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## CEOWA Early Literacy Intervention

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## Summary

Are you looking for a way to accelerate students who are not progressing in reading and writing after their first year of school?

The Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) Early Literacy Intervention initiative provides intensive, daily, individual reading and writing intervention. This intervention rapidly develops students' reading and writing skills and gives them classroom independence.

This internationally proven, high-quality literacy intervention deliberately builds on students' individual strengths, and maintains high expectations for student success. Highly trained intervention teachers monitor learning through detailed daily observations and plan accordingly to support the development of essential reading and writing skills.

I have seen my students develop strategies and techniques to make them independent readers. It has empowered them, which has set up positive school experiences for the future. It has helped to improve behaviour and confidence in the classroom, as the students want to show their newly developed skills. (Classroom teacher)

## Target student group

The student group targeted was identified through assessments indicating that they were below typical learning expectations for reading and writing at the end of year 1 of formal schooling.

The targeted group – the lowest-achieving students in the year 1 cohort – contained a range of students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs, across all settings from metropolitan to rural.

## Method

During 2011, 66 schools across CEOWA – plus a small number of cross-sectoral schools – participated in the CEOWA Early Literacy Intervention.

The intervention is based on the principle that diverse learners have varying prior literacy experiences and their learning pathways are unique. Intervention teachers begin to work with students based on this idea, gathering data so they can work from students' strengths.



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The intervention teachers are highly trained through comprehensive professional development, and undertake a year-long apprenticeship.

‘This year has been an amazing, rewarding, enlightening and challenging journey. I feel privileged to have been given this opportunity for growth, and to have been a part of the children's growth in ability and self-esteem.’ (Classroom teacher)

Daily monitoring is timetabled for each student to accelerate learning. Intervention teachers take detailed observations and records of text readings. The teachers use these results and other observations to determine the direction of their instruction.

Tutoring sessions last 30 minutes. A typical tutoring session might include reading two or more familiar books, re-reading yesterday's new book and taking a running record. It would also include working on letter identification, breaking words into parts, hearing and recording sounds in words when writing, building known words, reconstructing a story, listening to a new book introduction and attempting to read a new book.

For students to learn the strategies that good readers and writers use, and to develop appropriate neural pathways, the intervention teacher scaffolds the teaching of critical and higher-order thinking processes. Reading and writing are taught together, using continuous text, as reciprocal and interrelated processes that require the integration of many behaviours.

Students are considered successful when they are able to work independently and successfully, with appropriate strategic activity in reading and writing that enables them to access the classroom literacy program. Intervention finishes at this point.

The initiative is supported by a whole-school approach to literacy improvement. Collaborative planning occurs: parents and caregivers, administrators, teachers and intervention teachers supplement daily classroom learning with additional and intensive support.

Administrators support the intervention teachers by allocating funds to staff for the intensive time, organising schedules, and providing a working space suitable for the intensive activities. The cost of materials to support the intervention teachers should be factored in.

Parents and caregivers are informed about the intervention in prior interviews. They are kept up to date so that they can provide support for attendance and homework activities.



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The classroom teacher and the intervention teacher work together to make sure the student continues to learn along with their classmates. The students now actively participate in classroom units or topics because they understand the instructions.

'The students are filled with confidence and a 'can do' attitude as a result of Reading Recovery. That attitude shines through in other learning areas, not just with their reading. It's great to see these children excited about reading because they know they can do it!' (Classroom teacher)

Students were identified using eight assessments in the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OSELA) to providing an accurate picture of them as readers and writers.

After intervention, students were tested again using the same assessments. This was to monitor improvement, and to find out if students had developed the reading and writing skills that would allow them to return to the regular classroom program.

The OSELA includes assessment of:

- oral reading, to find the student's instructional level of text
- letter identification, to find which letters the child knows
- concepts about print
- sight word recognition of 23 initial high-frequency words using the Duncan Word Test
- reading words in isolation, using the Burt Word Test
- writing, and what students were attending to in print, as they wrote all the words they could in ten minutes in the Writing Vocabulary task
- listening to and recording the sounds in words, using the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words task, which involves writing a dictated sentence.

A summary of the OSELA and progress goals were completed by the intervention teacher for each student in the CEOWA Early Literacy Intervention.

### Entry and exit text levels

Student scores on a range of assessment tasks indicate the literacy gains of all students who completed a series of lessons in 2011. Table 1 shows the average entry and exit scores for students with a complete series of CEOWA Early Literacy Intervention lessons, and for referred students.



**Table 1: Average entry and exit scores for CEOWA Early Literacy Intervention lessons**

Assessment tasks	Discontinued students (Entry)	Discontinued students (Exit)	Referred students (Entry)	Referred students (Exit)
Text Reading Level	3.5	18	1	9.2
Letter Identification /54	48.7	52.7	35.5	46
Concepts about Print /24	15	20.7	12.9	16
Burt Word Test /110	14	27.2	4.3	14.1
Duncan Word Reading /23	12.5	21	4.3	12.4
Writing Vocabulary	21.2	44	8.4	22
Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words /37	27.2	35.5	13.8	26.3

## Results

Seventy-two intervention teachers taught 521 students in 66 schools. On average, students took 63 lessons spread over approximately 16 weeks:

- 311 students successfully completed their series of individual daily lessons within 20 weeks.
- 82.7 per cent of students who received a complete series of lessons reached the average band in their class.
- 65 students were referred for long-term learning support. These students made significant progress, but did not progress far enough in the 20 weeks to reach the average band of their class.

The initiative does not claim to be an 'inoculation' against difficulties in early literacy learning. The goal of the intervention is to accelerate students who are falling behind so that they can access the first-wave literacy teaching in an average group of learners in their classroom.



Longitudinal studies of students (based on NAPLAN) who were initially identified as the lowest-achieving literacy learners in their classes, have shown that they are maintaining the substantial literacy gains made in the intervention in the year afterwards and up to three years later.

‘One child, who started the year pushing boundaries and resisting work, transformed from a child making poor learning choices to a child taking pride in his reading achievements. This pride has filtered into all learning areas.’  
(Classroom teacher)

Table 2 summarises the data showing sustained success over a five-year period.

**Table 2: Sustained success over a five-year period of the CEOWA Early Literacy Intervention lessons**

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Schools	67	70	67	75	66
Teachers	72	76	76	83	72
Students taught	531	527	575	627	521
Students with a complete series of lessons	401	429	416	432	376
Percentages	91%	86.8%	84.1%	77%	82%

## Next steps

CEOWA schools implementing the Early Literacy Intervention try to identify as soon as possible those students who are falling behind their peers. Getting students on the road to independent reading and writing allows them to access the regular classroom program and make progress in all learning areas.



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The intervention is most successful if students receive a one-to-one session every day. This became clear over the course of the initiative. The accelerated tailored program works best when students can actively use, review and reflect on learning without a large gap between sessions.

Following the introduction of the Australian Curriculum and the pre-primary year becoming a compulsory year of schooling, this initiative will work exclusively with a year 1 cohort.

## Lessons learned

The effective implementation and sustainability of the CEOWA Early Literacy Intervention requires a team approach. It is essential that principals and school teams are committed to maintaining the quality of the intervention and its underlying principles, including the daily teaching of students. In whole-school planning, the initiative needs to be prioritised, including budgeting for the intervention teacher's time and supporting the training of teachers who take part in the one-year apprenticeship.

Flexible timetabling is key, as the intervention teacher typically teaches five half days each week. They will also need a suitable designated space near the lower-primary classes.

Continued strong collaboration between the classroom teacher and the intervention teacher will ensure that students' learning is accelerated and their progress is valued.

The Early Literacy Intervention works best when the whole school community takes shared responsibility for increasing reading progress.

## Research base

This project is based on Reading Recovery, which is built on the well-known principles of literacy acquisition researched by Marie Clay in New Zealand in the 1970s.

The intervention was developed and trialled 20 years ago and is now implemented in a number of education systems. It has been adopted in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia.



## Further reading and links

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