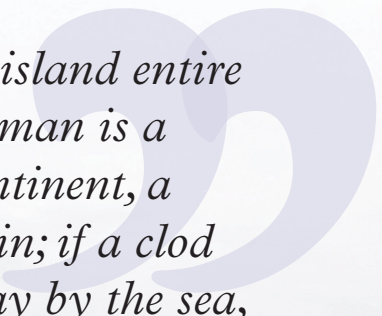


Nomanis

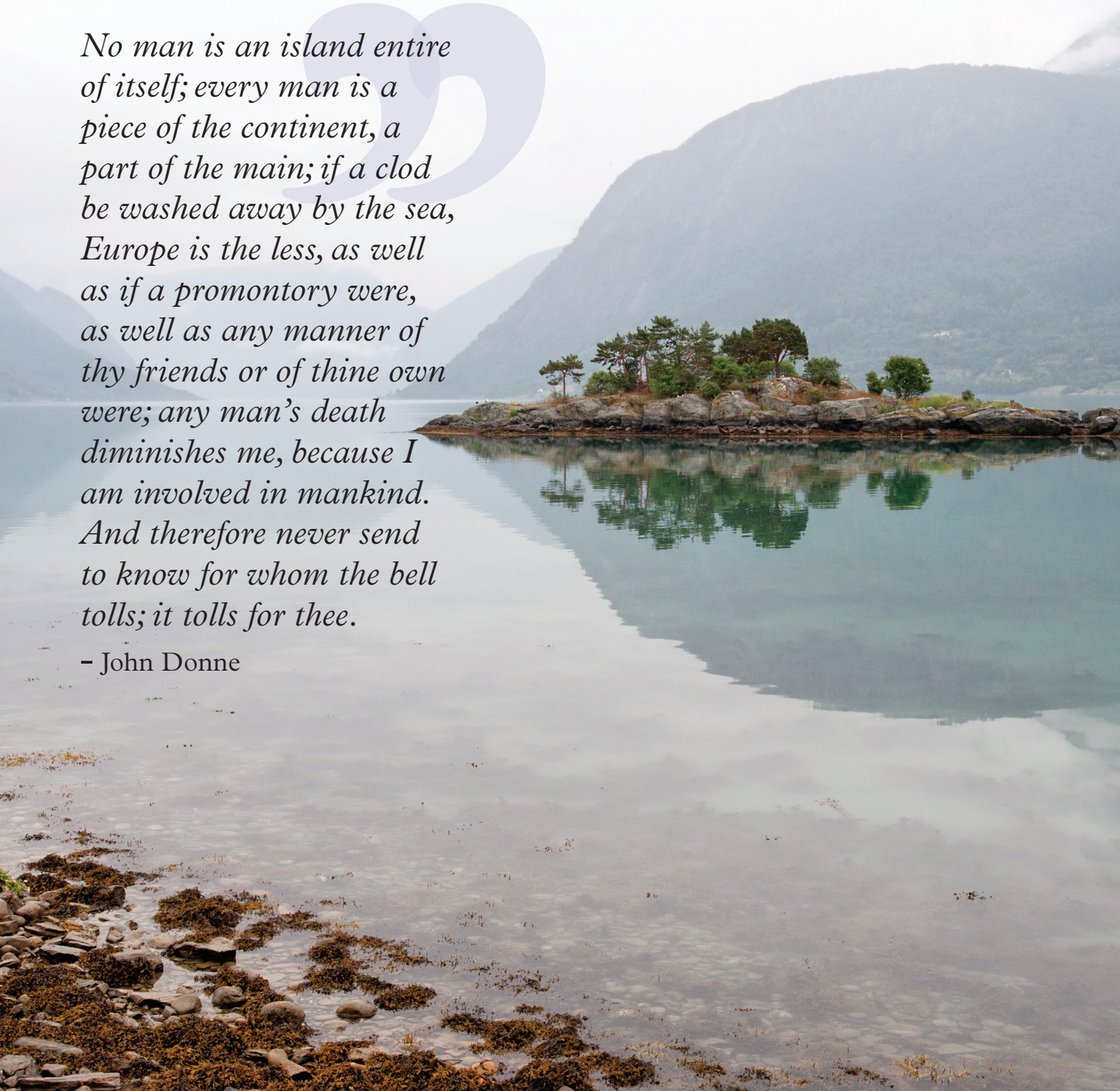
Reading | Teaching | Learning | Connecting

Issue 1 Vol 1 August 2016



*No man is an island entire
of itself; every man is a
piece of the continent, a
part of the main; if a clod
be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less, as well
as if a promontory were,
as well as any manner of
thy friends or of thine own
were; any man's death
diminishes me, because I
am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send
to know for whom the bell
tolls; it tolls for thee.*

- John Donne



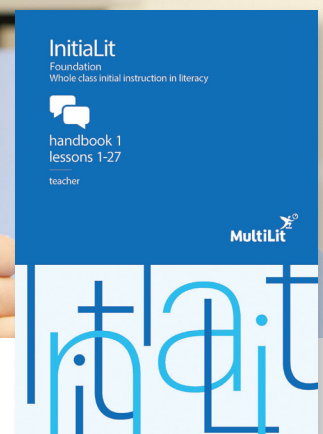
InitialLit is coming!

Designed to provide effective initial instruction in reading and related skills, the new InitialLit Program, providing whole class initial instruction in literacy, is currently in development. The first phase of development, InitialLit – Foundation will be released in Term 4, 2017. InitialLit – Year 1 and InitialLit – Year 2 will follow in subsequent years.

The InitialLit Foundation Program 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
- Storybook Lessons based on 25 popular storybooks to develop and enhance vocabulary and oral language as well as encourage a love of literature



InitialLit – Foundation will be released in Term 4, 2017

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

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Welcome to *Nomanis*

**Kevin
Wheldall**



The first question I suspect that many of you will be asking is ‘Why *Nomanis*?’ or perhaps ‘What is *Nomanis*?’ To answer this we have to travel back in time nearly 50 years, to when I was an undergraduate at Manchester University in the late ‘60s. For reasons that escape me now, I became the editor of the newly formed Poetry Society magazine. The committee cast around for a cool title but we could not agree on one until I suggested *Nomanis*, taking inspiration from the first line of John Donne’s famous poem that begins ‘No man is an island ...’. I think this magazine lasted for one issue and reading the mounds of undergraduate poetry submitted nearly put me off poetry for life. Oh the angst!

When it came to deciding upon a name for our new bulletin about reading and related skills for parents, teachers and interested others, again we hit the wall until I remembered *Nomanis* and thought about its implications; it is a powerful plea for understanding the interconnectedness of us all to each other.

For me, reading has probably been the best way to achieve this and has truly been a joy for life. A love of reading from an early age allowed me respite, not to say escape, from the rather moribund life on a council housing estate in Derby in the UK in the 1950s. Reading educated me not only intellectually but also spiritually too. Reading taught me to understand that other people lived very different lives from mine but also that, regardless of this, the essential human verities transcended class, race, gender and history. As C. S. Lewis is credited with saying, in the play and film *Shadowlands*, “We read to know that we are not alone.” So when Tom Sawyer was trapped in the caves with ‘Injun Joe’, I was there too. I was on the Coral Island with Jack, Ralph and Peterkin. I was even at the Circus of Adventure with Jack, Phillip, Dinah and Lucy-Ann, not forgetting Kiki the parrot, of course. Later on I became Stephen Dedalus and then Paul Morel, at least for a while.

I like to think that this personal love of reading, and an early brush with reading difficulty (rapidly resolved by my formidable mother), led to my continuing academic interest in how reading might best be taught and how best to help low-progress readers. I see this incarnation of *Nomanis* as a vehicle for promoting the ideas and evidence about effective instruction in reading and related skills, for teachers, parents, fellow professionals and policy makers. 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.

In fairness, it should also be stated upfront that *Nomanis* is published and totally funded by MultiLit Pty Ltd and is provided free to anyone who is interested. Information about MultiLit programs will be included as well as advertising material.

In this first issue, we feature: two articles by Jennifer Buckingham and John Picton based on their contributions to the MultiLit Twentieth Anniversary Conference, held last year; an excellent summary of what effective reading instruction entails by Molly de Lemos; a report of research on the controversial ‘Dyslexie’ font written with colleague Eva Marinus; a thought-provoking opinion piece by Greg Ashman; and news of the exciting new Five from Five initiative.

We hope that you enjoy this first issue of *Nomanis*. Please feel free to pass it on to your colleagues and friends.

“Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee”.

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM, Joint Editor

What we've been reading

At MultiLit, we are not only interested in teaching reading but we are also avid readers ourselves. In this regular feature, we ask members of the editorial team what they've been reading recently and to share their thoughts with our readers.



Robyn Wheldall has been devouring Alain de Botton's new novel *The Course of Love* and recommends it highly, although she wonders what his wife thinks about it. She is currently reading *Reading Development and Teaching* by Morag Stuart and Rhona Stainthorpe (2016) which is chock full of great information about reading and how to teach it. In parallel, she is reading Stanislas Dehaene's *Reading in the Brain* (2009).



Meree Reynolds has recently finished reading *The Dry*, a crime mystery by debut Australian author, Jane Harper. She really enjoyed this atmospheric book set in a typical country town. Meree is now engrossed in *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos* by Dominic Smith. Both books are highly recommended.



Alison Madelaine is also currently reading *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos*, by Dominic Smith and is enjoying it very much. She also recently listened to the audiobook, *Reckoning*, by Magda Szubanski (read by Magda herself). This is her favourite of 2016 so far. On the professional front, she is rereading Maryanne Wolf's *Proust and the Squid: The story and science of the reading brain* in anticipation of her visit to Australia in September.



Sarah Arakelian loves a variety of genres and having just finished reading *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, she has been enjoying J. R. R. Tolkien's classic, *The Lord of the Rings*. She can also often be found flipping through the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition*, to find out whether that comma should actually be a full stop.



Kevin Wheldall, a crime fiction enthusiast, has been catching up with Andrea Camilleri's Inspector Montalbano in *Game of Mirrors* and Ian Rankin's Rebus in *Mortal Causes*. He has also read the much praised Elena Ferrante's quartet of novels beginning with *My Brilliant Friend* but he can't see what all the fuss is about! On the other hand, he greatly appreciated Zachary Leader's *The Life of Kingley Amis*. He was less impressed than Robyn was with Alain de Botton's *The Course of Love* and offers a short review on p. 24 in this issue. He admits that his professional reading has been put to shame by his colleagues.

Finally, we *all* loved *Big Little Lies* by Liane Moriarty and eagerly seek to identify 'Blonde Bobs' in our networks!

Why Jaydon still can't read

**Jennifer
Buckingham**



Note: This article was originally presented as an address to the MultiLit Twentieth Anniversary Conference in 2015.

It is a great honour to be the first speaker at this symposium to mark the twentieth anniversary of MultiLit. What an incredible achievement. Congratulations especially to Kevin and Robyn Wheldall, of course, but also to all the many hard-working and clever people involved in MultiLit and its progeny.

This year marks some other auspicious but less celebratory anniversaries.

It is now 60 years since Rudolf Flesch published his best-selling book *Why Johnny Can't Read* (Flesch, 1955). Flesch explained in plain language why the methods of teaching reading in America in 1955 were not working. In it he wrote, "The teaching of reading – all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks – is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense. Johnny couldn't read ... for the simple reason that nobody ever showed him how" (p.2). Australian educators went ahead and adopted those same methods anyway.

It is now 15 years since the US National Reading Panel reported its findings based on the overwhelming scientific evidence of the key components of effective reading instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

In December this year, it will be exactly 10 years since the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy in Australia made almost identical recommendations to the National Reading Panel (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005).

Since then, evidence has continued to accumulate in support of the findings of these reports, as well as the Rose Review in the UK in 2006 (Rose, 2006), that with effective, evidence-based reading instruction and timely intervention, almost all children will learn to read.

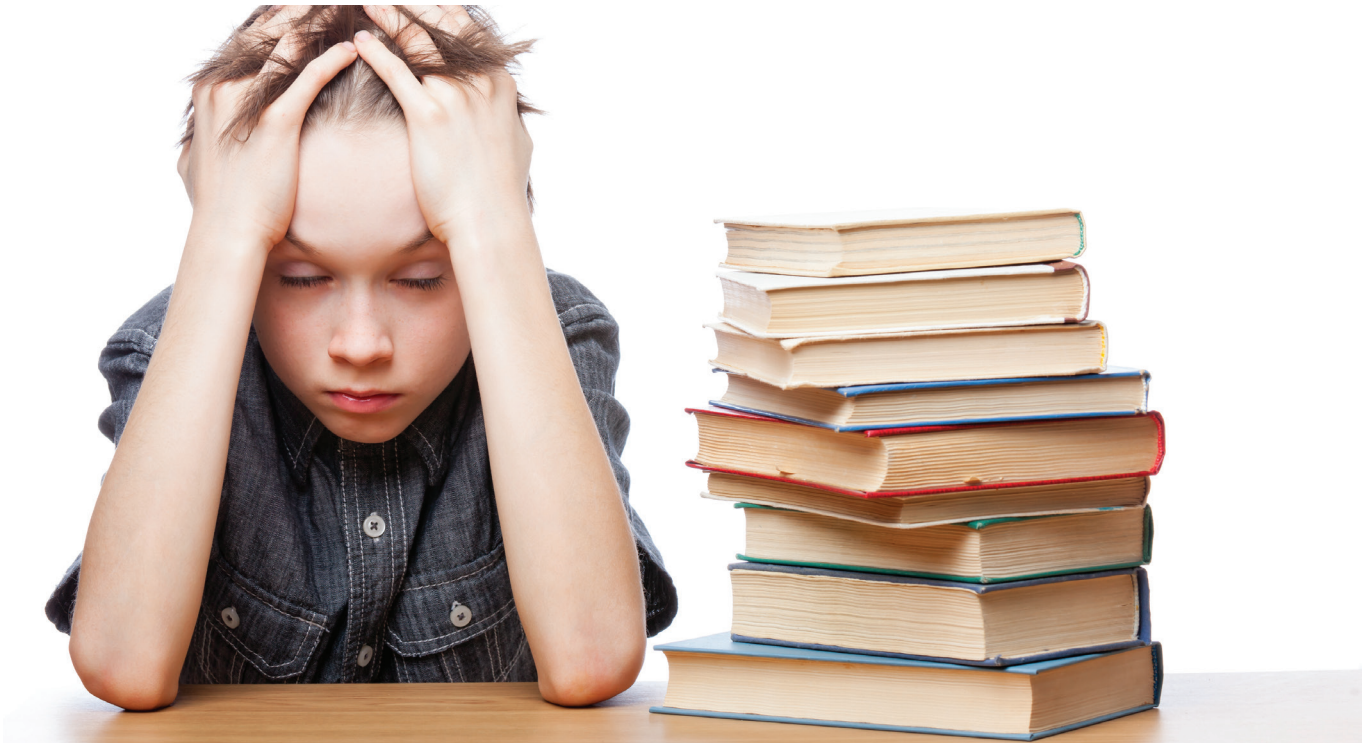
Yet a large number of Australian children and adults – hundreds of thousands, in fact – are either illiterate, or able to read at only the most rudimentary level – after as much as nine or 10 years of school. I don't know how many children and young people MultiLit and MiniLit have saved from that fate, but it would easily be in the thousands.

Almost exactly one year ago today, I gave a presentation at the Centre for Independent Studies to discuss a paper I co-wrote with Kevin and Robyn Wheldall. We called the paper 'Why Jaydon Can't Read' to highlight the fact that while fashions for names had changed, the reading problem had not (Buckingham, Wheldall & Beaman-Wheldall, 2013).

Here, I will discuss why Jaydon still can't read. In the year since then, there has been significant progress in policy, but not all of it good. And unfortunately there is no convincing evidence yet of improvement in outcomes.

Let's start with the statistics.

Table 1 shows the proportions of children who were in the lowest two bands of achievement in the NAPLAN tests in 2013 and 2014. They are classified as being either at or below the national minimum standard for



reading. From 2013 to 2014, the proportions of children in this category increased substantially in the primary school years.

These proportions have changed only marginally since the NAPLAN tests began eight years ago.

Table 1. Percentage of students at or below national minimum standard (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013; 2014).

	2013	2014
Year 3	13.4	15.1
Year 5	13.7	18.3
Year 7	18.5	17.7
Year 9	23.3	24.5

Data from an international assessment is even more damning. It shows that 24% of Australian students in Year 4 are achieving only at the low international benchmark at best. In terms of mean literacy scores on the Progress in Reading Literacy Study, or PIRLS, Australia is ranked lowest among all participating English-speaking countries, as shown in Table 2.

Why, after at least \$100,000 worth of schooling and thousands of hours of instruction, do so many children fail to learn to read?

Table 2. Year 4 students, English speaking countries (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Drucker, 2012).

	% at/below 'low' international benchmark	Mean rank / 45 countries
Northern Ireland	13	5
Canada	14	12
United States	14	6
Ireland	15	10
England	17	11
Australia	24	27
New Zealand	25	23

A report released by the Mitchell Institute last week noted the large difference between the NAPLAN benchmark and the PIRLS benchmark, saying that the Australian national benchmarks are low by international standards (Lamb, Jackson, Walstab, & Huo, 2015).

Figure 1. Comparison of Australian and international benchmarks (Lamb, Jackson, Walstab, & Huo, 2015).

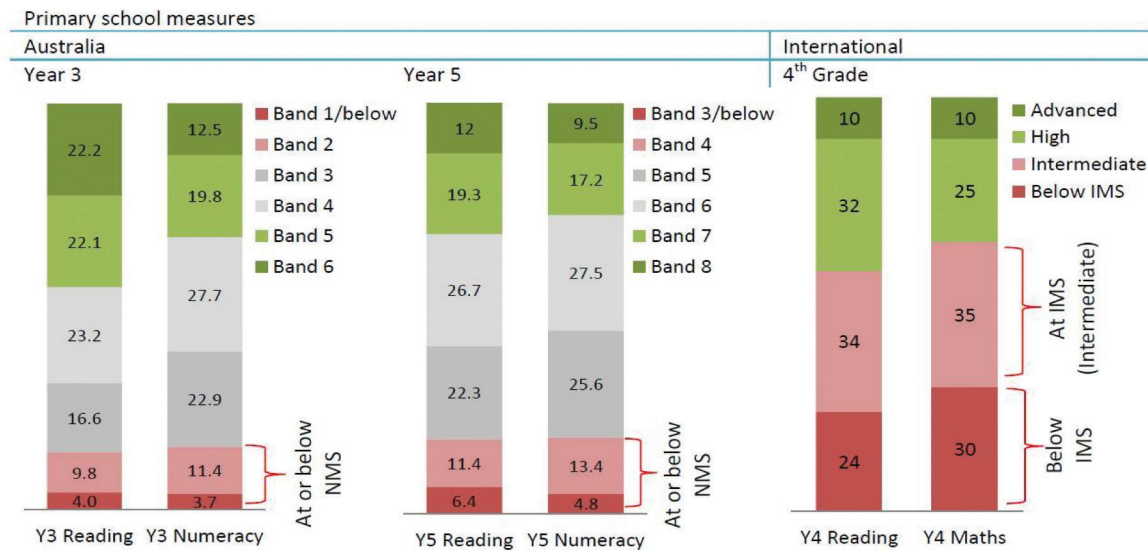


Figure 1 shows the difference between the NAPLAN and PIRLS standards at primary school level. The columns on the left are the NAPLAN achievement bands for Year 3 and Year 5 literacy and numeracy and the two columns on the right are the PIRLS achievement bands for Year 4. The dark and light pink bands represent the proportion of students at or below the minimum standard. The proportions are as much as three times greater in the international study.

The Mitchell Institute report proposed an adjusted NAPLAN benchmark that more closely approximated the international standard to estimate the proportion and the number of students who have literacy levels below the international minimum standards when they begin secondary school.

They found that 28% of Year 7 students did not have sufficient literacy skills to be able to cope with the academic curriculum demands in high school. That is an estimated 73,000 students in Year 7 alone. These children have been in school full-time for over seven years, clocking up as much as 2,800 hours of classroom literacy teaching, and very likely many more hours of reading support.

None of this is a secret. Billions of dollars of public money have been spent trying to improve literacy levels of school students over the last decade. Millions more have been spent privately by families on reading programs, tutoring and specialist services.

Why, after at least \$100,000 worth of schooling and thousands of hours of instruction, do so many children fail to learn to read? A small number have cognitive or congenital disabilities that make learning very difficult. How do we explain the rest?

There are only two plausible explanations. One is that there is something wrong with the children – they are too stupid or too poor or too naughty. The other explanation is that there is something wrong with the way they have been taught.

It is much easier for educators to accept the first explanation. It lets them off the hook. Fortunately, however, it is wrong. Almost all children can learn to read, given the right sort of instruction. Too often, however, that is not what they get.

Decades ago, schools adopted an approach to reading based on a theory that children would learn to read words if exposed to them often

enough. This is the method called ‘Look-Say’ or ‘Whole Word’ – children had to remember each and every word individually.

In 1955, Flesch explained that the whole word method overloads the memory and does not give students the ability to use the alphabetic principles and rules of written language to work out new words. These days, we call this cognitive load theory. It still makes sense, but now there is more evidence to support it.

The whole language method that followed it is just as wrong. It theorises that learning to read is just like learning to speak – if children are read to and exposed to books, their word range will expand. Neither of these assumptions is correct.

As evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker puts it, “Language is a human instinct, but written language is not ... Children are wired for sound, but print is an optional accessory that must be painstakingly bolted on. This basic fact about human nature should be the starting point for any discussion about how to teach our children to read and write” (Pinker, 1997, p.xi).

Effective, evidence-based reading instruction has five elements, all of which are necessary and none of which

is sufficient alone.

The essential components are: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. It is difficult to state it any more clearly – phonics is one of five essential elements. The three major reports on reading research I mentioned earlier (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Rose, 2006) stated unambiguously that an effective and comprehensive reading program has a focus on both decoding strategies and developing comprehension.

If we know this, why isn't classroom reading instruction constructed around this knowledge?

The Jaydon paper (Buckingham, Wheldall & Beaman-Wheldall, 2013) identified two culprits – pre-service teacher education and government policy. Many teachers do not themselves have strong knowledge of the underlying structure of written language to be able to teach it well. Teacher education degrees do not have sufficient emphasis on the specific strategies and techniques that are most effective in the crucial early years of reading instruction. For example, one study (Fielding-Barnsley, 2010) found that only 33% of teacher education students knew that the word 'chop' has three phonemes. In another study, less than half of teacher education students thought they had been adequately prepared to teach phonics, grammar and spelling (Louden & Rohl, 2006).

Government policy did not accurately reflect the research findings on effective reading instruction and was consistently undermined by a reliance on non-expert 'experts,' and misallocation of vital resources into ineffective programs, at least in part because of persistent failure to evaluate programs properly.

This brings us to 2015 and 'why Jaydon still can't read'.

Over the past year, there has been a noticeable shift in government policy and rhetoric about reading, especially in NSW, and I give a lot of credit to Tom Alegounarias, President of BOSTES NSW, for this shift. The Literacy Learning in the Early Years

report published in January this year is the first attempt since the National Inquiry to audit the literacy course content of teaching degrees (Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards [BOSTES] NSW, 2014); new NSW BOSTES pre-requisites for enrolment in teaching degrees will lift the literacy skills of future teaching cohorts (BOSTES, 2016, 'Increased academic standards for studying teaching'). The Centre for Educational Statistics and Evaluation published an excellent report on evidence-based practices in education (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE], 2014). And, most recently, the NSW BOSTES produced a phonics guide that has been widely commended by reading specialists.

At the national level, the early years literacy component of the

Teacher education degrees do not have sufficient emphasis on the specific strategies and techniques that are most effective in the crucial early years of reading instruction.

Australian Curriculum has been revised and improved, especially in the areas of phonemic awareness and phonics (ACARA, 2015). The Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group report handed down in February 2015 recommended that literacy courses in teaching degrees be required to be more evidence-based (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014). The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership is developing new accreditation standards that will require universities to explain in detail and prove that their courses meet criteria for effective teaching practices.

All of this is positive. The problem is that these overarching policy recommendations are not yet routinely reflected in reading programs in schools. Since I singled out NSW for bouquets I am also going to throw some metaphorical brick-bats in the same direction.

This year, yet another evaluation of Reading Recovery has shown that it is far less effective than it should be given its cost. Its many flaws are well known. Chief among them is that it is least effective for children that are most in need of intensive reading support. Nonetheless Reading Recovery is still the NSW Department of Education's preferred program for remedial reading instruction. In many schools it is the only funded intervention for struggling readers, of whom there are increasing numbers.

It is bad enough to persist with a program that has been regularly evaluated and found to be wanting. It is arguably worse to inflict upon schools a reading program that had not been evaluated at all, and which does not even meet the criteria for effective, evidence-based reading instruction. The latest issue of the *Learning Difficulties Australia Bulletin* contains a damning critique of an early reading program (L3) that was first implemented in 2007 and was used in hundreds of primary schools in 2012 (Neilson & Howell, 2015).

According to the authors of the LDA article, Roslyn Neilson and Sally Howell, there is "no planned sequence to the introduction of

letter-sound correspondences, and no opportunity for children to practise mastering the skills of letter-sound identification, phoneme segmentation and blending”, and the program’s guidelines discourage the use of any other formal phonics instruction. The program is deliberately targeted at socioeconomically disadvantaged schools, making Neilson and Howell’s warning that the program is “potentially a recipe for disaster for at-risk students” even more troubling.

But this is a good day, so I will end on a hopeful note. There are hundreds of schools around Australia making fantastic progress in literacy by making a deliberate decision to seek out and adopt effective teaching strategies and interventions, including MiniLit and the MultiLit Reading Tutor Program. Some of those schools are represented here today. I strongly believe that it is possible to turn back the ‘slow motion disaster’ of low literacy; it just can’t be left to chance.

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Dr Jennifer Buckingham is a senior research fellow and director of the FIVE from FIVE reading project at the Centre for Independent Studies. The FIVE from FIVE project promotes effective reading instruction through its website, www.fivefromfive.org.au, and social media, @fivefromfive and www.facebook.com/fivefromfive/.

MultiLit at Raymond Terrace Public School

Established over 150 years ago and the oldest school in the Port Stephens area, Raymond Terrace Public School (38km north of Newcastle), of which I have been Principal for the past 10 years, has a student population of approximately 450 pupils. Of these students, 80% come from low socio-economic backgrounds; 22% identify as indigenous. The school currently has 17 mainstream classes and three Multi-categorical support classes.

Inheritance

Preparing to start my Principalship at the school, I felt it important to look at the positives and what would be required to improve student outcomes. Arriving 10 years ago, as you do when you start at any school, you look at what works.

Raymond Terrace Public School (RTPS) had a very 'traditional' base. We had teachers who had over 30 years service – one with over 30 years at RTPS alone. Teachers were quite 'comfortable' and hesitant to embrace change, as they 'had seen it before' and that the students were 'only Raymond Terrace kids and that is all that could be expected'. That was like a red rag to a bull with me and obviously raised concerns.

Bearing in mind if you keep doing the same thing, you will keep getting the same result, it was necessary to do something as soon as possible. We used what data was available – because 'without data, it's only an opinion' – and began having conversations with staff, parents and the wider school community.

John Fleming, well-known academic and leader, and award winner of successful school programs in Victoria, was engaged to visit RTPS over three days and offer advice as to how the school could move forward. From this, we developed our 'Pillars' and set future directions. We agreed we would develop common practices and common language from K-6, and insist on:

- Explicit teaching;
- High expectations;
- Differentiation; and
- A genuine need for intervention.

We needed to get this message out to the school community. We were serious about lifting student outcomes.

Champion

We needed someone to 'champion the cause', to be our 'champion', and we had that very person in the form of a parent at the school – Jennifer Buckingham (how lucky were we?!).

Jennifer was the mother of two girls at our school at the time. What I did not know then was that Jennifer was also a renowned educational researcher, a conference speaker and highly respected in educational circles. Jennifer was instrumental in getting John Fleming to our school.

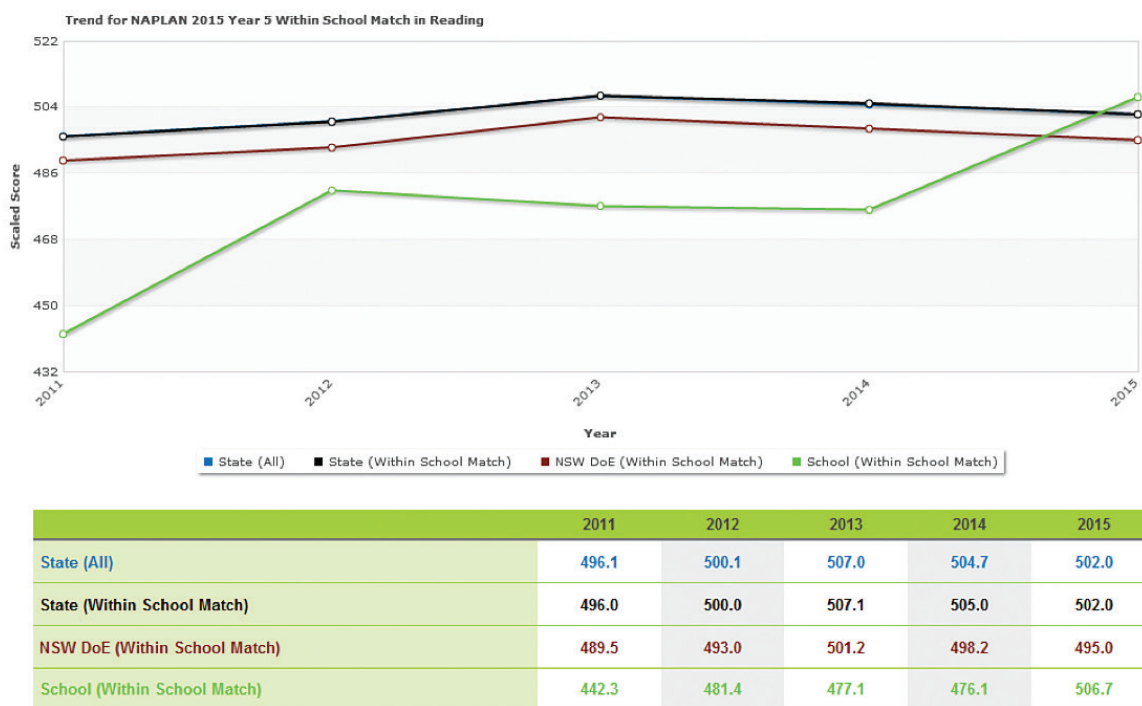
In conversation with Jennifer, I mentioned we were about to receive



**John
Picton**

***Note:** This article was originally presented as an address to the MultiLit Twentieth Anniversary Conference in 2015.*

Figure 1. Year 5 NAPLAN Reading results 2011 to 2015.



a substantial amount of National Partnership money, and asked how she thought we could best spend part of it. With little hesitation, she mentioned MultiLit. Soon I was provided with research on literacy and a brief of the program. It certainly had my attention and interest.

Discovery

Jennifer had arranged for me to visit and meet with the authors, Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Wheldall but, to my surprise, they were willing and very interested in coming to Raymond Terrace to speak about the program with me. Their passion and desire to help our students improve their reading, in particular, was quite overwhelming. There was a genuine interest in our students and a willingness to partner with us. They provided support through training and testing in our endeavours to help especially those ‘falling through the gaps’. We had formed a partnership with MultiLit and Macquarie University.

We chose to introduce the Tier 2 tutoring format to maximise the number of students we could support, while still having close to individual tutoring (one tutor to four students). We also catered for a few specific individuals by including them in a

We needed to take time time to build strength in the team by sourcing teachers with the skills, passion and genuine interest in making a difference and providing the necessary training.

Tier 3 format with an individual tutor and/or via the internet with a tutor from Macquarie University.

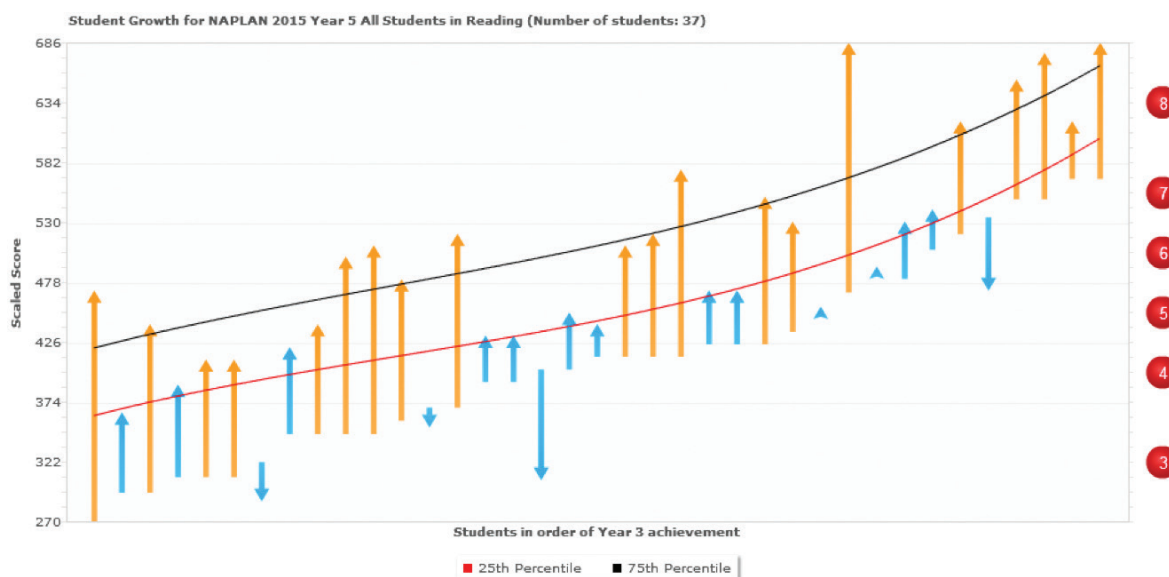
It was important that we gathered around us a strong team. We needed to take time to build strength in that team by sourcing teachers with the skills, passion and genuine interest in making a difference and providing the necessary training. Whilst quality resources were available to support the program, the tutors needed to be trained in the correct use of these resources and confident in implementing them. The ‘team’ also included Kevin, Robyn, Sarah Arakelian and the MultiLit team.

The obstacles

At RTPS we refer to ‘pressure with support’, and with some staff questioning the need for the ‘unheard of’ MultiLit program, it was important to provide evidence to support the program and demonstrate what it could offer. It meant that teachers were being taken out of their comfort zone.

Testing by MultiLit staff provided the necessary data to show the need for intervention. The team approach provided a starting point for conversation among staff and slowly teachers were on side. Professional dialogue was occurring and there was a sense that the importance of the program was building.

Figure 2. Student growth for NAPLAN 2015 all students in reading.



Whilst teachers were reluctant to have their students withdrawn from class, there was now evidence that there was improvement with their reading – and the teachers agreed.

While there were preferred programs recommended to the school, we chose to implement the MultiLit programs fully and continue with the program, as we were now able to provide evidence of improved student outcomes.

Commitment

RTPS was now fully committed to MultiLit. Jennifer Buckingham opted to undertake a PhD research project on literacy and social disadvantage. As part of the research, she tested low-progress readers who were now involved in our small group MiniLit and MultiLit Reading Tutor Programs. The results of this study gave further kudos to the program.

Results

MultiLit for RTPS was now an important part of our school programs. We had invested heavily in MultiLit resources; sourced, trained and employed quality teachers; designated and named rooms in the school with professionally made signage – providing a clear identity which was embraced by the whole school community.

The results were bittersweet – we actually lost Nort Norta (government) funding for our Indigenous students because of their improved outcomes. However, it was not just the improved NAPLAN results (where reading has continued a steady incline since 2010, see Figure 1), but also improved attendance (reported by the Regional Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer to be the best in the Hunter/Central Coast region for Indigenous students in 2011-13). The feedback from students was that they felt more confident. The fact that classroom incidents of misbehaviour had decreased not only had wide-ranging benefits but suggested the students were more engaged in their learning.

Reading results from 2015 NAPLAN continued to show significant increases in learning outcomes, with Year 5 students not only having growth above State average (see Figures 1 and 2), but transferring that to the other NAPLAN tests with Year 5 results above state average in all components in literacy and numeracy.

The future

At RTPS we are proud of the results we are accomplishing and proud to say that MultiLit has played an extremely important part. However, we realise we still have improvements we can make to help our students to continue

to improve their reading, and therefore improve their learning outcomes across all Key Learning Areas.

We also have some challenges ahead of us with seven teachers either on, or returning from, maternity leave, meaning teachers who are not as familiar with our expectations will need to be upskilled. We believe that by ensuring common language and common best practices are in place, we can maintain our improvements. MultiLit plays a large part in ensuring that this happens, for which we are extremely grateful.

John Picton has been the Principal of Raymond Terrace Public School for the past 10 years.

How children learn to read: A position statement

**Molly
de Lemos**



This position statement was developed to clarify what I see as the basic facts relating to how children learn to read, and how best to teach them, as supported by current theory and scientific evidence on the processes underlying the acquisition of reading.

- 1 The purpose of reading is to gain meaning from written text.
- 2 In order to gain meaning from written text, it is necessary to convert the written text to the spoken word.
- 3 Comprehension of written text is dependent on the ability to link the written word to the spoken word, and so to access the meaning of words through knowledge of the spoken language.
- 4 Reading comprehension is dependent on the same skills as listening comprehension, and is dependent on vocabulary knowledge, subject and context knowledge, and higher order thinking skills such as reasoning and inference which are applied to the interpretation of both spoken language and written text. A competent reader should be able to comprehend in written form what they can comprehend in spoken form.
- 5 English is an alphabetic language, and the ability to convert written text to the spoken word is dependent on knowledge of the alphabetic principle. This requires an understanding of the association between letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent (phonics).
- 6 In order to associate sounds with letters, it is necessary to be able to distinguish the smallest unit of sound in each word (phoneme), so that each sound can be associated with the appropriate letter (single letter) or grapheme (a combination of letters making a single sound, such as sh or igh).
- 7 Learning to read is not a natural process, like learning to speak, and systematic teaching of the alphabetic code is essential to learning to read.
- 8 Reading to children is important in developing their oral language skill and vocabulary knowledge, as well as their knowledge of the world and their thinking and reasoning skills, as in following the logical sequence of a story, and in making inferences about causes and consequences of certain events. This experience provides the basis for comprehension of both oral and written language. However, children do not learn to read by being read to.
- 9 Learning to read requires specific teaching of phonics. While phonics can be taught in different ways, the research evidence indicates that the most effective approach to the teaching of phonics is synthetic phonics,



where children are first taught the letters representing the 44 sounds of the English language, and are then taught to blend (synthesise) the sequence of individual sounds in each written word to read (or decode) words, and to break apart (or segment), the individual sounds in each spoken word to write words. Decodable books are used to practice this new skill, and to apply this skill to the decoding of unfamiliar words.

- 10 Teaching children to recognise words by sight, unless used in conjunction with an effective phonics-based teaching program, is not an effective way to teach children how to read. While learning common high frequency words that do not conform to common spelling patterns is helpful in the early stages of learning to read, this should not be done before children have learned to recognise the common letter sound correspondences and have acquired some basic decoding skills. Teaching children to memorise words by looking at the shape of the word and/or the beginning or end letters before they are able to recognise letters and

Teaching children to recognise words by sight, unless used in conjunction with an effective phonics-based teaching program, is not an effective way to teach children how to read.

the link between letters and sounds and to decode simple words is not helpful in learning to read.

- 11 Memorisation of words by sight in the beginning stages of reading is not the same as automatic word recognition in skilled readers. In this case skilled readers build up a bank of words recognised immediately by sight, without the need to decode the word, but this nevertheless involves recognition of the individual letters that make up the word. Only when skilled readers come across an unfamiliar word is it necessary for them to apply their decoding skills to arrive at the corresponding spoken word.
- 12 Once children have learned to read through decoding of text, the more they read the greater the number of words that they will be able to recognise automatically, thus enabling more fluent reading and freeing up the cognitive demands of the task so that they can focus more on comprehension than on decoding. This is referred to as the self-teaching hypothesis, and leads to what Stanovitch has termed the Matthew effect, whereby good readers read more and therefore



increase their exposure to print, and consequently their word recognition skills, and their fluency and speed of reading, while poor readers who read more slowly have less exposure to print, and therefore less opportunity to build up a bank of words recognised by sight, thus spending more time and cognitive energy on decoding unfamiliar words, and falling further behind in their reading achievement.

- 13 An effective program for teaching of reading and literacy skills involves a focus on the development of oral language skills at the pre-school level, together with exposure to the letters of the alphabet and the sounds associated with each letter, followed by systematic teaching of letter sound correspondences and decoding skills in the first year of school, with the reinforcement of these skills through reading of decodable books. Once basic reading skills have been achieved, continued reading of increasingly complex texts is required to develop vocabulary, fluency, speed of reading, and comprehension skills. The ultimate goal is independent reading, both for pleasure and for learning.
- 14 Some children have difficulties in learning to read. These difficulties may be associated with poorly developed oral language skills due to home background or other factors, failure to teach the essential skills required for reading

(letter sound correspondences and decoding skills), or underlying processing difficulties, and particularly difficulties with phonological processing. It is estimated that about 20% to 25% of children have difficulties in learning to read, and require some additional support. Regardless of the source of the difficulty, the most effective intervention for children with reading difficulties is systematic teaching of the alphabetic code.

- 15 In some cases children have persistent difficulties with reading, despite good oral language skills, exposure to an effective program for teaching of initial reading skills, and remedial assistance over a period of time. In such cases, the source of the difficulty is likely to be related to an underlying neurological processing difficulty, and such children are likely to require ongoing intervention and support for their reading difficulties. It is estimated that approximately 1% to 3% of students would fall into this category.
- 16 The term dyslexia is commonly used to describe a difficulty with reading that is severe, persistent and not responsive to remedial intervention. A diagnosis of dyslexia is only possible when other possible sources of reading difficulty are excluded. This can be a complex and time-consuming process. Since the research evidence indicates that effective strategies for addressing reading

difficulties are the same, regardless of whether the reading difficulty is attributed to dyslexia or to other causes, it has been argued that a diagnosis of dyslexia is not necessary for remediation of reading difficulties, and that resources spent on obtaining a formal diagnosis of dyslexia would be better spent on providing effective support for students with reading difficulties, regardless of the source of the difficulty. For this reason some reading researchers prefer to use the term 'low progress reader' in preference to 'dyslexia' when working with students who have a reading difficulty.

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- See also Hoover and Gough, 1990: http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/class/Psy338K/Gough/Chapter7/simple_view.pdf

Dr Molly de Lemos AM is a psychologist and former educational researcher with the Australian Council of Educational Research. She is the author of the report, Closing the Gap between research and practice: Foundations for the acquisition of literacy, published by ACER. She is a former President of Learning Difficulties Australia (2013/2014). Email: delemos@pacific.net.au

The future matters in education, but not in the way you think

We are currently in a state of denial which could lead to economies such as the US, UK and Australia being overtaken in the coming decades. It is a strange state, historically, and it betrays the near complete dominance of progressive educational thought in a particular aspect of education.

We have returned to 1918, when John Franklin Bobbitt wrote:

“New duties lie before us. And these require new methods, new materials, new vision. The old education, except as it conferred the tools of knowledge, was mainly devoted to filling the memory with facts. The new age is more in need of facts than the old; and of more facts; and it must find more effective methods of teaching them. But there are now other functions. Education is now to develop a type of wisdom that can grow only out of participation in the living experiences of men, and never out of mere memorisation of verbal statements of facts. It must, therefore, train thought and judgment in connection with actual life-situations, a task distinctly different from the cloistral activities of the past. It is also to develop the good-will, the spirit of service, the social valuations, sympathies, and attitudes of mind necessary for effective group-action where specialisation has created endless interdependency ... Most of these are new tasks. In connection with each, much is now being done in all progressive school systems; but most of them yet are but partially developed. We have been developing knowledge, not function; the power to reproduce facts, rather than the powers to think and feel and will and act in vital relation to the world's life. Now we must look to these latter things as well.”

The current rhetoric around twenty-first century skills follows this logic almost completely: in the future, fact-knowing will be less important than application. We need to train students for jobs that don't exist yet. Various statistics are quoted to show how traditional jobs will disappear and how the labour market will be much more unstable, requiring employees of the future to be flexible.

The obvious conclusion that should flow from this last point is that our education systems need to perform better. Whereas, in the past, students who missed out on an academic education could find work in manual, blue-collar jobs, these jobs are going to be fewer in number. Now is the time to ensure that every child learns to read and write more than just stories; learns mathematics to more than just a rudimentary level; learns the broad sweep of history and literature in order to draw inspiration and avoid past mistakes; and learns the fundamental principles of science and technology. Not only will this better equip our young people for a range of different careers, it will give them a cultural hinterland to draw on in their personal lives and to participate more fully in democracy.



**Greg
Ashman**



But this is not what advocates of twenty-first century learning suggest at all. The goal of improving academic performance (often dismissed as the goal of improving test scores) is trivial and might even hinder progress. In much the same way that Bobbitt claimed that we need better methods for learning facts, before sidelining fact learning for other kinds of things, twenty-first century skills proponents will briefly mention the idea of learning foundational skills – perhaps giving a nod to a form of ‘literacy’ that also includes interpreting pictures and working with computers – before emphasising the need for students to learn critical thinking, collaborative and entrepreneurial skills, as well as creativity. They point out that this is what employers are asking for.

How may we develop such skills? It’s not obvious that we can. Collaboration is not a skill, it is a choice. It may depend upon skills of communication and there may be systems that enable collaboration but it is not something that can be trained and improved through practice. Similarly, critical thinking and creativity cannot be trained in an abstract way. Creativity of any economic or cultural worth depends on a thorough grounding in subject content.

Yet proponents of twenty-first century learning suggest that we can train students in these skills by initiating project-based or inquiry learning, seemingly without considering that this is a claim that needs some kind of supporting evidence. The Buck Institute for Education is influential in the movement promoting project-based learning (PBL). They claim:

“PBL builds success skills for college, career, and life. In the 21st

century workplace and in college, success requires more than basic knowledge and skills. In a project, students learn how to take initiative and responsibility, build their confidence, solve problems, work in teams, communicate ideas, and manage themselves more effectively.”

They also claim that projects lead to better understanding and retention of learning. This is highly contentious and the evidence to support it comes mainly from weakly controlled studies. It is worth noting that, whatever you think of John Hattie’s methodology, when he compared such studies with similar (or perhaps more rigorous) research on direct instruction or mastery learning, he found the latter were far more effective.

This all makes more sense after reading Jeanne Chall’s book on the last century of the education debate. Educationalists want the world to be a certain way. They see child-centred approaches such as inquiry learning as more democratic. They fit their ideals. All the stuff about the future is just a smoke-screen to gain support for really very old ideas; ideas that have failed to deliver many times since Bobbitt wrote his book in 1918.

It is interesting that this future-shock has played out quite differently to two previous ones. Both the 1950s Sputnik panic and the 1980s ‘A Nation at Risk’ report in the US prompted calls for a turn towards more teacher-centred (and thus effective) forms of instruction. Such a voice is almost completely missing in the current discussion about jobs of the future. Whatever is happening in real classrooms, child-centred rhetoric has won the wider debate. And this is why

we risk being overtaken economically by countries with better education systems. Unlike the 1950s and 1980s, there is an ever-shrinking reserve of unskilled work to absorb the uneducated, leading to ever-widening inequality.

Yes, employers are wont to call for employees with initiative, problem-solving ‘skills’ and so on but it is interesting that they are also still complaining about a lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills. This is something that we really could tackle.

We know, for instance, that systematic synthetic phonics programmes (SSP) get a larger proportion of children reading than the alternatives and yet it is the alternatives that hold sway in the classroom, with teachers lacking the knowledge to properly implement SSP due to the complacency or ideological opposition of teacher education programmes. Rather than glossing over it as a trivial issue, we should be shocked at how many students currently fail to learn to read and we should do something about that. This should be a better starting point from which to prepare our students for the knowledge economy of the future than romantic claims about project work.

*Greg Ashman is a teacher working in Ballarat, Victoria and is also currently undertaking a PhD. He is on Twitter as @greg_ashman and writes the ‘Filling the Pail’ education blog that you can find at gregashman.wordpress.com. He has recently published the ebook, *Ouroboros*, available via his blog.*

FIVE from FIVE: Effective reading instruction in every classroom, every day

Early reading success is the foundation of educational attainment, individual prosperity, citizenship, and quality of life.

International assessments show that as many as one in four Australian children does not reach the minimum standard of reading necessary for progress in school at Year 4 (PIRLS, 2011). Children who cannot read well at this age are unlikely to catch up to their peers without intensive intervention.

These poor reading outcomes are not inevitable. Reading scientists estimate that only one in 20 children will have significant difficulty learning to read. Many of the students who struggle with reading in schools today are ‘instructional casualties’ – they could have learned to read if they had been taught using the most effective methods.

The *simple view of reading* is that reading requires two abilities – correctly identifying words and understanding their meaning. Acquisition of these two broad abilities requires the development of more specific skills. These five ‘pillars’ or keys to reading are widely accepted as the essential components of a quality literacy program. They are: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

There is strong, scientific evidence that the most effective way to teach these skills to all children is using reading instruction methods that are explicit, systematic, and sequential. This is especially important for teaching phonics, which is an abstract skill that unlocks the alphabetic code. Explicit instruction is beneficial for all children but especially important for children at greater risk of reading difficulties – children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, indigenous children, children for whom English is a second language, and children with learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

Low literacy is a persistent problem in Australia and will only be reduced when all schools use effective, evidence-based reading instruction and intervention. This does not require large amounts of extra funding for schools, it simply requires a change in practice. When all teachers have learned to use effective teaching methods, fewer children will need intervention and fewer children will leave school unable to read. The potential for welfare and justice system savings is high.

Billions of dollars have been spent on programs to improve literacy. Yet reading levels have barely shifted. The real problem is that many teachers do not have fundamental knowledge of language and literacy development, and have not been equipped with the evidence-based instructional strategies most likely to be effective in teaching reading. Schools and school systems are using programs that do not reflect the best evidence on effective instruction.

The Centre for Independent Studies’ project – FIVE from FIVE – is working to bridge the gap between the research on effective reading instruction and classroom practice. It draws on the expertise of reading scientists and expert practitioners to provide the highest quality information



**Jennifer
Buckingham**



The Hon. Adrian Piccoli, NSW Education Minister, at the launch of the FIVE from FIVE initiative.

and resources for policymakers, educational leaders, and teachers. It has an alliance of organisations and people working toward the same goal.

FIVE from FIVE targets school education to maximise its impact. The years prior to school are very important for literacy and language development, but highly effective classroom teaching can reduce the gaps. Unlike early childhood programs which only reach some children, a focus on schools will potentially reach every child, every day.

The FIVE from FIVE website is evolving to provide the evidence base for the five 'keys' to reading and the most effective ways to teach them, to providing specific guidance and resources for parents who want to know how to help their child's reading development, and practical support for teachers who want to know how the research applies in the classroom. The evidence base was published in a research report by Dr Kerry Hempenstall – *Read About It: Scientific Evidence for the Effective Teaching of Reading* – which is available to download from the FIVE from FIVE website.

A key initiative of FIVE from FIVE is advocating for a Phonics Screening Check of Year 1 students in all Australian schools, following the outstanding success of the UK Government's policies on early reading instruction. Since the introduction of the Phonics Screening Check in England in 2012, the number of children not reaching the expected reading standard in Year 2 literacy tests has decreased by a third.

A Phonics Screening Check in Australian schools would reveal which

A key initiative of FIVE from FIVE is advocating for a Phonics Screening Check of Year 1 students in all Australian schools, following the outstanding success of the UK Government's policies on early reading instruction.

schools are teaching phonics well, and which students are in need of support. Phonetic decoding ability is a powerful predictor of reading success; early identification is crucial and intervention is crucial. While phonics alone is not enough to get children reading well, it is essential. Improving this aspect of reading instruction would be an important first step on the road to improving literacy.

Dr Jennifer Buckingham is a senior research fellow and director of the FIVE from FIVE reading project at the Centre for Independent Studies. The FIVE from FIVE project promotes effective reading instruction through its website www.fivefromfive.org.au and social media @fivefromfive and www.facebook.com/fivefromfive/.

Do dyslexics need Dyslexie?

The media in general, but perhaps the early evening current affairs shows in particular, love a good ‘new cure for dyslexia’ story. The latest ‘gee whizz’ offering doing the rounds is a special font called Dyslexie that apparently makes reading so much easier for children with dyslexia. Recently, the Australian media has labelled the font as “a breakthrough” (Channel 7 news, 30/4/16) and a small Sydney-based company has struck a deal with Australia’s largest book publishers to print thousands of books in the new typeface (*The Australian*, 16/4/16). And would it not indeed be wonderful if we really could help children with dyslexia simply by changing the font of the written materials we offer to them?

At the risk of being labelled party poopers, we beg to differ; our research (just published in the international journal *Dyslexia*) casts serious doubt on the efficacy of this new font. In essence, what we found was that the Dyslexie effect is, in fact, very small, leading to only 7% faster reading speed. Moreover, even this small difference can be achieved with a regular font, such as Arial, by simply adjusting the word and letter spacing.

The Dyslexie font was developed by Christian Boer, a Dutch graphic designer. The font is characterised by heavier than normal bases to the letters. The font also includes larger spacings both between words and between letters in words, an important consideration, as we shall see. The figure below provides an illustration of the way that Dyslexie (first line) differs from the popular Arial font (second line).

But does Dyslexie make conceptual sense? And, even more importantly, what is the evidence for the efficacy of this new font?



**Kevin
Wheldall**



**Eva
Marinus**

The wind howled in the gum trees.
The wind howled in the gum trees.

There is now general consensus in the field of reading research that dyslexia has multiple causes. In most individuals with dyslexia, the cognitive problems that underlie their reading impairment are beyond the early visual level. Few reading scientists would have expected that the idiosyncratic letters of Dyslexie would positively influence reading performance in the first place. The ‘heavy bases’ of the letters were developed to help suppress the supposed tendency of individuals with dyslexia to mirror-reverse or rotate letters. Notably, reading researchers have already refuted this ‘mirror and rotating’ theory, over 40 years ago. Moreover, the graphic designer



aimed to make the letters as distinct as possible from each other to avoid confusion between letters. However, our pixel-overlap analyses show that, probably due to the heavy bases, the letters of Dyslexie are actually *less* distinct than the letters of Arial. Consequently, it is unlikely that providing additional visual support, such as that provided by the Dyslexie font, will prove to be effective.

That's all very well in theory but what about in practice? For a product that has been seized upon so readily and the considerable sums invested to publish books in this font, there is surprisingly little empirical evidence to support its efficacy. In fact, there have been no published, peer-reviewed, journal articles testifying to its efficacy, or otherwise, until now. The evidence base consists of three unpublished Dutch masters theses and two non-refereed articles in practitioner journals. The results of these studies were equivocal, to say the least.

Consequently, our research team (Eva Marinus, Michelle Mostard, Eliane Segers, Teresa Schubert, Alison Madelaine and Kevin Wheldall) set out to test whether the Dyslexie font really does make reading easier for children who struggle with reading. We tested 39 low-progress readers from Years 2 to 6 who were asked to read four different texts of similar difficulty level in four different font conditions (in counterbalanced order) that were all matched on letter display size, but differed in the degree to which they were matched for spacing settings.

Our results showed that low-progress readers did indeed perform better, in terms of number of words read correctly per minute, in Dyslexie

font than in standardly spaced Arial font. To put this in perspective, however, this amounted to only 7% more words read correctly per minute. More importantly, when within-word spacing and between-word spacing in Arial font was matched to that of Dyslexie font, the difference in reading speed was no longer significant. We concluded that the efficacy of Dyslexie font lies not in its specially designed letter shapes, but arises from its particular spacing settings. These spacing settings can be replicated in Arial and other fonts. As a proof of concept, we have developed EasyRead, a free Chrome browser extension that applies Dyslexie's spacing settings to all fonts on all web pages you visit. You can install EasyRead from the Chrome web store: <https://goo.gl/CLwZgu>.

The implication of our study, the first refereed journal article published on the efficacy of the Dyslexie font, is that there is still no evidence to suggest that the font is particularly helpful for children who struggle to read. Parents and teachers might be well-advised to save their money and not buy specially published books employing the Dyslexie font if the only benefit is a mere 7% increase in reading fluency. This increase, moreover, can be replicated in other fonts by simply adjusting the spacing. Instead, parents and teachers might be better-advised to concentrate on the phonological aspects of reading by employing effective reading instruction.

Reference note

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it work and if so, why? *Dyslexia*, doi:10.1002/dys.1527

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM is Chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd and Director of the MultiLit Research Unit. You can follow him on Twitter (@KevinWheldall) where he comments on reading and education (and anything else that takes his fancy). He also has a blog, 'Notes from Harefield: Reflections by Kevin Wheldall on reading, books, education, family, and life in general': www.kevinwheldall.com. Email: kevin.wheldall@pecas.com.au

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Book review

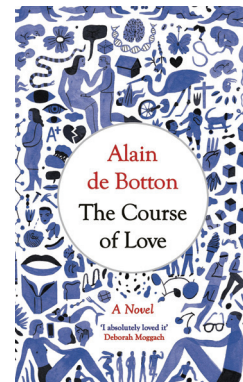
The Course of Love by Alain de Botton

Alain de Botton's new book *The Course of Love* is presented as a novel about personal relationships. But it is not really a novel at all, in my view. The characterisation is minimal and the plot is seriously limited. In effect, the novel structure is just a clotheshorse on which to hang his discursive philosophising about the nature of relationships. (Indeed, he intersperses the text of the novel with little sermons in case we don't get it.) Nothing wrong with that you might say. Plenty of novelists do precisely this and there are many examples of philosophers using the novel form to get their ideas across. To take just two quick examples, Sartre used the form brilliantly in his first novel, *Nausea* (*La Nausée*), to convey the utter hopelessness of existential anomie. A totally different philosopher, the radical behaviourist B. F. Skinner, also used the form in *Walden Two*, a utopian (some might argue, dystopian) novel which explored what a society might be like if it were to be run on behaviourist principles. Two very different books, both with important things to say, and yet both, at least to me, eminently readable and displaying literary talent. (Those amazed by my latter example might be surprised to learn that Skinner's very early writing was praised by the iconic American poet, Robert Frost.)

But sadly, de Botton is no novelist. He certainly has interesting, if not arguably depressing, things to say about personal relationships. But even as a device in a philosophical novel, we have to care about the characters, for good or ill, and we don't (or, at least, I didn't). The rather unattractive couple at the centre of the book are mere cyphers for what he sees as, to a greater or lesser degree, everyman and everywoman. Apparently, we are all a little bit crazy, mostly as a result of being f**ked up by our parents, as Philip Larkin would have it in 'This be the Verse'. The latter part of the book is very sympathetic to attachment theory and John Bowlby's work, in particular; work that has been the subject of serious criticism within psychology for many years. He seems to be arguing for greater access to psychotherapy for all, so that we can leave our childhood hangups behind. Perhaps some of us do need this but whether it should be of the psychoanalytic form he appears to be suggesting, I am less than persuaded. One gets the nagging suspicion that this is very much a first world problem writ large.

Of course, none of these criticisms will matter to his legions of fans who take in every word he utters, some of whom happily sign up for his 21st century religion lite, the 'School of Life'. Lest I be accused of being unfair, I should point out that I admired some of his earlier non-fiction works such as *How Proust Can Change Your Life* (1997) and *Status Anxiety* (2004). I just think he would be better off sticking to his day job of distilling and explaining what philosophy has to offer to a wider audience.

As all good husbands should, I'll leave the last word to my wife who wondered what his wife would think of this novel. I can only agree.



**Reviewed
by Kevin
Wheldall**

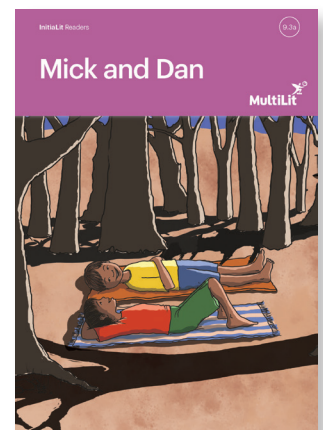
InitialLit Readers soon to be released

MultiLit is excited to announce the upcoming release of its own set of 60 beautifully illustrated phonic readers for young children.

The InitialLit decodable reader series has been written to provide children with practice in working out words in connected text using their phonic knowledge. 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.

The set of 60 readers contains nine levels, with between five and 10 titles in each level. Ideal for use in Foundation classrooms, these little books have risen admirably to the challenge of creating entertaining reading experiences for young children, while using a necessarily restricted vocabulary. Children who love surprises, adventure, humour, and mischievous animals will enjoy our beautifully illustrated stories.

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! Books will be available in full sets or individually and can be pre-ordered for delivery in Term 4, 2016.



InitialLit Readers will be released in Term 4, 2016

Find out more at www.multilit.com/programs/initialit-readers