Through the initiative, Learning Centred Schools – A Sacred Landscape: Learning and Teaching Framework and Strategy, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) supports schools in the provision of high-quality literacy learning where the curriculum is designed to be flexible and responsive to individual learning needs. Reading Recovery is an individualised program, which ensures opportunities for teachers to see precisely how a student is working on texts and how to support the student’s progress (Clay 1993, p. 6).

We cannot justify teaching all children as if all need the same teaching not when the learning is an essential foundation to subsequent success in education. We will always need to make special provisions for some children (Clay 2005, p. 14).

Reading Recovery within the CEOM Literacy in Learning Centred Schools Strategy promotes a personalised response to the learning needs of each student and builds capacity for lifelong learning.

**What is Reading Recovery?**

Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention designed to serve the lowest-achieving Year 1 students. The goals of Reading Recovery include:

- promoting literacy skills
- reducing the number of Year 1 students who are struggling to read and write
- preventing long-term reading difficulties.

Not all students develop the necessary reading and writing skills in their first year of school. These students require further opportunity to participate in a quality literacy program which will allow them to operate as proficient readers and writers. For these students, Reading Recovery supplements classroom teaching to help them progress to the average literacy level of their classmates.

Reading Recovery:

- does not exclude any student
- is based on a theory of complex learning, valuing individual difference (in practice, this means different starting points for every child, who is taking a different and idiosyncratic path to learning.)
- enables struggling learners to construct a literacy processing system for reading and writing continuous texts
- supplements classroom teaching with one-to-one tutoring sessions (these daily 30-minute sessions are conducted by a trained Reading Recovery teacher over a period of 12–20 weeks.)
- involves comprehensive assessment of literacy tasks
- involves an ongoing professional learning course for trained teachers, facilitated by a Reading Recovery Tutor
- builds on the learning partnership between parents, teachers, members of the leadership team and students
- adheres to an international set of Standards and Guidelines.
As an initiative within the Literacy Strategy, Reading Recovery is specifically designed to improve the literacy outcomes of low-achieving students in Year One. The strong international research base supporting Reading Recovery is the reason the CEOM has selected this approach to be used for early intervention in all Melbourne Catholic schools.

With the development of visual and electronic texts, becoming literate has become increasingly complex. Through the framework, Learning Centred Schools – A Sacred Landscape, the CEOM supports schools in the provision of contemporary learning and teaching. Within this context, most students succeed with good classroom instruction. However, research shows that approximately 10–16% of children in any educational system will exhibit problems in developmental and academic learning (Purdie & Ellis 2005).

Reading and writing difficulties limit achievement in school learning and, if not attended to, may result in students falling further behind their classmates (Clay 1993, p.7). Early intervention is a key factor in differentiated support and successful literacy acquisition for all.

**Background**

Reading Recovery was developed by New Zealand educator and researcher Marie Clay. Clay conducted observational research in the mid-1960s that enabled her to design ways to detect children’s early reading difficulties. In the mid-1970s, she developed Reading Recovery teaching procedures with teachers and tested the program in New Zealand schools. The Reading Recovery Research Project was initiated in New Zealand in response to calls for assistance with junior children who were struggling with literacy learning. The new initiative was rooted in years of research, critique and advocacy. Since its success in New Zealand, Reading Recovery has been implemented in Australia, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland and Denmark. Reading Recovery has proven to be successful for over 30 years and since 1984 has been operating in most schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Recent data collected by the CEOM show the significant improvement made by Reading Recovery students with regard to their reading as determined by text level. Clay (2005, p. 53) recommends a student attains a minimum of text level 16 before lessons are discontinued.

**Effectiveness of Reading Recovery**

Hallmarks of Reading Recovery in Australia are established evaluation and accountability systems. Participating schools have collected data on individual students since 1984. Remarkably similar results have been reported year after year, with different children, different teachers and different schools.

Studies and research reviews in peer-reviewed journals document the effectiveness of Reading Recovery (Hattie 2009, p.139). An Australian longitudinal study examining factors affecting students’ progress in reading (Rowe 1995) cites a number of studies that indicate that Reading Recovery appears to be meeting its intended purposes for those students involved. This study also concludes that the students who are identified as ‘at risk’ and placed in a Reading Recovery program have benefited notably from participation. Moreover, gains made by Years 5 and 6 students who had participated in Reading Recovery in their early years of schooling were sustained in the later primary years.

A recently longitudinal study in the United States (Askew et al. 2002) reports findings that support the investment of resources in short-term options for ‘secondary prevention’, such as Reading Recovery, for young children identified as experiencing literacy difficulties. In their study, Askew (Askew et al. 2002) explore whether or not, over time, Reading Recovery
prevents or substantially reduces literacy difficulties among students who participate. They investigate how the literacy performance of these students aligns with average class performance. They report that Reading Recovery:

- significantly impacts on students as a secondary prevention
- effectively identifies students who need further assistance and
- offers a program which allows students to sustain progress over time.

A United States Department of Education report (2008), presenting a range of studies about Reading Recovery, indicates the positive improvement that Reading Recovery has on alphabetics and general reading achievement and potentially positive effects in fluency and comprehension. This report of national and international research concludes that Reading Recovery:

- promotes phonological and orthographic awareness
- improves the self-efficacy of children
- promotes self-regulated behaviours
- promotes writing strategies
- reduces the need for specialised education services and the costs of those services
- yields positive outcomes for students with English as a second language
- represents a comprehensive model of reading reflected in the lesson framework.

A large body of research continues to inform Reading Recovery today.

Benefits of Reading Recovery
Evidence of the success of Reading Recovery has been reported nationally and internationally through a number of studies (Hattie 2009, Askew et al. 2000; Row 1995). Of the numerous positive outcomes of Reading Recovery two are of particular significance for a student’s learning future: a student is able to continue to progress in the classroom without the support of Reading Recovery, and second, a student who has made progress in Reading Recovery but not caught up to his peers is identified for further help.

Benefits for students include:

- active participation in reading and writing activities in the classroom
- development of independent problem-solving to enable further progress after the Reading Recovery lessons are discontinued
- daily monitoring of reading and writing progress to ensure that teaching is immediately directed at the point of need.

Benefits for schools include:

- implementation of a cost-effective, preventative intervention, which reduces the number of students who require long-term remedial support
- early identification of the small percentage of students who do require further, ongoing specialist support
- provision of rich assessment data, which inform instruction
- continuous building of the knowledge and capacity of both classroom and Reading Recovery teachers through the opportunity for collaborative work
- opportunity for Reading Recovery teachers to act as literacy leaders and agents of literacy improvement in schools.

The Reading Recovery Lesson
Daily lessons allow the teacher to prompt the student to remember reading concepts from day to day. Regular attendance at these sessions is crucial for the program to impact effectively on the student’s literacy attainment. Reading Recovery teachers make clear lesson records of how the student responds to teaching in each of the components of the lesson. A typical Reading Recovery session would include:

- re-reading two or more familiar books
- re-reading the new book from the previous lesson and taking a running record
- identifying letters
- writing a story (including hearing and recording sounds in words)
- cutting up a story to be rearranged
- introducing a new book
- attempting a new book.

Ensuring Success in Reading Recovery
Key elements that ensure the success of Reading Recovery in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne are:

- intensive instruction for Year 1 students most at risk in reading and writing
- excellent classroom instruction informed through collaboration between the Reading Recovery teacher and the classroom teacher
• a team approach to literacy instruction, with the principal, the class teacher, the literacy leader and the Reading Recovery tutor collaboratively planning, evaluating and monitoring the ongoing progress of students

• a whole-school strategic plan for the implementation of Reading Recovery

• a home-school partnership, which strengthens the power of Reading Recovery as an intervention strategy

• a comprehensive ongoing design for professional learning for RR teachers and tutors.

Professional Learning
CEOM Reading Recovery Tutors provide high-quality professional learning for Reading Recovery teachers. This is pivotal to the success of Reading Recovery. The professional learning involves the initial training of Reading Recovery teachers and the facilitation of ongoing professional learning for trained Reading Recovery teachers.

Reading Recovery training is a year-long commitment where teachers participate in a course facilitated by a certified Reading Recovery Tutor. Teachers immediately begin working with Reading Recovery students, putting their new understandings into action. Fortnightly training sessions involve extensive use of a one-way screen, allowing teachers to observe one another working with students. Teachers are able to observe and describe reading behaviours, analyse teaching decisions, articulate questions, and reflect on their own teaching. The experience challenges assumptions about children’s learning and strengthens theoretical understandings of reading and writing processes.

After the initial training, teachers participate in ongoing professional learning to keep their knowledge base dynamic and current and to further develop their expertise in teaching the hardest-to-teach students.

Ultimately, it is the adaptations made by the expert teacher to a child’s idiosyncratic competencies, history and past experiences that start him (or her) on the upward climb to effective literary performances. (Clay 2005).

For further information:


Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) (in print) Reading Recovery Guidelines.


Purdie, N & Ellis, L 2005, Literature Review: A review of the empirical evidence identifying effective interventions and teaching practices for students with learning difficulties in Years 4, 5 and 6, Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell.
