
Thank you for the MUSEC (with apologies to ABBA)

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We write this in the aftermath of our hugely successful MultiLit 30th anniversary conference/summit that was held at the end of May. After coming down with a nasty bug straight after the summit, we have now had time to reflect on the wise words of our conference speakers and on what led us to where we are today.

In our last Editorial ('The Sound of MUSEC'), we sought to emphasise and pay tribute to the Macquarie special educators who came before us at Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC) and who pioneered the behavioural science of learning and teaching literally decades before it became the flavour of the month in education circles. In this current Editorial, we reflect on the subsequent progress made by MUSEC on this front since our own involvement began in 1990 when Kevin took over as the Director of MUSEC, following his time as Director of the Centre for Child Study at the University of Birmingham (UK).

In the UK, Kevin had pioneered the application of behaviour analysis in education. (Two of his early books were *Social Behaviour* in 1975 and *The Behaviourist in the Classroom* first published in 1979.) This was far from a popular view in education at the time and he paid the price. It was with great relief that he was able to join a community of likeminded souls at MUSEC in 1990. He brought with him his lengthy research track record in classroom behaviour management ('Positive Teaching') and work with older low-progress readers. We have written about this in a recent journal article published in recognition of Kevin being awarded the 2023 Eminent Researcher Award of the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, the journal of Learning Difficulties Australia (and we will not repeat that period here).

One of the first projects Kevin worked on in his early years at MUSEC was one of the very first empirical research studies on the efficacy of Reading Recovery (RR), commissioned by the New South Wales Department of Education. Once again, he found himself unpopular for blowing the whistle on RR's deficiencies, not least because the department had already committed to its full-scale implementation.

Coincidentally, Robyn who had been a research assistant at MUSEC from 1988, later collected data on the RR evaluation project. She subsequently became Kevin's personal research assistant from 1991, later becoming Research and Development Manager at MUSEC and Research Fellow, following the completion of her doctorate. Her research essentially replicated and extended Kevin's work on classroom behaviour management in an Australian context. This was carried out as part of a larger evaluation project, again commissioned by the New South Wales Department of Education, on their professional learning program 'Working Ideas for Needs Satisfaction'.

During this period, we also worked together on projects that eventually led to the launch of the MultiLit (Making Up Lost Time In Literacy) research initiative in 1995. This early work included projects with Aboriginal low-progress readers in Redfern and literacy interventions in MUSEC's on-site classrooms for students with learning difficulties. This work drew on the AIM project with Dr Coral Kemp who had a great influence on our work and to whom we express our deep thanks and gratitude. Kevin also worked with Dr Mark Carter on a revised version of his earlier theoretical model (with Professor Ted Glynn) of a behavioural interactionist perspective in education. We would also like to acknowledge the major influence of his thinking on our work. Working at MUSEC with these like-minded colleagues felt like coming home to a true place of evidence-based research and practice. We would like to emphasise that MUSEC continued and greatly extended the work

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on behaviour analysis in education, building on the seminal work of their predecessors reported in our last Editorial. We continue to work with Coral Kemp and Mark Carter to this day – the latter having been appointed Dean of MultiLit’s The Academy for the Science of Instruction.

Following the launch of the MultiLit Initiative in 1995, we were subsequently commissioned by the federal (Commonwealth) Department of Education to complete a thoroughgoing ‘Evaluation of MultiLit’ over the years 1996, 1997 and 1998, as well as documenting the work that preceded this. Our report was published by the federal department in the year 2000 and included reports of our Schoolwise Project carried out for the Exodus Foundation led by the Rev Bill Crews and the findings from our MUSEC-based classrooms implementing our MultiLit programs.

We were subsequently asked by Noel Pearson of Cape York Partnership to work with him in schools for Aboriginal children in Far North Queensland, implementing MultiLit programs. It is important to note that, in common with MultiLit programs carried out elsewhere, Positive Teaching formed the bedrock for classroom management. Behavioural psychology, in fact, informed both curriculum and pedagogy and continues to do so.

Following our success with the MultiLit Reading Tutor program at MUSEC, our research and product continued to develop into new MultiLit programs released subsequently by MultiLit Pty Ltd after the company was spun off from Macquarie University in 2006: MiniLit, PreLit and MacqLit. (We are proud to say that MultiLit continues the research and development work of more evidence-based programs for use in schools – the legacy of MUSEC lives on.) Dr Merece Reynolds, who had been very influential in the AIM program at MUSEC in 1990s rejoined the team

when she did her PhD with Kevin and Alison into the short-comings of RR and establishing the efficacy of an evidence-based alternative, which was MiniLit. Merece continued to work with us for many years after attaining her doctorate, another champion of evidence-based practice from the MUSEC days.

Our commitment to an approach based firmly in behavioural psychology at MUSEC has also been reflected in our preferred framework for assessment. We were early adopters of curriculum-based measurement, where reading fluency at nonword, word and passage level reading serves as proxies for overall reading progress appropriate to the stage of learning to read (the so-called ‘WARs’). Dr Alison Madelaine, another of our MUSEC heroes, worked in this area with her PhD studies and is an expert in this field. As with Mark and Coral, we continue to work with Alison in MultiLit to this day and she is the Clinical Director of MultiLit Literacy Centres across Australia, as well as being a Principal Research Fellow, as is Mark.

We (the present authors), formally resigned from MUSEC at the end of 2011, due to Kevin’s ill-health and life-limiting cancer, but we not only acknowledge the conceptual and empirical advances we made there but also carried this forward in the MultiLit Research Unit (MRU) within MultiLit Pty Ltd, the publishers of this masthead. In many respects, not least its membership, MRU is akin to being MUSEC reborn. We are so grateful for the brilliant colleagues that made significant contributions to MUSEC and their continuing impact on the field. And so, we say, misquoting ABBA:

‘Thank you for the MUSEC!’

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