

Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

In July 2009, the report of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision was released in relation to Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID). Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2009 is the fourth report in a series commissioned by heads of Australian governments in 2002 (COAG) to provide regular reporting against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage.

In December 2007 and March 2008 COAG committed to six ambitious targets to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage:

- closing the life expectancy gap within a generation;
- halving the gap in the mortality rate for Indigenous Children under five within a decade;
- ensuring all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to quality early childhood programs within five years;
- halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade;
- halving the gap in Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment rates or equivalent attainment by 2020;
- halving the gap in employment outcomes within a decade.

In its report in relation to the target for Reading Writing and Numeracy, the Steering Committee detailed four programs in section 4.34 'Things that work' — early literacy engagement. The first of the programs outlined was **MULTILIT**, and the second was **MINILIT** (also a MULTILIT program). The other two programs were the **National Accelerated Literacy Program** (NALP), an elaborated version of the Scaffolding Literacy Program, used extensively in the Northern Territory, and a Tasmanian program called **Finding Your Pathway into School and Beyond**. The text from the report in relation to MULTILIT programs is reproduced below:

*The **MULTILIT pilot program** improved the reading ability of Indigenous children at Coen State School in Cape York in Queensland. The program involved taking the 15 least proficient readers and giving them intensive, systematic instruction in phonics for 17 to 18 weeks by specialist teachers (IRUA 2006; Devine 2006).*

Since the Coen pilot, MULTILIT has been expanded as part of the broader Cape York Welfare Reform Trial, which began on July 1 2008, to Hope Val and Mossman Gorge (OATSIP 2008), and was rolled out in Aurukun in term 1, 2009 (Queensland Government unpublished). In addition, the MULTILIT program provided assistance to Indigenous students at the Redfern Tutorial Centre in NSW, under the auspices of the Exodus Foundation. Results for the second intake of MULTILIT students under the 2007 program at the Centre showed that after 18 weeks of instruction the cohort made average gains of: 13 months in reading accuracy; 7 months in reading comprehension; and 15 months in spelling (Australian Government unpublished).

MINILIT, a modified version of MULTILIT, was offered to younger students in Years 1 and 2 at the Redfern Tutorial Centre. Results for the second intake of MINILIT students showed that, after 15 weeks of instruction, the cohort made average gains of: 8 months in single word recognition and 11 months in spelling (Australian Government, unpublished).

Source: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2009: 4.34.

MULTILIT is proud to be involved, and recognized for its part to play, in this most important area of addressing entrenched disadvantage for the first Australians.

Robyn Beaman July 2009