

The MiniLit Early Literacy Intervention Program

What is MiniLit?

MiniLit stands for ‘Meeting Initial Needs In Literacy’ and is an early literacy intervention program. It is designed to be delivered daily, for one hour, to small groups of up to four Year 1 students who have struggled to make adequate progress in learning to read during their first year of schooling.

Who developed MiniLit?

MiniLit is the product of an ongoing program of research and development carried out by a specialist team of academic researchers and special educators, led by Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM, originally from Macquarie University. It was under development for over eight years. A continuing process of refinement by trial and revision was employed until the program met the stringent efficacy criteria to justify its release to the wider community. The published version of MiniLit (by MultiLit Pty Ltd in 2011) entailed a major revision of previous experimental versions and represents scientific evidence-based best practice.

What is MiniLit based on?

MiniLit is informed by the findings of scientific research, carried out over the past 40 years, into how reading works and how it may best be taught. It is also in accord with the recommendations of national reports into effective reading instruction that have emphasised the five key pillars of reading instruction (sometimes known as the ‘five big ideas’), namely: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The relevant research and the findings of the national inquiries are reviewed in the following two refereed journal articles:

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2010). Components of effective early reading interventions for young struggling readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 19, 35-57. doi: 10.1080/19404150903579055

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2011). What recent reviews tell us about the efficacy of reading interventions for struggling readers in the early years of schooling. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 58, 257-286. doi: 10.1080/1034912X.2011.598406

MiniLit is predicated on ten desiderata drawn from these sources:

1. Intervention is timely and offered during the second year of formal schooling, as soon as it is identified that the student has ongoing difficulties that cannot be addressed by the regular classroom instruction.
2. Instruction is delivered in small groups of up to four students.
3. The program includes phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension.
4. The main activities in phonemic awareness relate to learning to blend and segment and should ideally involve using letters once students are familiar with some letter-sound relationships.
5. Phonics is taught through a synthetic approach.
6. There are planned procedures for students to build automaticity in word recognition.
7. Instruction is explicit and systematic.
8. A well-trained teacher or a paraprofessional with teacher support delivers instruction.

9. Sessions are frequent, preferably daily, and involve at least 20-30 minutes of intensive instruction.
10. Assessment procedures and tools are available to identify struggling students and to monitor their progress.

What does MiniLit consist of?

MiniLit consists of 80 carefully structured lessons (sufficient for at least two terms of instruction) in an easy to hard sequence and is divided into two levels, Levels 1 and 2, with 40 lessons at each level. There are three main components of each lesson:

- Sounds and Words Activities
- Text Reading, and
- Story Book Reading

It is very important that *all* of three of these components are taught daily, as specified in the manual for the program:

MultiLit. (2011). *MiniLit early literacy intervention program*. Sydney: MultiLit Pty Ltd.

How are struggling students identified for participation in MiniLit and how is their progress monitored?

Ideally, young struggling readers should be identified at the commencement of the second year of formal schooling. Preliminary benchmarks for early identification have been established on several literacy measures and are reported in:

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2011). Early identification of young struggling readers: Preliminary benchmarks for intervention for students in years one and two in schools in New South Wales. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 20, 127-143. doi: 10.1080/19404158.2011.586711

A weekly curriculum-based measure of early reading progress has also been developed to monitor the progress of struggling readers, reported in:

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K. & Madelaine, A. (2009). Building the WARL: The development of the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists, a curriculum-based measure designed to identify young struggling readers and monitor their progress. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 14, 89-111. doi: 10.1080/19404150902783443

What is the evidence for the efficacy of MiniLit?

Successive iterations of the MiniLit program have been continually revised following efficacy trials. Reports of the early development trials of MiniLit are reported in the following journal articles:

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2007). Developing a ramp to reading for at-risk year one students: A preliminary pilot study. *Special Education Perspectives*, 16, 39-69. Retrieved from <http://aase.edu.au/about/publications/perspectives>

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2007). 'Meeting Initial Needs In Literacy' (MINILIT): Why we need it, how it works and the results of pilot studies. *Australian Journal of Special Education*, 31, 147-158. doi: 10.1080/10300110701716188

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2007). 'Meeting Initial Needs In Literacy' (MINILIT): A ramp to MULTILIT for younger low-progress readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 12, 67-72. doi: 10.1080/19404150709546832

Randomised control trials have also been completed confirming the efficacy of the program.

Reynolds, M., Wheldall, K., & Madelaine, A. (2010). An experimental evaluation of the efficacy of an intervention for young struggling readers in year one. *Special Education Perspectives*, 19(2), 35-57. Retrieved from <http://aase.edu.au/about/publications/perspectives>

Buckingham, J., Wheldall, K., & Beaman-Wheldall, R. (2012). A randomized control trial of a tier two small group intervention ('MiniLit') for young struggling readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 17, 79-99. doi: 10.1080/19415532.2012.722038

Buckingham, J., Wheldall, K., & Beaman-Wheldall, R. (2014). Evaluation of a two-phase implementation of a tier 2 (small group) reading intervention for young low-progress readers. *Australian Journal of Special Education*, 38, 169-185. doi: 10.1017/jse.2014.13

A recent analysis of the progress of 194 struggling young readers who had attended MiniLit programs for four days per week for 15 weeks showed that they had made substantial and statistically significant gains ($p < 0.0005$) on all of the measures of reading and related skills assessed, with very large effect sizes evident.

Wheldall, K., Wheldall, R., Madelaine, A., Reynolds, M., & Arakelian, S. (2017). Further evidence for the efficacy of an evidence based, small group, literacy intervention program for young struggling readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 22(1), 3-13. doi: 10.1080/19404158.2017.1287102

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