

whole-class initial instruction in literacy

InitialLit is an evidence-based whole-class literacy program which will provide all children with the essential core knowledge and strong foundations to become successful readers and writers. In the context of a Response to Intervention framework, InitialLit is a Tier 1 program, designed to be delivered to whole classes by classroom teachers.



Who is it for?

- ▶ Children in the first three years of school (Foundation to Year 2)
- ▶ Schools seeking a reading and spelling program with a synthetic phonics approach alongside a rich literature and vocabulary component
- ▶ Schools that would like to see consistent instruction across year groups and a reduction in the number of children needing literacy support in higher grades
- ▶ Teachers looking to provide an evidence-based approach to reading and spelling aligned with the Australian National Curriculum



The InitialLit approach

InitialLit is designed to be implemented across the four terms of the school year. InitialLit-F and InitialLit-1 focus on two main components:

1. Phonics, to systematically and explicitly teach the basic and advanced alphabetic code in a set sequence. Children will be introduced to letter-sound correspondences, common morphemes and simple grammatical concepts.
2. Vocabulary, oral language and listening comprehension through quality children's literature. Detailed lessons, including writing tasks, are provided for each of the storybook titles selected.

In InitialLit-2, the scope of the program broadens to cover four main components:

1. Spelling, teaching the remainder of the advanced alphabetic code systematically and explicitly, as well as new spelling rules and morphological concepts.
2. Reading comprehension and fluency. This includes explicitly teaching students comprehension strategies and how to apply them to different types of text.
3. Grammar, in which children learn key grammatical features and how to apply them to a writing task.
4. Vocabulary, oral language and comprehension through children's literature. Detailed lessons, including writing tasks, are provided for 15 storybook titles. Two novel studies are included for use towards the end of the year.



Program content and resources

In each year of InitialLit, a comprehensive package of resources is provided to implement the program, including:

- ▶ Handbooks detailing lesson scripts and session procedures
- ▶ Sounds and Words Books or RAD Reading Books for small group sessions
- ▶ Assessment procedures
- ▶ Flashcards and Picture Cards (Foundation and Year 1)
- ▶ Colourful posters, displaying key characters and concepts
- ▶ PowerPoint slides to accompany lessons (downloadable from MultiLit website)
- ▶ Access to hundreds of downloadables, such as:
 - Consolidation and handwriting worksheets (available in NSW, SA, Qld and Vic font)
 - Literacy games
 - Activity templates
 - Home Reading Diaries (one per term)
 - Assessment Recording Forms
 - Resources to help schools implement the program, e.g., parent information sheets, certificates, planning documents, curriculum linkage information.



Program trial results: InitialLit–Foundation

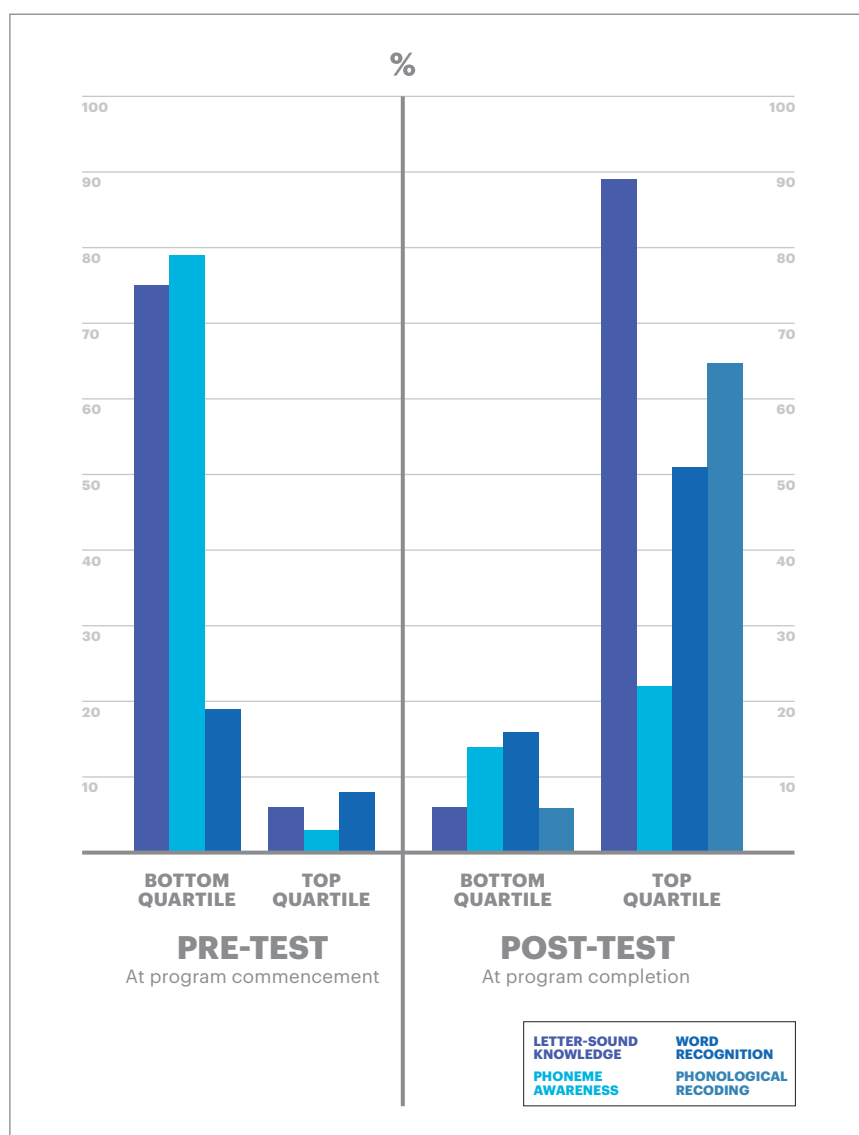
In a 2017 trial undertaken in two Sydney schools, 63 Foundation students were assessed at the commencement of instruction, after 20 weeks (mid-test), and after a further 17 weeks (at program completion).

Over the course of the year, students made significant gains with large effect sizes on all measures of early reading skills, including letter-sound knowledge, word recognition and phoneme awareness.

These gains were not only significant over the first half of the year, when you may expect Foundation children to make progress quickly, but also over the second half of the year.

There was also a significant gain with a large effect size in decoding fluency over the second half of the year, indicating the program had a sustained impact on the children's acquisition of these skills.

These results indicate that InitialLit–F may have helped to reduce the number of students who might have struggled to learn to read (those in the bottom quartile), while not limiting the growth of higher performing students, as indicated by those moving to the top quartile.



“ I began using the InitialLit program this year after spending two days receiving excellent implementation training. Although I began the program in the middle of the year, I have already seen very positive results through student literacy growth in reading, spelling and vocabulary. This is due to the systematic and explicit approach of the program. There has been a major improvement in student and teacher clarity and all my students are enjoying their successes.

Natasha Martin | Foundation teacher, St Brigid's Catholic School, TAS

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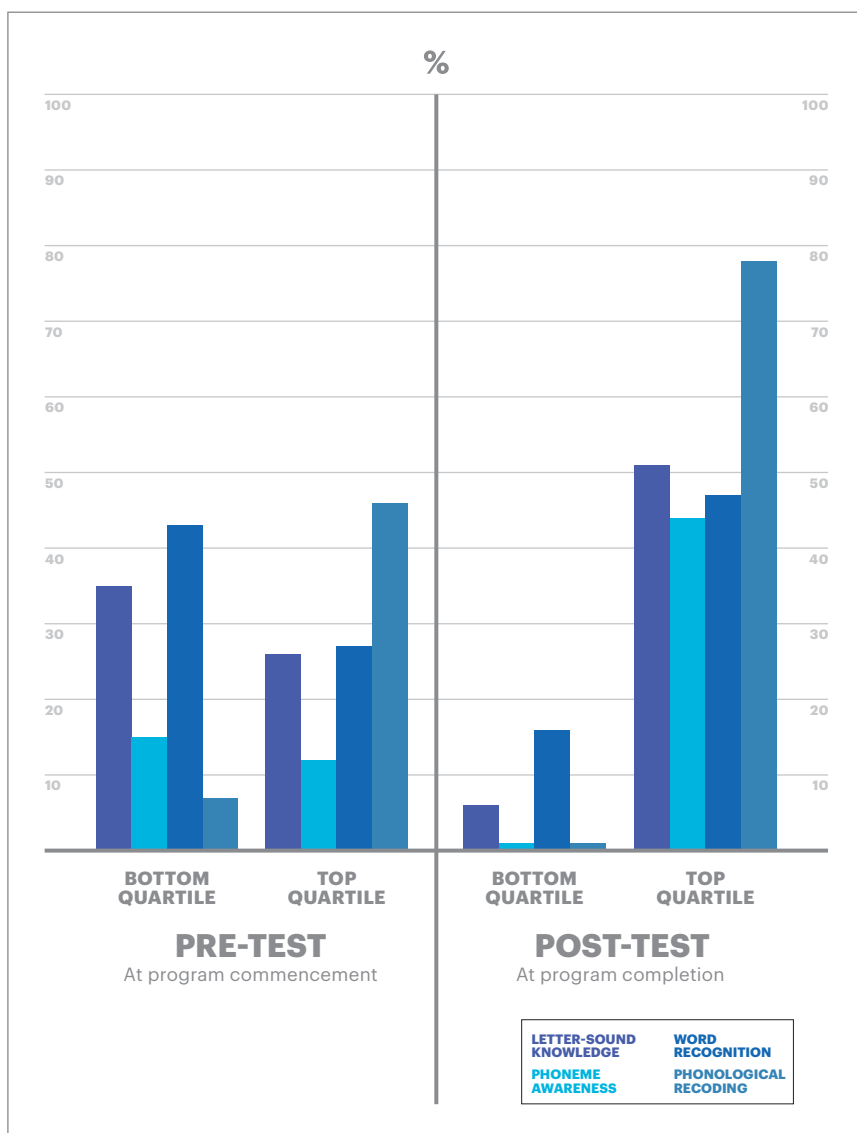
Program trial results: InitialLit-1

Three schools and a total of 155 Year 1 students were involved in a trial (two schools in Sydney and one school in Perth). Prior to the trial, one of the Sydney schools and the Perth school had used a mixed approach for initial reading instruction with some phonics instruction and some whole language instruction, while the other Sydney school had taken a whole language approach. Students were assessed at the commencement of instruction, after 20 weeks (mid-test), and after a further 17 weeks (at program completion).

Over the year, students made significant gains with large effect sizes on all measures of early reading skills and more advanced reading skills. These gains were significant when measured over the first half of the year, and over the second half of the year, except for letter-sound knowledge, on which no significant gains were made in the second half of the year (which can be attributed to the fact that many students had already scored close to or at the highest level on this measure by mid-year).

The results indicate the program not only developed the children's early reading skills over the course of the year, but also fostered the later reading skills required to allow them to access the rest of the academic curriculum.

These results suggest that InitialLit-1 may have helped to reduce the number of students who might have struggled to learn to read (those in the bottom quartile), while not limiting the growth of higher performing students. Students receiving InitialLit-1 can make excellent gains in measures of early reading skills and other reading skills over and above the typical progress of their same aged peers.



For a more detailed program trial results summary for InitialLit-F, InitialLit-1 and InitialLit-2, including trials comparing groups undertaking InitialLit with others receiving instruction in whole language or an alternative exemplary phonics program, visit www.multilit.com/initiallit.





Research: InitialLit and the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

Three Sydney schools participated in a study that measured performance on the UK government’s Year 1 Phonics Screening Check (PSC). In two schools, 84% of children were from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds, and in the other, 9%.

The PSC has been used in South Australian schools since 2018 and is going to be trialled in NSW and Tasmania in 2020.

The study found that children who had been learning to read with the InitialLit program in Foundation and for three terms in Year 1 had high average scores on the PSC. In addition to high average scores, the distribution for scores for children in the InitialLit schools was clustered at the high end of the range. Only six students scored below 20. There was no significant difference in the scores associated with the percentage of students learning English as an additional language or dialect.

Percentage of students achieving the threshold score in the Year 1 PSC*

England (2018)	82%
South Australia (2018)	43%
InitialLit study schools	82%

*The threshold score is 28/40 in South Australia (and in this trial) and 32/40 in England. The lower threshold in Australia is due to earlier administration of the PSC, and therefore less teaching and learning time for the phonics curriculum.

This study shows that the large majority of children provided with high quality early reading instruction in the InitialLit program achieved the expected level of proficiency in word decoding.



“ The improvement we have seen in our Year 1 students over the past few years has been nothing short of astounding. Each individual child’s writing, reading and comprehension skills have improved, as we can deliver the program at their own ability levels. The frequent assessment allows us to be able to closely monitor every student so that we can implement strategies for those who need extra assistance and those who need an extra challenge before issues arise. We happily recommend the InitialLit program for any primary school that values the importance of the development of early years literacy skills.

Antoinette Buiks and Kate Wilkes | Year 1 teachers, St Columba’s School, WA





Program trial results: InitialLit-2

InitialLit-2 has strong emphases on reading fluency, reading comprehension, grammar and spelling. In the years of development before its release, InitialLit-2 was subjected to a great deal of field testing 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. Students were assessed on

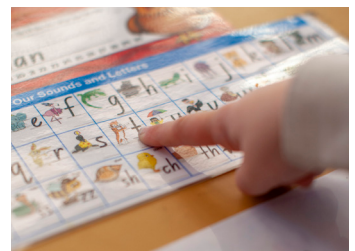
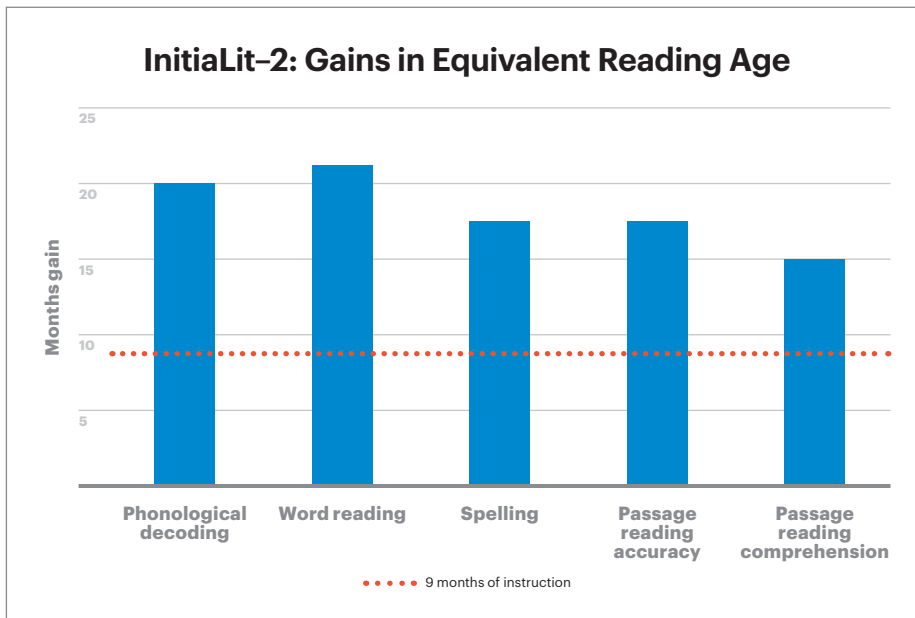
phonological decoding (i.e., nonword reading), real word reading, spelling, passage reading accuracy and passage reading fluency at the beginning and end of the school year.

Students made statistically significant 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.

Students made impressive gains in their 'reading age'. In the 9 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.

These schools implemented InitialLit-F and InitialLit-1 in 2017 and 2018, respectively, which means the students started InitialLit-2 with strong skills in phonological decoding, continued to develop these skills and extended them to fluency and comprehension. 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.

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



Having taught InitialLit-F and now as a Year 2 teacher teaching InitialLit-2, I can say with great confidence that the implementation of the InitialLit program has had a significant and positive impact on my students' literacy and English knowledge and growth. With explicit instruction and regular assessment, the program ensures no child is left behind and teachers have ample opportunities to ensure students are firm on the content being presented. Personally, the program has strengthened my ability to teach literacy explicitly, systematically and confidently. Professionally, I was able to place my trust in this program because it is research-based and supported, and having all the resources readily available allowed me to focus on what matters most – my teaching!

Abir Charif | Year 2 teacher, Amity College, NSW

