The Wattle Series

In 2017, we released a series of InitialLit Readers designed to help children practise decoding the advanced alphabetic code.

Since this launch we have received feedback that students who are progressing more slowly with mastery of decoding needed additional practice with some easier books. Our wonderful team of authors applied their skills to the task, and with the help of seven talented illustrators, have brought to life The Wattle Series: a simpler series of InitialLit Readers for Levels 10–16.

With simpler storylines, lower word counts and more literal comprehension questions, this series of books is ideal for MiniLit Sage students, as well as those undertaking InitialLit–1 and other synthetic phonics programs.

Visit www.multilit.com to find out more about these new products.



NAPLAN results for InitialLit trial schools

By Nicola Bell



The past few years have seen the release of MultiLit's suite of whole-class instructional programs for Foundation, Year 1 and Year 2. The most recent of these, InitialLit-2, was released at the end of 2019, while InitialLit-F and InitialLit-1 were released in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

2020 was the first year that any student receiving InitialLit instruction had reached Year 3, which is when – in any usual year – those same students would participate in NAPLAN. However, 2020 was not a usual year, and because of school interruptions and closures, NAPLAN testing did not go ahead in Term 2 of last year. As such, we will have to wait to see what broadscale effects InitialLit has had on Australian students' literacy development, as captured by future NAPLAN testing.

Fortunately, we have had the opportunity to see how our 'trial' schools performed in NAPLAN 2019. These 11 trial schools, who partnered with MultiLit during the development of our InitialLit programs, implemented late-stage versions of InitialLit-F, InitialLit-1 and/or InitialLit-2 between 2016–18. Since the students from these schools entered Year 3 in 2019, we can see how well they performed on NAPLAN compared with the rest of Australia.

Five of the Year 3 cohorts had a year of InitialLit instruction, while four had two years and two had three years. In total, the testing at these schools in 2019 included around 580 students. NAPLAN tests cover five subjects:

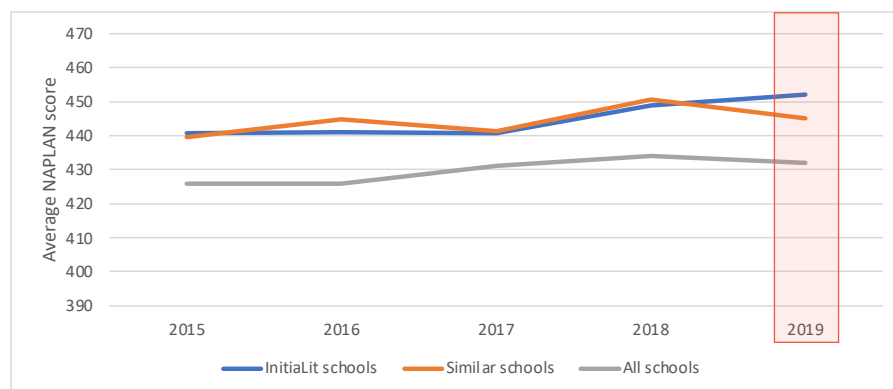


Figure 1. Weighted average NAPLAN reading scores n = 11 schools (~540–590 students).

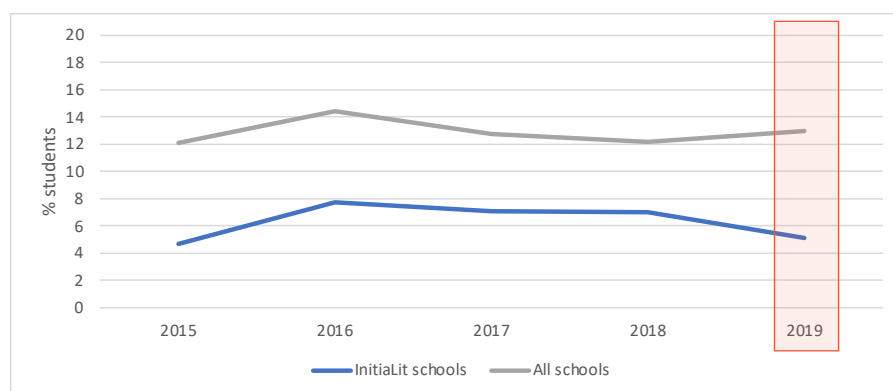


Figure 2. Weighted average NAPLAN reading percentages in Bands 1-2 n = 5 schools (~240–270 students). 2019 band percentage information was not released by ACARA for six of the 11 trial schools. Band percentages for 'similar schools' were not released for any year.

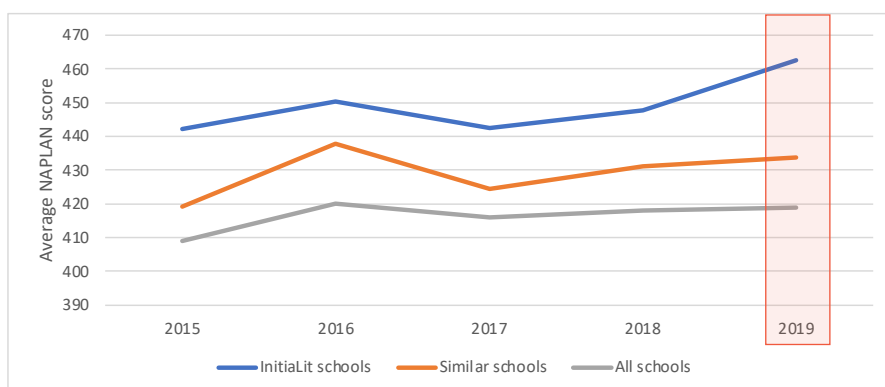


Figure 3. Weighted average NAPLAN spelling scores n = 11 schools (~540–590 students).

reading, writing, spelling, grammar/punctuation and numeracy. Of these, the reading and spelling tests are most obviously aligned with the instructional components of InitialLit.

Looking first at Figure 1, it is clear the average reading scores for the InitialLit schools (blue line) vary a

little from year to year, although they do follow a similar trajectory to other Australian schools in general (grey line) and to other Australian schools with similar socioeconomic and language characteristics (orange line).

Of course, the year of most interest is 2019, since this was the first point

in time when any InitialLit cohort participated in the testing. Here, a gap does appear to emerge between InitialLit schools and other schools. While the average reading score of InitialLit schools increases between 2018 and 2019 (from 449 to 452), the averages decrease for similar schools (from 451 to 445) and all schools (from 434 to 432).

As well as receiving average NAPLAN scores, schools also receive information about the percentage of students performing in each graded performance band. Unfortunately, such results are not widely available for schools who administered the online version of NAPLAN, which means it was not possible to examine all 11 InitialLit schools. Even so, the five schools (i.e., ~240–270 students) for whom data were available appeared to show an advantage.

As seen in Figure 2, the percentage of students performing at or below the minimum national standard (i.e., performance bands 1 and 2) has been consistently lower in schools who go on to implement InitialLit (blue line), relative to all schools (grey line). It is therefore unsurprising that the same gap existed in 2019, when students who actually received InitialLit instruction were included in the testing. However, the noteworthy point here is that the gap appears to widen in 2019: while the percentage decreases

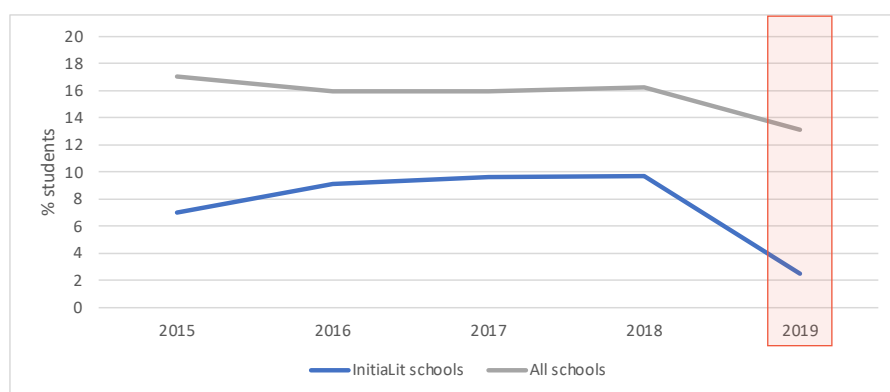


Figure 4. Weighted average NAPLAN spelling percentages in Bands 1–2 n = 5 schools (~240–270 students). 2019 band percentage information was not released by ACARA for six of the 11 trial schools. Band percentages for ‘similar schools’ were not released for any year.

for InitialLit schools (from 7% to 5%), it increases for other schools (from 12% to 13%) when we focus instead on the NAPLAN spelling test.

As seen in Figure 3, the average score for InitialLit schools increased substantially between 2018 and 2019 (from 448 to 463). In contrast, over the same time period, there is little change in the average scores of ‘all schools’ (from 418 to 419) and ‘similar schools’ (from 431 to 434).

Similarly, the proportion of lower-performing students decreases between 2018 and 2019 more so for InitialLit schools (from 10% to 2%) than for all schools (from 16% to 13%; see Figure 4).

In summary, the student cohorts who received InitialLit in the first three years of their schooling appear at an advantage, with respect to their levels of reading and spelling achievement.

These results lend support to the existing results from our smaller scale InitialLit research trials (summarised on the MultiLit website). They also provide a promising glimpse into the positive impact that InitialLit can have on literacy development in the early school years, as represented by NAPLAN scores.

Find out more about InitialLit at www.multilit.com/initialit.

Dr Nicola Bell is postdoctoral research fellow, MultiLit Research Unit.

Research in the Northern Territory

By Nicola Bell

Last year, a teacher from a school in the top end of Australia approached the MultiLit Research Unit (MRU) to see if we would be interested in collaborating on a research project. The school had just started implementing MacqLit with a small number of older struggling readers. They were already seeing the students make good progress, and so their plan was to begin delivering the program on a larger scale in 2021.

This particular school could be considered unusual, because it caters to students who have disengaged from the mainstream schooling system. Statistically, this means that the young people enrolled there are at extreme

risk of future unemployment and mental ill health. Given how important literacy skills are to life outcomes and personal wellbeing, access to good instruction in this area could literally be life-changing. We in the MRU were very excited by the possibility of collaborating with the school, to see how students might benefit from MacqLit being implemented within such a unique teaching context.

The large-scale rollout of MacqLit instruction started early this year. This means that all students at the school with written English language difficulties have been (and will continue to be) identified through screening assessments. Once identified, they will receive small-group

or one-to-one MacqLit instruction, as delivered by trained teacher aides.

The school has also undertaken to gauge students’ learning by looking at the reading assessment results collected before and after six months of intervention. More frequent (i.e., fortnightly) assessments, such as the WARP and the WARN, will also be conducted to check that students are responding positively to the program.

It is wonderful to see this school now taking such a structured approach to assessment and instruction. Ultimately, we anticipate that results from this project (or similar ones) may be used to improve the educational practices of schools with at-risk student populations.

MiniLit and MacqLit top list of Tier 2 interventions

By Jennifer Buckingham

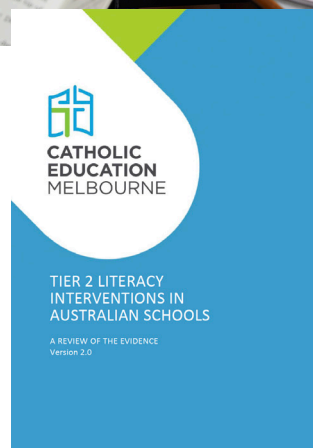
In March, Catholic Education Melbourne released a report titled *Tier 2 Literacy Interventions in Australian Schools: A review of the evidence*.

The report assessed the empirical evidence for a range of literacy intervention programs and practices, and provided a ranking based on two criteria: reliability of evidence, and alignment with evidence-based instruction. MiniLit topped this ranking, due to both a large high-quality evidence base supporting the use of the program for Tier 2 intervention, and its use of evidence-based instruction. MacqLit was number two in the ranking, with what the authors described as a small but high-quality evidence base, and again, use of evidence-based instructional methods.

Also included in the report were our Reading Tutor Program and PreLit program, though there were some inaccuracies in how these two programs were presented (for example, they were not designed as a Tier 2 intervention). The MultiLit Research Unit produced a response to this report to provide clarification of these matters – in particular, the quality of the extensive research base supporting the efficacy of the Reading Tutor Program. The response can be found at www.multilit.com/CEMReportResponse.

In 2021, Catholic Education Tasmania has joined the Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn in becoming the second Catholic diocese to adopt MultiLit programs including PreLit, InitialLit and MiniLit Sage on a system-wide basis.

Dr Jennifer Buckingham is director of strategy, MultiLit and senior research fellow, MultiLit Research Unit.



Literacy Centre helps Sarah advance her career

Sarah Davis was ready to take on a promotion to executive assistant at a large arborist company, as well as studying a Certificate IV in business administration, but she felt something was holding her back.

"I was practical and sporty at school, but when it came to English, I struggled with it. For my course, I had to do presentations and speak. I didn't have the confidence to read out loud, because I thought I sounded funny, so I wanted to improve my literacy, my spelling and reading," Davis said.

Sarah's mum found the MultiLit Literacy Centre in Bella Vista, and her employer provided financial support to enable Sarah to attend sessions with Centre Manager, Margaret Rees, twice a week for two terms.

While going back to basics as an adult learner was tough, Sarah said, it was essential, as she was never taught letter-sounds correctly at school.

"I was very embarrassed to start off with because I felt I was going backwards, but to move forward, that was what I had

to do. Margaret was amazing, very supportive," Sarah said. "It was hard, and I cried because I hated feeling like I had to start all over again – especially as an adult. But when you see those improvements, you know why you are doing it."

Sarah saw the greatest changes in her reading fluency and spelling and successfully completed her Certificate IV qualification. But perhaps the biggest change has been in the confidence she has gained in the workplace.

"Now I do presentations and I'm a lot more comfortable with my leadership teams. Before, being up the front in meetings, writing on the whiteboard and having people look at you, was just impossible. Now I'm more likely to say, 'Let me write it'. I feel so much better in myself, my confidence, my speaking, my work – everything."

Sarah is keen to return to the Literacy Centre to build on what she has learned so far. Her advice for other adults who might be thinking about getting some support with their literacy?

"Don't be afraid to go backwards to go forwards. People don't realise what they might have missed out on. Do it. Just do it!"

Staff profile: Andy Russell

Andy Russell recently joined MultiLit as General Manager of Literacy Services, overseeing the operations of our Literacy Centres. We caught up with Andy to find out about his background, what brought him to MultiLit, and what he enjoys about working with students and families.

Q: Tell us a little about your role at MultiLit.

Andy: As General Manager of Literacy Services, my role is really to stay in the background. I provide the Centres with the systems, processes and support they need to allow them to focus on what really matters – delivering quality instruction to kids that need it most.

Q: What is your background in education?

Andy: I have essentially been in education in one form or another for my whole career. After completing an Honours degree in Psychology I worked as an Assistant Psychologist in a residential school and care home in Scotland. This involved supporting the care of children who were out of their home due to trauma and were residents at the care home and receiving education at the school.

While this was an incredibly challenging and rewarding job, the pull of Australia was too much and I signed up to do a Masters in Special Education at Macquarie University and moved to Sydney. Since then I have worked in literacy centres delivering one-to-one education to struggling readers and learners. I have held a number of roles from tutor to manager and have thoroughly enjoyed every step.

Q: What drew you to MultiLit?

Andy: There were a few things that drew me to MultiLit. The fact that the programs are based in research and that the research is ongoing was really important. And I was really attracted to the impact that MultiLit has had and continues to have, striving for improvements in Australian education. I was keen to play a small part in that.

Q: I understand you have had some interesting international experiences – can you tell us about those? What did you gain through these experiences?

Andy: I have been very lucky to have worked in, opened and managed learning centres in Switzerland, USA, Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Darwin. I have also spoken at conferences in some pretty cool places, including Singapore and Borneo.

Every time I have had the pleasure of travelling for work I have enjoyed the independence it demands, and the unique challenges that working in a different culture throws at you. The need to establish trust with a new group of people while learning about their culture is challenging but fun, as is the need to constantly think on your feet and problem-solve all manner of unexpected challenges.

However, one of the biggest things I learned is that when it comes to providing support to the family of a kid who is struggling, no matter where you are in the world, everyone essentially wants the same things; honesty, hard work, passion and trust.

Q: What do you like about your work?

Andy: I love being part of an organisation that has such an impact on Australian education. I enjoy seeing the changes in students' reading as they go through our programs and hearing about all of the fun, humorous stories of student trials, tribulations and ultimately success. I enjoy working with a team of people who are always striving for excellence, and I enjoy the variety in my days.

Q: What's something you wish more people knew about literacy?

Andy: I wish the kids who were struggling to read knew that this didn't make them 'less than'. With the right help and support from evidence-based practice, the difficulties they are having could become that bit easier.



“When it comes to providing support to the family of a kid who is struggling, no matter where you are in the world, everyone essentially wants the same things; honesty, hard work, passion and trust.”

Five from Five launches seminars for school communities



The Five from Five project, MultiLit's community education initiative, aims to reduce the number of students who are left to struggle in school with inadequate reading and literacy skills through promotion of best practice instruction.

With many schools and education professionals seeking more information about evidence-based approaches to the teaching of reading, Five from Five has launched a series of free professional learning seminars.

Delivered by specialists in reading instruction, with content development led by Dr Jennifer Buckingham, the seminars outline insights gleaned from thousands of rigorous scientific studies from multiple research disciplines on how children learn to read and the most effective method to teach them.

The first seminar, 'The science of reading: Essential knowledge for teachers', delivered in a flexible 90-minute format, is ideal for schools who would like to learn more about the theoretical and scientific evidence for best practice reading instruction. The second seminar, 'Deep Dive into Systematic Synthetic Phonics', covers how the English alphabetic code translates language from print to speech and vice versa, and how to best teach this knowledge to beginning and low-progress readers.

The seminars are offered as public workshops, and can also be booked by schools for private events (via videoconference or in person). Visit fivefromfive.com.au/ presentations for more information.

New links and recognition



Anna Taylor, Speech and Language Specialist in the MultiLit Perth Product Development team, was earlier this year named as the joint winner of the 2020 Lee Mills Teacher Training Award, presented by the Australian Association of Special Educators. The submitted paper, 'A preliminary evaluation of a scripted Tier 1 intervention program to improve early literacy skills in children with Developmental Language Disorder', evaluated the

effectiveness of InitialLit for children with DLD at the North East Metropolitan Language Development Centre (compared with a retrospective control group who received business-as-usual/SSP). Mean gains for all literacy measures favoured the InitialLit cohort, with nonword reading fluency (as measured by the WARN) being statistically significant.

Alison McMurtrie, MultiLit Product Development Manager, is the winner of the 2021 Bruce Wicking Award, presented by Learning Difficulties Australia (LDA). The Bruce Wicking Award recognises an individual for innovation in programs or practices relating to the teaching of children with learning difficulties. In the award citation LDA acknowledged Alison's contribution to the field of learning difficulties, in particular reading, writing and spelling, noting that her extensive practice with students and their teachers has resulted in improved educational outcomes.

Dr Jennifer Buckingham, Director of Strategy and Senior Research Fellow in the MultiLit Research Unit (MRU) has recently become an Affiliate Member of the newly formed SOLAR Lab at La Trobe University in Victoria.

Dr Jennifer Buckingham has also recently been admitted as a Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales. The Royal Society of New South Wales is a learned society, the oldest of its type in the Southern Hemisphere having been established in 1821. The category of Fellow recognises the substantial contribution made by residents of NSW who are leaders in their fields within science, art, literature and philosophy.

Dr Robyn Wheldall, Company Director and Deputy Director of the MRU, has become a University Associate in the Curtin School of Allied Health at Curtin University in Western Australia.

Furthering **MultiLit's** long association with Learning Difficulties Australia (LDA), which represents teachers and other professionals assisting students with learning difficulties through effective teaching practices, **Dr Robyn Wheldall** has been elected President, and **Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM** and **Dr Alison Madelaine** as Council Members. Kevin and Alison have become the Joint Editors of the association's *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, with **Dr Nicola Bell** as Assistant Editor.

Chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM

Editor

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