



MultiLit

A newsletter for parents and teachers

July 2016

moments

Initialit decodable Readers soon to be released

Do you know how to tame a crocodile?

What happens when a sheep takes a jeep for a spin?

Will a little lost puppy find his way home?

Find out the answers to these and many more very important questions in our new Initialit Readers.

MultiLit is excited to announce the upcoming release of its own set of 60 phonic readers as part of the new Initialit – Foundation program due to be released next year.

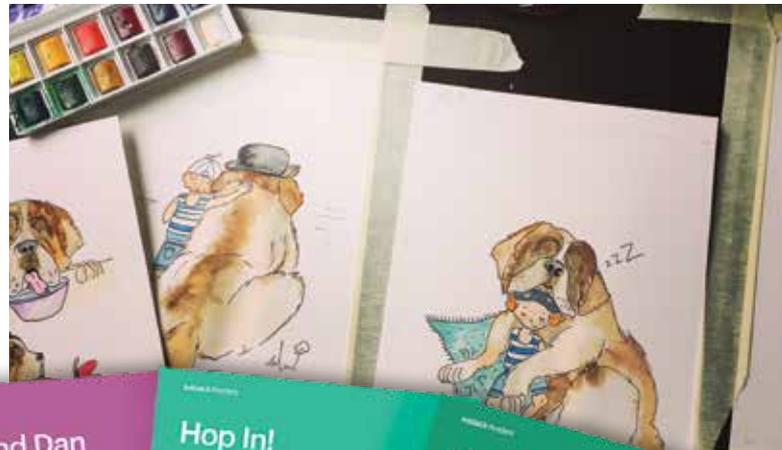
The Initialit decodable Readers series has been carefully developed by the MultiLit Product Development team to provide phonic support for beginner readers, working alongside the sequenced introduction of letter sounds and sight words taught in the first year of schooling. The readers will encourage young children to use the correct reading strategies to access print right from the start. Guessing words from pictures and context will be a thing of the past.

The set of 60 Initialit Readers contains nine levels, aligned to the instruction in the Initialit program. As a child's knowledge of the alphabetic code develops, the readers become more complex. At the start of each level a 'shared' reader is featured in which the teacher and children read alternate pages. This shared reading allows for the introduction of more complex story structures and vocabulary on the teacher page, as well as the modelling of fluent and expressive reading.

Each reader contains helpful additional information to be used at the start and end of a reading session. This includes some brief points about how to use the reader, which sounds and words to preview and post-reading comprehension and discussion questions. 'Extra lap' decodable word practice can be used to work on reading fluency.

These little books have risen admirably to the challenge of creating fun, entertaining reading experiences for young children, while using a necessarily restricted vocabulary. Decodable readers often get a bad rap for having banal, meaningless story lines. The Initialit Readers have cleverly ensured that children will be able to actually read, not guess, the words while enjoying the story at the same time. Children who love surprises, adventure, humour, and mischievous animals will enjoy our beautifully illustrated stories.

Don't miss out. Hurry and have fun with *Gus on the Bus*, enjoy *A Little Snack*, and explore *The Zoo* while providing much needed reading practice for children just beginning to discover the joy of reading! Register your interest in purchasing Initialit Readers by emailing multilit@multilit.com.



(top) Artist at work: illustrations by Rozzy Kelly in progress; (bottom) some of the 60 titles in the Initialit Readers series.

RIP Neale Analysis of Reading Ability?



Kevin Wheldall

For more than 50 years, the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA) has been the reading test of choice for many, if not most, educational psychologists and special educators, in both Australia and the UK.

First published in 1958, the test was last revised in 1999 (the third

edition). Professor Marie Neale, the test's author, died in 2011 and there are no plans to revise the test again. Consequently, test users are left with a version that was last standardised in 1999. Not only may the norms now be out of date but also some of the little stories that comprise the test passages to be read by children are a bit out of date too. In the story about the diver and the shark, for example, the phrase "their welfare" appears, expressing the shark's concern for her children. For some children from less socially advantaged backgrounds, however, 'welfare' can mean something rather different and their answers occasionally reflect this!

As fans of NARA at MultiLit, we have been loathe to abandon its use but we are now convinced that it is time to move on and to use a newer test, the York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC), which is very similar to the Neale in most respects. Published in 2012, however, it has the added advantages of both more recent test norms and more contemporary stories. Being evidence-based in our approach, we did not make this decision lightly.

We needed to be reassured that the YARC was just as good, and as appropriate for our purposes, as the NARA. Consequently, we tested nearly 80 low-progress readers on both tests, and also several other reading measures, and compared the results. Sarah Arakelian and I have written a short research note on our findings that we hope will be published. In brief, we found that scores on all of the measures of reading accuracy that we used corresponded very closely with each other, including the YARC, and that also the measure of reading comprehension provided by the YARC was probably a better measure than that provided by the NARA. As a result, we have decided to phase out our use of the NARA and to introduce the YARC into our testing regimes, in the MultiLit Literacy Centres, in our external tutorial centres, and in our research.

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM is Chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd and Director of the MultiLit Research Unit (www.multilit.com). Email: kevin.wheldall@pecas.com.au

How do we teach the hard to reach?

Kevin Wheldall and Robyn Wheldall

Annually, the results released from the NAPLAN testing Australia-wide confirm the huge gaps in literacy performance between students from Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds.

These gaps are particularly pronounced for those students living in remote Aboriginal communities. For example, for Year 5 students, the percentage scoring at or above the national minimum standard (arguably a very low baseline) is only 70% for Indigenous students, compared with 94% for non-Indigenous students. But for Aboriginal students living in remote and very remote areas, the figures are much worse, at 56% and 29% respectively. Without essential basic literacy skills, these students are prevented from accessing the broader educational curriculum and their disadvantage is compounded over time.

Our most disadvantaged students need intensive, exemplary, effective literacy instruction provided by expert tutors. Since 1995, the high efficacy of the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program has been repeatedly and consistently demonstrated. Moreover, the efficacy of the program has been specifically demonstrated when delivered by skilled tutors with students

from Indigenous backgrounds, including those from remote communities, as our research in Redfern and Cape York has demonstrated. The principal remaining problem is the lack of adequately trained teachers and/or tutors in remote communities to deliver the program effectively. It is extremely difficult both to attract and to retain skilled staff in these settings.

For many years now, we have been offering online tutoring involving live video interaction and presentation of material over the internet. It has been successfully implemented with clients at our MultiLit Literacy Centre (Clinic) whereby low-progress readers are tutored in their own homes or schools by expert MultiLit trained tutors. (See the article on p4 of this issue reporting our latest results.)

Thus, we now have (1) a demonstrated effective literacy intervention and (2) the technology to provide this level of one-to-one exemplary instruction via online tutoring to students in remote communities. Consideration should now be given to rolling out this online model to provide high quality, intensive reading instruction to some of our most disadvantaged students.

Research briefing: Is PreLit effective for Kindy kids?

Robyn Wheldall and Kevin Wheldall

The MultiLit PreLit program was designed to assist pre-school children to learn the oral language and pre-literacy skills thought to be essential for learning to read. Our principal aim was primarily to help young children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. To this extent, we thought that it might also be helpful to some young children beginning their first year of schooling (Kindergarten in New South Wales) who were ill-prepared for learning to read.

Last year we had the opportunity to trial PreLit for Kindy kids attending schools in the Armidale Diocese. We would like to record here our thanks to the staff in the Catholic Education Office in Armidale. While not a true experiment, we were able to compare the results for schools that received three terms' of PreLit instruction in kindergarten with the results for schools that did not. Because it was not possible to randomly assign children or schools to experimental and control groups, we must be cautious about the conclusions we draw from our study. Nevertheless, the results were encouraging.

This project sought to establish the efficacy of the PreLit early literacy preparation program (PreLit) used in the context of children beginning school. Eight schools were involved in the study in 2015, with more than 240 students participating.

An extremely large number of children in this study entered school with very poor phonological awareness skills (91% of the cohort). Notwithstanding this, these students had oral language skills in the average range on school entry.

All students in the study made substantial gains on the language and early literacy measures employed in this study. This would be expected after 25 weeks of instruction at school. Moreover, the teachers delivering PreLit instruction did so with a high degree of treatment fidelity following a one-day professional development workshop. They delivered the program with enthusiasm and had positive experiences using the program, indicating that they could see the benefits of the instruction for the children. This enthusiasm grew over the course of the intervention.

While we found no difference in the average performance of the students in the two groups of four schools (experimental and comparison) following PreLit instruction, we did find a much higher degree of variability in the comparison schools in terms of early literacy skills.

PreLit appears to be more uniform in its effects on early literacy skills, in effect keeping the students closer together with only 3% remaining in the bottom quartile (compared to 92% at pre-test). Conversely, 16% of students remained in the bottom quartile in the comparison group at post-test (compared to 90% at pre-test). Moreover, this was not achieved at the expense of holding more able children back, since 55% of experimental group students were in the top quartile at post-test compared to 45% of comparison group students.

Our findings suggest that there is evidence to support the efficacy of the PreLit program with beginning Kindergarten students, where there is not a systematic and explicit program of phonics instruction in place in schools. While there is some evidence that PreLit may be effective in terms of improving the emergent literacy skills of beginning Kindergarten students, it may be more effective to include a thoroughgoing phonics program instead with these children. (To this end, we are currently developing, and are about to launch, the InitialLit program, for initial reading instruction in Kindergarten.)

There was no evidence for the efficacy of PreLit in terms of improved language skills in this study. The reason for this may be that the students entered school with language skills in the average range and therefore were not in need of support in this area.

PreLit may be more sensibly reserved for the pre-school children for whom it was originally designed and/or possibly for students commencing school who come to school with low levels of oral language facility and phonological awareness from very socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

The research team on this project included Dr Robyn Wheldall (project director), Katharine Glenn, Sarah Arakelian, Dr Alison Madelaine, Dr Meree Reynolds and Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM, MultiLit Research Unit.



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Latest results from the MultiLit Literacy Centre

We have recently analysed some of the very latest results from our MultiLit Literacy Centre.

This group of 23 students received instruction for two one-hour sessions per week for two terms. They were tested when they first commenced the program and then again two terms later. The average age of the students was nine years and four months and they were found to be of average verbal ability. They were over two years behind in reading, for their age.

In just two terms (about 40 hours of instruction plus, of course, time spent reading to their parents at home), they made average gains of:

- about 13 months in single word reading;
- about 12 months in reading accuracy and in reading comprehension; and
- about 14 months in spelling.

For what is known as phonological recoding, the ability to sound out words using phonics, they made a huge gain of 22 months and they could read 42% more words correctly per minute when reading passages of text aloud.

We also compared the results for students attending for face-to-face instruction in the Literacy Centre with those who received the program via online tutoring in their own homes. On average, the students who experienced online tutoring tended to be about two years older than the students who attended the centre in person and so comparisons need to be interpreted with caution.

Bearing this in mind, however, it was clear that the students who received online tutoring did just as well, if not slightly better, than students who attended the centre. This was very encouraging news since not all parents can easily attend the Literacy Centre. Not only is this difficult for parents living outside Sydney, it can be very trying even for Sydneysiders, Sydney traffic being what it is!

Initialit is coming!

Designed to provide effective initial instruction in reading and related skills, the new Initialit program, providing whole class initial instruction in literacy, is currently in development. Initialit is a three-year program for children in Foundation to Year 2.

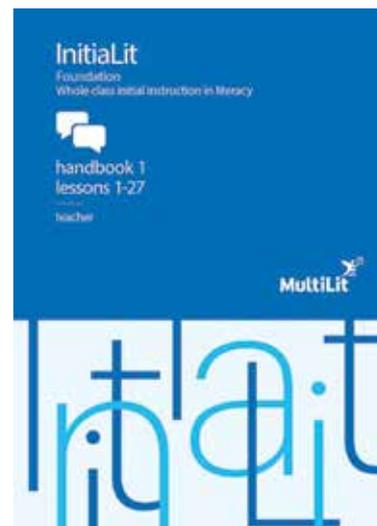
Initialit – Foundation will be released next year and incorporates the key components necessary for early reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The program teaches the alphabetic code through structured, explicit and systematic lessons, which will provide all children with essential foundational knowledge to become successful readers and writers.

What is in the program?

- 115 detailed and scripted lessons to be

delivered to the whole class for 20-30 minutes to teach the alphabetic code

- Flashcards, Picture Cards, Templates and other downloadable resources necessary for the delivery of a full lesson
- MS PowerPoint lessons to accompany the script for ease of delivery
- Sounds and Words Books and carefully constructed written activities to facilitate group and independent work during the literacy block
- A set of decodable readers comprising 60 titles to be used during group reading
- Testing and monitoring procedures to assist with the identification of children who may need extra assistance
- Lessons based on 25 popular storybooks to develop and enhance



vocabulary and oral language, as well as encourage a love of literature.

To register your interest and receive updates about the program's release, please email multilit@multilit.com.

The font of all wisdom?

Did you know that across Australian states and territories five (count them, five!) different fonts are recommended, not to say mandated, for teaching handwriting in primary schools. This means that if your child began school in, say, NSW and you and your family moved to Victoria, he or she would have to adapt to using a different handwriting font. Quite a confusing proposition for a little just beginning to get to grips with literacy. Now what was that we heard about a National Curriculum ...?

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