

Mea culpa ... Neale Analysis resurrected!

Some 18 months ago, we announced in *MultiLit Moments* our intention to discontinue our use of the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA) for evaluating the effectiveness of our programs in favour of the more recent York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC). The YARC is very similar in many respects to the Neale and, after some pilot work using both tests, we determined that it was time to switch to the YARC.

We were wrong!

The MultiLit Research Unit (MRU) has spent considerable time carefully examining the data collected on the new measure and arguing the pros and cons of the two tests. While the YARC reading passages are arguably more contemporary and the test norms are certainly more recent, we have reluctantly come to the conclusion that, in our view, the YARC is not sufficiently robust for our purposes. The YARC, like the NARA, provides information on reading accuracy, reading rate, and reading comprehension. It is the last of these, reading comprehension,

that is the focus for our decision to abandon our use of this test because of its unacceptably low reliability. A reliable reading test should deliver roughly the same result when repeated. Moreover, the correlations between the test results for groups of children when tested on two occasions should be high if we are to have faith in the reliability of the measure. Sadly, this is not the case for the YARC comprehension measure. Nor is this a mere technical issue. The effects of low reliability in practice, when assessing children, can lead to faulty conclusions being drawn about the progress children are making and the instruction they need.

So, reluctantly, we have discarded the YARC and have decided to go back to using the Neale from the beginning of next year, while we examine other tests of reading. The Neale is a bit old now but it is reliable and the norms, while arguably a bit dated, are unlikely to have changed much given the sad fact that NAPLAN and other studies of reading performance show that Australian children appear to have made little progress in reading performance over the past decade.

Some light relief

Many of you will know of Hilaire Belloc's 'Cautionary Tales', perhaps the most famous of which is entitled, 'Jim, who ran away from his nurse and was eaten by a lion'. But few will have heard of another recently discovered poem in the same genre by Kevin Belloc, Hilaire's sadly misunderstood and much under-rated younger brother. In the spirit of Christmas, we offer it here as a little light relief.

Tim

Who was denied phonics and was eaten by whole language

There was a boy whose name was Tim
His parents were so good to him
Not only Mum and Dad but Gran
And Auntie Rose and Uncle Dan
They read and read to him each night
'Till they had almost lost their sight
They read 'cos Mem Fox told them this
Was how to give Tim reading bliss

Now it's a fact, if strange to tell,
Tim's reading did not seem to gel
At first it seemed he'd made a start
He'd learned his readers off by heart

By using picture cues to guess
Some words and memorise the rest

Alas that fateful day did fall
When teacher gave our Tim the WARL*
Tim thought that this was quite absurd
He could not read a single word
'Where are the pics?' he cried in vain
His teacher blanched to cause such pain
And rang his parents' home that night
To tell them of Tim's awful plight
'Have you been reading to young Tim?'
She asked, and feared the worst for him
'Of course we have', Tim's parents cried
'No child of ours would be denied!'
'In that case' was her quick retort,
'Then phonics is our last resort'

And so, my friends, it came to pass
That Tim was given help at last
He learned his letter sounds and blends
And soon was reading like his friends
Tim's parents were relieved but sad
At what had happened to their lad
No need for this we must admit
If he'd just had InitialLit.

CODA

The moral of this story rules
That we must take care in our schools
And always learn our phonics first
For fear of learning something worse.

* *The Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists*



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