

# moments

## RIP Reading Recovery

**Jennifer Buckingham**

Thanks to NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli, the deeply entrenched, multi-million-dollar Reading Recovery program will no longer be sacrosanct in NSW public schools. As of next year, the funding allocated to Reading Recovery will be unlocked and schools will be able to use this money for other more effective intervention programs to help students with reading difficulties.

This decision has been a long time coming. The NSW Department of Education was given strong advice 20 years ago by Professor Kevin Wheldall that Reading Recovery does not work very well. His report was swept under the carpet but, in recent years, evidence against Reading Recovery has become impossible to ignore.

A large study published by the NSW Government's own evaluation centre found

that students who had been in the Reading Recovery program were less likely to be at the expected reading level at the end of Year 1 than matched students who had not done Reading Recovery. The same study found that Year 3 NAPLAN scores of Reading Recovery students were worse than non-Reading Recovery students. Similar results have been found in the US, UK and New Zealand.

Credit is due to Minister Piccoli, who no doubt met a lot of resistance from Reading Recovery devotees. Sadly, thousands of children have been poorly served by Reading Recovery over the last two decades, and many Catholic schools remain committed to the program. Hopefully, they too will soon see the light.

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## The Bill Crews Charitable Trust MultiLit Literacy Centre at Busby West Public School



**Erin Teale**

At the beginning of this year, MultiLit embarked on a new project with the Bill Crews Charitable Trust (BCCT) to establish Literacy Centres at Busby West Public School for the whole school year, as well as at Punchbowl Public School.

The aim of this project is to provide intensive literacy support to students 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. Approximately 80 Year 3-6 students from each school will receive daily intensive literacy instruction for a semester.

The Literacy Centres employ our recently published small group program, MacqLit.

MacqLit is an explicit and systematic reading intervention program for small groups of older low-progress readers. It provides teachers with a comprehensive sequence of lessons that includes all the key components necessary for effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics,

## Why we developed InitialLit

### Kevin and Robyn Wheldall

**For over 20 years now, MultiLit has been researching and developing instructional programs for low-progress readers. We began with the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program, a one-to-one program for older low-progress readers from Year 3 up to high school and adult level. Then came MiniLit, a small group program for young struggling readers in Years 1 and 2, followed by PreLit for preschool children lacking the essential prerequisites for learning to read.**

Our most recent program is MacqLit, a small group program, again for older low-progress readers from Year 3 up. In effect, we have been busy creating Tier 2 and Tier 3 programs within a Response to Intervention model of instruction. But, of course, Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction are both predicated on exemplary Tier 1 instruction, what is taught initially to all students as a whole class so that they learn reading and related skills. Tier 2 and Tier 3 instructional programs are reserved for the minority of students who 'fail to thrive' as a result of Tier 1 instruction.

Unfortunately, Tier 1 instruction in learning to read in the Years K to 2 has not always been as effective as it could have been. Learning to read requires careful attention by teachers to what has become known as the Five Big Ideas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The Simple View of Reading tells us that successful reading comprehension is the product of decoding and listening comprehension. There is no point in being able to decode the words on the page fluently if a child's vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension skills mean that she or he does not understand what the words and sentences in the text mean. Similarly, having a great vocabulary and excellent listening comprehension skills will not get the emergent reader very far if he or she is unable to decode the words on the page with reasonable fluency. This is why, to be exemplary, initial reading instruction needs to cover all the bases of the Five Big Ideas.

In Australia, initial literacy instruction has not always been exemplary because

not all of the Five Big Ideas have been taught sufficiently well. In fact, it is probably true to say that while there has often been a strong focus on the vocabulary and comprehension side, the skills of rapid decoding have rarely been adequately addressed; phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency have been relatively neglected. Where phonics has been taught, it may not have been taught in a sufficiently explicit and systematic way. This has resulted in far too many children who would otherwise have learned to read with relative ease, failing to do so. Hence the excessive demand for Tier 2 and Tier 3 remedial programs.

This was why we finally decided that the time had come to develop our own program of exemplary initial instruction in literacy for the years Foundation (Kindy/Prep) to Year 2. Over the past few years, the MultiLit Product Development Team and the MultiLit Research Unit have been working together to develop an effective, coordinated and articulated program of initial instruction, now known as InitialLit. Like all MultiLit programs, it is the product of the combined work of a team of researchers and special educators that we have had the privilege of leading.

What started off as a relatively modest program grew into a far more ambitious undertaking to provide young children with a thorough grounding in reading and related skills. InitialLit has evolved into a dynamic instructional program for whole classes that reflects both advances in scientific research in reading instruction and the concomitant changes in our thinking and conceptualisation of reading instruction. It is our hope that, if schools and teachers embrace InitialLit, then far fewer young children will require more intensive Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions and, instead, will get off to a great start in learning to read.

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*In Australia, initial literacy instruction has not always been exemplary because not all of the Five Big Ideas have been taught sufficiently well.*

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fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Selected students receive 90 minutes of small group instruction a day (four to five students per group), five days a week. Trained volunteers also assist tutors work with students on a one-to-one basis to support the Reinforced Reading component of the program.

So far this year, 35 students have graduated from the MultiLit program

at Busby West Public School, after two terms of instruction. These students achieved great results and exceeded all expectations. At program commencement, the students were nearly three years below their chronological age for reading accuracy and comprehension. On average, these students made gains of:

- 17 months in decoding (reading nonwords)
- 16 months in single word reading

- 13 months in reading rate
- 10 months in reading accuracy
- 8 months in reading comprehension,
- 11 months in spelling, and
- can now read 33 (37%) more words correctly per minute.

There are currently 43 students from Stage 2 and 3 enrolled in the program for Terms 3 and 4.

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## Nomanis: A new magazine for teachers and parents

**MultiLit is proud to announce the launch of a new online magazine, *Nomanis*.**

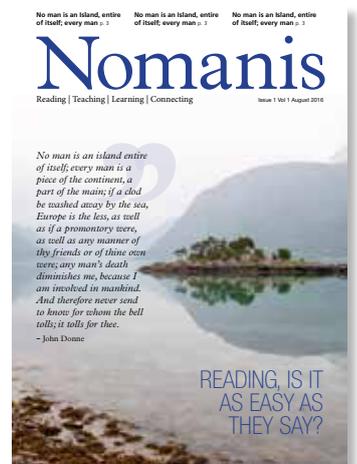
*Nomanis* will provide a platform for disseminating ideas and evidence about effective instruction in reading and related skills, for teachers, parents, fellow professionals and policymakers.

Our aim is to provide readable and engaging accounts of developments

in the teaching of reading and writing, distilled from the sometimes rather esoteric, and certainly dry, research literature. We welcome contributions and correspondence.

*Nomanis* is published and totally funded by MultiLit Pty Ltd and is provided free of charge to anyone who is interested.

Our first issue is available now from our new *Nomanis* website: [www.nomanis.com.au](http://www.nomanis.com.au)



## Armidale Diocese receives educational award

**Robyn Wheldall**

Dale Cain, from the Armidale Diocese Catholic Schools Office, has shared some good news with us – that the Office has been awarded The HTB Harris Award by the Australian College of Education for an outstanding educational program. The award recognises a program or coordinated approach to an educational need, with emphasis on innovative thinking, planning and action.

The Armidale Diocesan Literacy Strategy involved a system wide implementation of MiniLit (and more recently PreLit). Dale wanted me to pass on this excellent news to all at

MultiLit and to congratulate us also, as it is the MiniLit program implementation that has brought about enormous change in the literacy skills of the children in the Diocese. Dale also made the point that the capacity of their staff to teach reading has been built considerably because of their knowledge of MiniLit.

In addition, Dale also shared that their latest Year 5 NAPLAN results are excellent, this being the first group of Year 5 students undertaking NAPLAN who had received MiniLit instruction in their early years in school. The long term benefits of the firm foundations laid by MiniLit are manifest.

## Success story: Al-Faisal College

“Our NAPLAN results have come out today. Year 3 results were a stand out. We implemented a Tier 1 phonics based program in 2013 that was supported by MiniLit and MultiLit interventions in Years 1 and 2. Since 2013 we have seen dramatic improvements. Our 2016 Year 3 cohort is the first group of students

who have received and reaped the benefits of this approach from the start of Kindergarten. We have accredited the jump to our school’s implementation of a systematic, explicit phonics program that is supported by MiniLit and MultiLit intervention. Al-Faisal College has now seen consecutive years of improvements

in both reading and spelling since 2013. On behalf of the school, I would like to thank you for your contribution to early literacy education. Your work has made such a wonderful impact on the future prospects of our students.”

*Mohammed Adra, Deputy Principal, Al-Faisal College*

## How to make sure that MultiLit does not work

Renaë Watkins and Kevin Wheldall

**We recently received interesting feedback about the use, or rather misuse, of our MultiLit Reading Tutor Program in schools.**

Our correspondent wrote: "Every school uses the kit differently and hardly ever follows the instructions. I've seen students being 'taught' by other students, by parents who don't understand the program but are given a job to do by busy teachers ..."

We share our correspondent's frustration that, unfortunately, some schools (not too many we hope) choose not to implement our programs according to our recommendations and training. We are aware that when schools choose to do this, they do not achieve the gains we see in our Literacy Centres and that other schools routinely achieve when they implement our programs as they are intended to be taught. The NSW Education Department's own commissioned report on the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program confirmed that many schools do not teach the program properly, often missing out vital components entirely.

In fact, MultiLit chairman, Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM, addressed this very issue in his article, "Is MultiLit like Spaghetti Bolognese?" (available for download from <http://www.literacycentres.multilit.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Is-MultiLit-like-Spaghetti-Bolognese.pdf>).

When we first released the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program, nearly 20 years ago now, in our naivety we made it readily available to anyone who wanted to use it. We offered training but did not make it mandatory. How we have subsequently regretted that decision over the years and wished that we could get this particular genie back in its bottle! In all of our subsequent remedial programs (such as MiniLit and MacqLit), we have made access conditional upon prior training in its use and have made it available only for use in schools.

We cannot emphasise enough the vital importance of effective training in the delivery of remedial reading programs. It is, in fact, really easy to spoil any program, however effective it might have been shown to be, by not following the procedures correctly as the program developers intended.

## InitialLit Readers hit the mark!

**MultiLit has just released InitialLit Readers, a new range of 60 beautifully illustrated phonic readers for young children.**

**The books follow the phonic sequence taught in the InitialLit – Foundation Program, which will be released in Term 4, 2017. Although specifically written to be used alongside InitialLit, this delightful set of readers can be used alongside any phonic program.**

**We've already received some wonderful feedback from schools using our new InitialLit Readers. Here's what they have to say.**

Interesting and engaging story lines with amazing illustrations that students love, what more could you want! InitialLit Readers are a series of fantastic decodable books that introduce new

sounds and 'tricky' words, coinciding with the sequence of lessons InitialLit provides, making it easy to introduce the books for independent and supported reading.

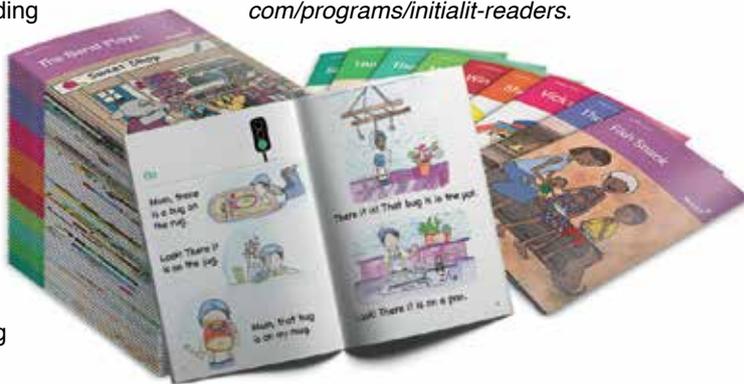
*Cody Keenan, Mercy School, Perth*

The new InitialLit Readers are amazing. Phonically regular words are introduced systematically, providing much-needed practice in basic letter sounds and patterns. Based on sound research, these decodable books are the perfect resource for emergent readers, EAL/D or students with reading

difficulties. The engaging and humorous stories and colourful illustrations have been an instant 'hit' with our young students, boosting confidence and motivation.

*Katie Harmon, Glenorie Public School*

*To find out more about InitialLit Readers or to order, please visit [www.multilit.com/programs/initiallit-readers](http://www.multilit.com/programs/initiallit-readers).*



## MultiLit Catalogue 2017 available soon

Our annual Catalogue, providing a comprehensive listing of MultiLit's products and professional development workshops, will be available shortly. To request a copy, please email [multilit@multilit.com](mailto:multilit@multilit.com).

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