



moments

MacqLit is coming!

You asked for it and we're about to deliver. For some time now we have been fielding queries about a small group version of our famous MultiLit Reading Tutor Program (RTP) for individual instruction. Not unreasonably, schools are keen to gain the maximum bang for their buck, and research confirms that excellent literacy instruction conducted in small groups can be just as effective as individual instruction, especially for students whose problems are not quite so intractable.

Rather than simply modify the existing RTP for small group instruction, however, we have taken the opportunity to develop a completely new small group program for older low-progress readers. To be known as MacqLit, the Macquarie Literacy Program will be released by MultiLit in early 2016.

MacqLit targets the bottom 25% of students from Year 3 and above; students who have failed to make adequate progress in their first three years of schooling. In terms of the increasingly popular Response to Intervention model,



MacqLit, like its little sister MiniLit, is a Tier 2 small group program. In other words, it is the first line of support for those struggling to learn to read, following several years of early literacy instruction in school. We anticipate that instruction in small groups of no more than four to five students should ensure that only a small proportion of low-progress readers, perhaps less than 5% of students, will then need subsequent Tier 3 individual one-to-one instruction, using the RTP.

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Celebrating 20 years of MultiLit

Marking two decades since it was established, MultiLit held a 20th Anniversary Conference, 'Delivering Successful Literacy Interventions for 20 Years', on Saturday 7 November at Macquarie University.

The event featured the thought-provoking keynote symposium, 'Why Jaydon Can't Read – A forum on fixing literacy', presented by Dr Jennifer Buckingham, Research Fellow, Centre for Independent Studies; Justine Ferrari, Director, External and Strategic Relations, Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES); and Tom Alegounarius, President, BOSTES and Adjunct Professor, University of Sydney.

We were also privileged to have school leaders and practitioners sharing their experiences of using MultiLit programs



in their schools. Many attendees were inspired by the presentations from Ana Grassi, Kogarah High School; John Picton, Raymond Terrace Public School; Katie Campbell Harmon, Glenorie Public School; Jenny Rayner, Royal Far West School; Dale Cain, Armidale Catholic Diocese; and Colleen Toms, Maitland Christian School.

MultiLit also celebrated this milestone with an Anniversary Dinner, attended by staff and supporters.

Following are the edited addresses made by MultiLit Chairman Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM and Director Dr Robyn Wheldall at the Conference.

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MacqLit includes instruction in the five pillars of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, with the main focus on learning and applying the alphabetic code. Accurate and fluent word recognition is taught along with reading practice in sentence and story reading. Reinforced Reading, a component of MacqLit, ensures that the students are given sufficient opportunity to practise their reading in connected text.

The new MacqLit program will doubtless prove to be particularly attractive to schools with large numbers of low-

progress readers and who can form groups of four to five students experiencing similar levels of difficulty.

The MacqLit package includes a comprehensive Kit and a compulsory two-day Professional Development Workshop. Workshops will be held around Australia beginning in March 2016, and we are now taking bookings for these workshops – visit www.multilit.com for our 2016 Professional Development Workshop Calendar.

To find out more about MacqLit, including answers to a wide range of Frequently Asked Questions, and to order, visit www.multilit.com/macqlit.

MultiLit teams up with Bill Crews again

In 2016, MultiLit will again work with the Rev. Bill Crews to ensure students from disadvantaged backgrounds have the necessary literacy skills they need to reach their full potential.

This new partnership builds on a 20-year relationship which has seen more than 2,500 students receive MultiLit instruction through the Exodus Foundation Tutorial Centres.

The Bill Crews Charitable Trust (BCCT) has now secured a funding agreement with the NSW Department of Education (DoE) to deliver MultiLit within NSW DoE schools over the next two years.

The aim of the project is to provide intensive literacy support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not have the reading skills necessary to access the school curriculum, and who will struggle to cope with the demands of schooling as they move into high school.

The MultiLit BCCT Literacy Centres will be based at Punchbowl Public

School and Busby West Public School, with 80 Year 4-6 students from each school receiving daily intensive literacy instruction for a semester. The MultiLit literacy program will combine our newly developed small group program MacqLit, along with individual delivery of the Reading Tutor Program for students requiring more intensive instruction, and spelling instruction for all students. Trained volunteers will also work with students on a one-to-one basis to support the Reinforced Reading component of the program.

This program has been designed specifically to cater to the needs of low-progress readers who are likely to be at the bottom of their peer group in terms of reading ability, and may also be subject to other factors that have negatively impacted on their schooling.

“Ever since I first saw MultiLit in action, I could see how good they were, and I wanted to be involved. I’m so pleased to be working with them,” said the Rev. Bill Crews.



Punchbowl Public School Principal, Rose Manousaridis, and Deputy Principal, Sharonsue Sheppard, with the Rev. Bill Crews

“We are excited that the 20 years of success in working with Bill Crews and his charities to help the education outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged children will continue. The new centres will be in a school setting, embedding the MultiLit program within the school and local community where it can be most effective,” said Iain Rothwell, Director, MultiLit.

2016 Catalogue is out now

The 2016 MultiLit Catalogue has been released, with full details of all of our programs and Professional Development Workshops. Visit www.multilit.com/programs/ to download a copy, or email multilit@multilit.com to request a printed copy.



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

From all of us at MultiLit, we hope you have a happy and safe festive season, and a wonderful 2016!

*Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM,
Dr Robyn Wheldall and Iain Rothwell
MultiLit Directors*



‘Dreams come in a flash ...’

Kevin Wheldall

Over the past 20 years, we have carried out a great deal of research and development into programs to help low-progress readers – but I am not going to tell you anything about it! Instead, I am going to call on my research partner for over 20 years, my wife, Dr Robyn Wheldall, without whom I seriously doubt that we would be gathered here today on this special occasion. I would like to take this opportunity of acknowledging the extraordinary contribution that Robyn has made to our work in MultiLit.

In our work together, Robyn, and I have taken inspiration from the husband and wife team of architects, Walter Burley-Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin, who designed much of what was to become Canberra, and also some of Sydney’s Castlecrag. Marion Mahony Griffin wrote:

“Two people working together can change the world. Dreams come in a flash but one must fight the whole past to the death to make them come true. Blood, sweat and tears.”

Certainly none of it would have been possible without the support of the

MultiLit team working with us: Drs Alison Madelaine and Meree Reynolds who, with Sarah Arakelian, work with Robyn and me as the MultiLit Research Unit; our former research students, Lisa Limbrick, Simmone Pogorzelski, Jennifer Buckingham, as well as Alison and Meree, and literally dozens of research assistants; Renae Watkins, director of our MultiLit Literacy Centres and her teams of MultiLit tutors; Alison McMurtrie and her product development team; Freya Purnell, our publisher, and her production colleagues; Kyle Pitt and the training group, and Rose Ye, our finance manager; and our former academic colleagues at the Macquarie University Special Education Centre, Dr Coral Kemp, Associate Professor Mark Carter and Dr Jennifer Stephenson. My sincere and heartfelt thanks to you all.

I would also like to thank the University for their support of MultiLit and for encouraging us to follow our dream of helping low-progress readers.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge with gratitude, the support we have received over the years from:

- The Rev. Bill Crews, who had faith in

our work from the outset and whose Exodus Foundation has provided funding for the MultiLit Schoolwise program provided to socially disadvantaged students since 1996;

- Aboriginal leader, Noel Pearson, who invited us to see for ourselves what life is still like for many Australian children living in remote indigenous communities even today. This led to our project with Cape York Partnerships to roll out MultiLit across four aboriginal communities in Cape York;
- Particular thanks are owed to someone who has become a very dear friend as well as our business partner, Iain Rothwell, for his patient nurturing of two ‘risk averse’ academic researchers and for finally persuading us that a university spin-off company was the logical next step for MultiLit. We thank him for his leadership of the company as our Chief Operating Officer and fellow company director.

In summary, then, I would like to thank all of those who have been in our corner in our fight to make our dream of scientifically based reading instruction a reality.

Looking forward, looking back

Robyn Wheldall

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if, during the 20 years between when the Making Up Lost Time In Literacy (MultiLit) Initiative was established and now, we, as educators and policymakers, had solved the problem of children struggling to learn to read in our schools? Sadly this is not the case, notwithstanding the fact that a huge amount of research has been conducted in these years and the decade or so before. We now know much more about how children learn to read than we did even 20 years ago. The big problem has been getting that knowledge translated into practice. We now know how to teach reading effectively; we just don’t do it.

I thought I would share with you today some of the highlights of the past 20 years.

- In 1996, the first MultiLit programs were established in the Special School at Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC). We also set up the MultiLit Clinic at MUSEC and established the first Exodus Foundation ‘Schoolwise’ Program in Ashfield.
- In 1997 we secured a research grant from the Commonwealth Government to undertake an evaluation of

MultiLit, which was then published in 2000.

- 1998 saw the publication of the first edition of the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program, with a second edition produced in 2007.
- In 2001 we established the first MultiLit Tutorial Centre outside of New South Wales in Gladstone, Central Queensland.
- We were delighted when, in 2002, The House of Reps Standing Committee Report on Boys’ Education concluded that: “The knowledge and practical instructional techniques developed in MULTILIT by the researchers at Macquarie University should inform and enhance initial and remedial literacy instruction throughout Australia and form the core of remedial reading programs in primary and high schools.” We thought that, perhaps, our work was done ... but no.
- In 2004 we started working with Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson, and in 2005, established a MultiLit Tutorial Centre within the school at Coen on Cape York. From 2008, MultiLit

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was a key plank of Noel Pearson’s Welfare Reform Trial on Cape York. This saw MultiLit interventions being delivered in four Indigenous communities in Cape York until the end of 2010.

- In 2006 we expanded our work with the Rev. Bill Crews to establish the Redfern Exodus MultiLit Tutorial Centre, which extended further to the Northern Territory in 2009.
- The MultiLit Initiative was ‘spun off’ by the University in 2006 and we became MultiLit Pty Ltd. The MultiLit Research Unit was also established.
- In 2011, we started working with the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence to provide assessment and online literacy intervention services to Indigenous students.
- We expanded our product portfolio considerably, with Word Attack Skills Extension released in 2009, MiniLit in 2011, PreLit in 2012, the WARP (Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages) in 2013, Spell-It in 2014, and the WARL (or Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists) in 2015.

For the first 15 years, we did look a bit like ‘a one trick pony’, until the publication of MiniLit in 2011. Of course in all those years the research and development work was ongoing, and ongoing, and ongoing... And it is easy to reel off a list of highlights but this does not reflect the extent of the work behind the programs and products that we have today.

By way of summary, since MultiLit was established, 25% of Australia’s 11,000 schools have purchased one or more MultiLit resources. Since 2011, 12% of schools in Australia have a staff member who has been MultiLit trained. MultiLit has also provided assistance to thousands of students in our own Literacy Centres and community-based projects, including in Indigenous communities in northern Australia, and with the Exodus Foundation. More than 2,500 students have participated in MultiLit programs at the Exodus Foundation Tutorial Centres alone.

And what of the future? Looking back over the 20 years, we have really been working backwards, in a way. We started out trying to address the needs of older low-progress readers as they were heading off into high school. Over the years we have turned our attention to younger at-risk students with the development of MiniLit, and then through our work on Cape York, to intervene earlier in the years before school to help level the playing field for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, with PreLit.

We have also moved from one-to-one instruction to small group instruction. We are very excited that the release of MacqLit, our new small group program for older low-progress readers, is just around the corner, after a research and development phase of more than 10 years. Our small group programs have enabled larger numbers of students to have access to effective literacy support and these locate well within a Response to Intervention (RtI) framework.

But we feel that we have identified a gap in the RtI model for Australian schools. The RtI model really rests on effective, evidence-based universal Tier 1 – that is, whole class – instruction. We need to get the initial teaching of reading right



Jenny Rayner, Principal of Royal Far West School



(L-R) Rev. Bill Crews, Alison McMurtrie, Dale Cain, Dr Molly de Lemos, Sue Stacey

in the early years of school. To this end, MultiLit is working on InitialLit, a whole class program of instruction that will begin on Day 1 of school for 5-year-olds.

When we have completed InitialLit, and if it were to become widely adopted, we would expect to see far less demand for MiniLit and MultiLit. But then, as we have always said, our aim is to make ourselves redundant. Our mission is to contribute to the goal of ensuring that all children, regardless of background or circumstances, should become skilled readers.

Before closing, I would, at this point, like to say a big public thank you to Kevin Wheldall. I know that I speak for a great many people when I say that we have really appreciated your leadership of MultiLit, Kevin. You have been a generous mentor to many of us and we salute your determination and drive to help children who struggle to learn to read. Even faced with considerable health challenges, you have maintained your passion and continue to devote your energies to improving the outcomes for children and young people.

Finally, many thanks to all of our MultiLit users who have come out to celebrate with us today. We really appreciate the work that you do and the support that you give us in our shared vision of helping children and young people to become the very best that they can be.

Chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd

Professor Kevin Wheldall

Editor

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