AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ACCELERATED READER PROGRAM IN ONE SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICT: STUDENTS’, TEACHERS’, AND ADMINISTRATORS’ PERCEPTIONS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of students, teachers, and principals from one small school district regarding the Accelerated Reader program (AR). Specifically, the study sought to document and analyze: 1) how the elementary schools implemented AR in grades four through six; 2) how the three groups of stakeholders perceived this implementation; 3) how stakeholders perceive that AR has affected the students’ reading experiences; and, 4) how the stakeholders currently perceive the AR program as a whole and how these perceptions might have changed over time.

The subjects of the study were a selected group of twenty elementary students, fourteen teachers, and five principals. To gather descriptive data, sixth-grade students were interviewed as a part of five focus groups representing each elementary school; fourth- through sixth-grade teachers were interviewed and each of their classrooms was observed during an AR session; and principals from each elementary school were also interviewed.

Findings of the study reveal that AR is implemented in a variety of ways throughout the grade levels and throughout the schools within this district. The study documented inconsistencies in perceptions of grading, conferencing, and the use of incentives to motivate students. Findings also suggest that teachers desire additional training to run the program more effectively in their classrooms. Data analysis revealed
that AR is an isolated event in most of the classrooms with little integration of other literacy activities, and that students’ perceptions differ from teachers and principals in areas of motivation and choice. In addition, it was found that all three stakeholders did perceive that AR has influenced students’ reading experiences, although the perceptions of influence differed between groups. These data provide important findings that can benefit districts considering the adoption of the Accelerated Reader program in the future.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who has been very supportive and patient with me through this whole process.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation in memory of my grandfather, Dr. Gilbert D. Quinn. It was his modeling that served as a foundation for all of my higher education. Thanks, Doc.
I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Patricia Scharer. From my first Masters class to the final submission of this dissertation, her time and energies have inspired me to accomplish goals that I could not have accomplished without her. Over the years, she has coached me to a level that I had no idea I could reach. I am very fortunate to have such a positive mentor. Without a doubt, she is the best teacher I have ever experienced. I can only hope that I can inspire my students as she inspired me.

I would also like to thank Dr. Mary Jo Fresch for her guidance throughout this doctoral process. Her expertise is greatly appreciated. I would like to thank Dr. Janet Hickman for her wisdom and guidance. Her willingness to come back after retirement to help me finish is also greatly appreciated. I would like to thank Taylor University for their support and flexibility. From the students to the administration, your thoughts and prayers were appreciated. I would like to thank the students, teachers, and administration of the school district studied. Without your cooperation this study would not have been possible.

Lastly, I want to thank my family. I thank my children for helping me keep everything in perspective. They helped me laugh and enjoy life outside the degree. I also thank my wife, whose love and encouragement provided me with the desire to accomplish this goal.
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Since my first days of teaching, I have been a proponent of integrating both literature and technology in the classroom. I have seen first-hand how students can become engaged in literature when given the opportunity, the resources, the motivation, and the modeling. Similarly, I have seen students excited about their education when provided with the opportunity to use technology as a learning tool.

During the mid 1990s, I began to hear about a program called Accelerated Reader or AR. I did not know much about the program, only that quality children’s literature and technology were a part of the program. The district that I taught in at the time did not use the program; therefore much of my knowledge was only hearsay. In the late 1990s, I changed jobs as an elementary school teacher to a college instructor. Ironically, within two months of my job, I was introduced to AR when one of my student teachers used it in her classroom. My initial emotion was excitement. I finally had the opportunity to explore the program and to investigate how it could be used in the classroom. Several years later, some elementary schools in my children’s school district chose to implement the program. However, this time my emotions changed to uncertainty. Before, it was a program that seemed to hit two areas of education where I spent my energies; now it was
a program that would influence my children. I was getting mixed signals about the program, so I decided I wanted to investigate it for myself.

At this point I began to ask myself questions about AR. Why do some districts like this program so much and others do not? What are the different ways AR is used in elementary schools? What are the principals’, teachers’, and students’ perceptions of AR? For students who enjoy AR, is it just a novelty where the excitement eventually wears off or do students’ feelings for AR stay consistent over several years? Does the AR program motivate students to read or do the incentives that motivate the students? These questions and some others have led to my dissertation research, a project that will allow me to investigate principals’, teachers’, and students’ perceptions of AR; to examine the range of their perceptions over several years; and to explore how one small school district implements AR throughout their elementary schools. The rationale for doing a study of this nature and the importance of the results will be outlined in the following section.

Statement of the Problem

Since the early 1990s the popular reading management software program, Accelerated Reader (AR), has been implemented in nearly 60,000 schools (Renaissance Learning, 2002). The AR program was created by Judith and Terrance Paul and is part of Renaissance Learning Inc. AR was constructed to help teachers motivate students to read more literature and to enable the teachers to manage each student’s progress effectively. In a review of the research of AR, Vollands, Topping & Evans (1999) stated that the AR program is designed to impact both students and teachers. In the AR program, students
choose books to read that have been identified as AR books because there are multiple-choice quizzes available on the AR computer program. The books are leveled according to ability to encourage students to have successful reading experiences. The books and quizzes available for children are typically chosen by teachers or librarians from an AR catalogue. The quizzes can be purchased from Renaissance Learning in bulk or individually. Students then read a book they have chosen, take a multiple-choice quiz, and receive an immediate score on the computer. The students can also receive reports to take home for their parents with results from each test. The reports offer information such as the score from the current test, a score that represents a nine-week average, and a year-to-date score. An immediate goal of this process is that students will become motivated readers as they are encouraged to read books more frequently and to read lengthier and more difficult books. Teachers receive immediate feedback with detailed information about the reader’s performance. The teacher is then able to evaluate this performance in relation to the student’s functional reading level all to help make certain that the student is reading within their own “zone of proximal development, ZPD” as defined by Renaissance Learning.

According to the Renaissance Learning website (2005, Overview Introduction section, ¶ 1) AR has several objectives to help students “build a lifelong love of reading and learning: get students excited about books; obtain reliable, objective information; help every student master standards; improve classroom management; and keep each student challenged.” These objectives may entice many schools to investigate the implementation of Renaissance Learning’s Accelerated Reader software.
Not only does AR propose such positive objectives, but it also stands behind in-house and independent research which documents its success (Terrance, VanderZee, & Swanson, 1996; Topping & Paul, 1999; Vollands, Topping, & Evans, 1999; Topping, 1999). There have also been some large-scale studies to support the AR program (Paul, 1992; Paul, 1993; Paul, VanderZeeRue, & Swanson, 1997; Sanders and Topping, 1999), and some longitudinal studies that show benefits and/or impact of AR over a longer period of time (Peak & Dewalt, 1993; Penuel, 1997).

Although much of the previous research may support the AR program, is it too good to be true? In 2003, The Journal of Children’s Literature devoted a large amount of their fall issue just on the pros and cons of the AR program. The journal took a balanced approach asking experts of children’s literature, teachers, librarians, parents, students and authors to voice their opinions. Some of the articles such as Rogers (2003), Potter (2003), Morey (2003), Tate (2003) and Hanley (2003) support the AR program. Many of these support articles or letters discuss how students’ reading motivation has been sparked by the AR program. On the other hand, there were articles such as Lamme’s (2003) study which focused on the notion that AR concentrates too much on getting kids to read and not enough on the quality of the literature and the reading process. The journal had a variety of other letters that rebuked the AR program for various reasons (Galda, 2003; McCann, 2003; O’Connor, 2003; Pipken, 2003).

Other scholars and educators have also offered negative opinions of the AR program. Pavonetti, Brimmer and Cipielewski (2003) voiced concern with the long term effects on reading habits of students that have experienced AR. Biggers (2001) critiques AR because she feels the program erodes balanced literacy programs. Shonda Brisco
(2003), a one-time proponent of AR, has altered her opinion of the program after she began to question AR’s motives. Other articles and studies question the whole idea of motivation and are often used to devalue the AR program (Gamrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996; Guthrie, 1996; Baumann, Hooton, & White, 1999; Brophy, 1999; Worthy, 2002; Guthrie & Davis, 2003). In response to Topping’s (1999) article posted on Reading Online, Linda Labbo (1999) poses five questions of concern in regards to AR. Labbo’s conclusion shares a different negative perspective of AR as she writes, “It is worth asking if the AR program, and the time devoted to using the program in classroom, is the best possible literacy-related use of a school’s large investment in computers” (Labbo, 1999 Computer Use section, ¶ 5). Several studies and articles have been completed by Stephen Krashen (2002, 2003a) that challenge readers to consider two components of AR, tests and rewards. He also believes that there is a lack of experimental evidence to support AR’s usage in the classroom.

While investigating this topic I have discovered three studies (Rogers, 2000; Moore, 2002; Clements, 2004) that used qualitative methods in some manner to investigated the individuals’ perceptions of AR. The Rogers (2000) study examined the AR program to determine its perceived impact on students’ reading experience, attitudes, and habits. This study focused on fifth graders and their teachers. The Moore (2002) study examined six fourth-grade students and their parents in regards to AR’s effect on students’ reading comprehension, habits, and attitudes. The Clements (2004) study investigated the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the impact of AR on student reading experiences, attitudes and habits. All three of these studies were significant to the field of AR research; however, there is still a need for similar research
with a larger subject sample. To enrich the previous studies, it would be important for the field of research to have a study which investigates the perceptions of principals, teachers, and students, all across one school district.

When it comes to AR, educators vary in their perceptions of the program. AR is a hot topic, one that continues to be debated in schools, universities, and in professional journals. In the case of my children’s school district, four of the five elementary schools currently implement the program; one does not. At the time of this study the district was also investigating their current literacy plan with the strong potential to construct a new plan. Many teachers and administrators wonder what role AR will play in this new plan. Both nationally and locally AR is a topic of discussion, and this study adds insights that will help schools carefully investigate the implementation and effects of the program.

Purpose of the Study

According to a pamphlet published by Renaissance Learning, as of March 2004 there were over 113 scientific research studies that supported AR (Renaissance Learning, 2004). Of these studies, 21 were experimental and quasi-experimental; 67 were correlation and case studies; 15 were product foundation papers; and 10 were reliability and validity assessment research. According to Renaissance Learning, 84 of the studies were considered independent and 29 were internal research. Although the research may support the effectiveness of the program, some experts in the field of literacy and children’s literature are skeptical about the effectiveness of AR. One criticism is that fewer than 10 of the 113 studies have been published in referred journals while others question some of AR long-term effects and as well as its motivational factors (Baumann,
One area that is missing from both sides of these studies is the voice of those stakeholders that are involved with AR on a daily basis. As previously mentioned, I have found three studies that give students, teachers, principals, and parents a voice to share their perceptions of the program (Rogers, 2000; Moore, 2002; Clements, 2004).

Although all of these qualitative studies share the commonality of individuals’ perceptions, I hoped to expand this area by investigating a larger sample of subjects than the previous studies mentioned above. My sample included data from all five elementary schools in one small district. I included the principals’, teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the AR program. It was my goal to investigate these perceptions and to give all three groups of stakeholders an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings toward the AR Program. I also hoped to explore the stakeholders’ perceptions in regards to the way(s) AR is implemented in their individual schools.

**Guiding Questions**

Based on the above statement of purpose, I have formulated the following research questions for my study:

1. How do the elementary schools in one small city school district implement AR?
   - What are the students’ perceptions of this implementation?
   - What are the teachers’ perceptions of this implementation?
   - What are the principals’ perceptions of this implementation?
2. How has AR affected the students’ reading experiences?
   - What are the students’ perceptions?
   - What are the teachers’ perceptions?
   - What are the principals’ perceptions?

3. What are the perceptions regarding AR and have these perceptions changed over time?
   - What are the students’ perceptions and have these perceptions changed?
   - What are the teachers’ perceptions and have these perceptions changed?
   - What are the principals’ perceptions and have these perceptions changed?

Significance of the Study

This study has potential to contribute to the body of research on the Accelerated Reader program and its use in the elementary classroom. By documenting and analyzing these perceptions, elementary schools can evaluate the implementation of the AR program and the role it might play in their future literacy plans. The results can also help schools assess the time, money and effort they have designated for the AR program. By giving the students a voice, the results can enlighten teachers and administrators regarding the students’ perceptions of the AR program. Teachers and principals can also examine the methods of motivation and incentives used and the perceived impact of these methods. The findings are also important to university personnel who instruct preservice teachers in literacy classes to assess implications of the AR program.
Definitions

For the purpose of the study, various terms must be defined:

- **Accelerated Reader**: a computerized reading management system that claims to help improve student reading skills. Students read a book, take a test, and receive timely feedback.

- **AR**: an acronym to indicate the Accelerated Reader Program.

- **AR Coordinator**: a building representative that oversees much of the AR program.

- **AR Room**: a room specially used for AR reading and quizzing.

- **AR Time**: a specific time in the day set aside for AR reading and quizzing.

- **Leveled Books**: books that are labeled according to a grade leveling method designed by Renaissance Learning.

- **Non-AR Books**: books that do not have AR tests at the school(s) in this study.

- **Quizzes**: an electronic set of multiple choice questions to assess readers’ comprehension

- **Status of the Class**: a time at the beginning of the class for students to share what they are reading and their goals for the day.

- **Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)**: a period of uninterrupted silent reading.

- **Reading Renaissance**: a combination of AR, reading practice and sound teaching strategies (Renaissance Learning, 1999).
- **ZPD:** an acronym to indicate a reader’s zone of proximal development. The zone between reading that is too easy and reading that is too difficult for an individual (Renaissance Learning, 1999).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will explore a variety of studies that directly or indirectly can affect a classroom’s implementation of AR. First, literature about AR will be provided. This section will contain a mix of studies that support and do not support the program. Next, the chapter will investigate studies that explore the implications of motivation and incentive in the classroom. Then, literature regarding reader-response will follow. The reader-response section will provide a look at Louise Rosenblatt’s and Judith Langer’s work in this area. The chapter will conclude with literature of two programs that utilize on children’s literature as a classroom context for learning.

Accelerated Reader

A review of the literature on the Accelerated Reader in schools reveals a range of findings. Some studies claim to show data that proves AR’s effectiveness where other studies claim that the research supporting AR lacks experiential evidence to make positive proclamations. There are also studies that show no increase in students’ reading skills due to AR, yet other studies document an increase in student’s reading skills. Many of the above studies have used quantitative methods; however, in the last five years
there has been a new line of qualitative studies on the topic of AR. These qualitative studies provide a similar range of results. In the following sections, the findings of reviewed studies pertaining to the pros and cons of AR and the focus of the study are discussed.

Large Scale Studies Supporting Accelerated Reader

A study conducted by Topping and Paul (1999) focused on the relationship between reading practice and reading ability. They investigated how the amount of in-school reading practice was positively related to student’s reading ability. Their one-year study included 659,000 K-12 students that used AR. They found positive support in the relationship of reading practice and reading ability. This finding is not new. There have been several other studies that also found a positive connection between reading practice and reading ability (Greaney, 1980; Heynes, 1978; Krashen, 1993; Leinhart, 1985; Taylor, Frye & Maruyama, 1990). However Topping and Paul found that there is a low amount of reading practice time in schools, and this practice lowers significantly after grade six. In support of the AR program, their study found that schools which had used the AR program for longer periods of time displayed higher rates of reading practice.

Paul, VanderZee, Rue, & Swanson (1996) conducted a comparison analysis that investigated a large number of schools that use AR to similar geographic and demographic schools that did not use AR. Their study revealed that the schools (elementary, middle, and high school) which used AR had a positive impact on student performance rates across five curricular areas, and that attendance rates were higher in schools with the AR program. Additionally, they found that schools which owned AR
for two or more years had a significant increase in academic performance in comparison to schools that did not own it at all or had owned it for less than two years. Their other significant finding suggested that AR has a positive impact on student achievement when used in urban schools and schools in low socioeconomic areas.

Another study that found similar results for at-risk students was led by Vollands, Topping, and Evans (1999). They studied the effectiveness of AR with at-risk students from two elementary schools in Scotland. Their results implied that the AR program supported superior reading achievement with these at-risk students compared to traditional teaching without AR. The study also found that girls’ attitude toward reading improved when they used the AR program.

**Longitudinal Studies Supporting Accelerated Reader**

One significant study that supported the use of the AR program is a longitudinal study conducted by Peak and Dewalt (1994). Their five-year study investigated 25 students from one school who used the AR program from third to eight grades. These students were then compared to a control group of students who did not use the AR over the five years. Reading test scores were compared when both sets of students were in grades three, six, and eight. The results found that the 25 students who used AR scored nearly twice as high as the control group, and that the students who use AR seemed to spend twice as much time reading than the control group.

Another longitudinal study resulted in similar findings to previous studies that the longer the AR program is in a school, the greater the gains. Penuel (1997) studied 19 metropolitan elementary schools that implemented AR for over two years, and he
compared longitudinal data from norm referenced reading and language tests. A comparison of actual gains to expected gains were investigated and individuals in grades three and four scored higher gains than expected in both reading and language.

Studies of Perceptions

In the last five years, three studies have investigated perceptions of AR among various stakeholders, students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Two of the studies concluded that AR did have a positive impact on students reading experience, while the third study found mixed perceptions in regards to AR.

Rogers (2000) examined the AR program in an elementary school to find out its perceived impact on students’ reading experiences, attitudes, and habits. Her sample included fifth-grade students and their teachers. Her study found that AR, as used in this school, had a beneficial impact on students’ reading abilities, vocabulary, and their time spent in sustained silent reading. Both teachers and students perceived AR as a positive program in regards to students reading.

A similar qualitative study was conducted by Clements (2004). This study explored perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the impact of AR on student reading experiences, attitudes, and habits. The sample included teachers from second to fifth grades, and each of these teachers used AR in their reading program. Clements found that both teachers and administrators had mixed perceptions. Positive impacts included: monitoring students’ reading practice and motivating students to read more from a variety of subjects. Negative perceptions included: lack of whole group
instruction, lack of isolated skill work, and inability to meet the needs of struggling readers.

A third study that investigated perceptions of AR was conducted by Moore (2002). Specifically Moore focused on teachers’, students’, and parents’ perception of the efficacy of AR. Six students and their parents were selected as part of the sample along with a media specialist and four grade level teachers. Moore found that AR did increase reading comprehension and did impact students’ reading habits and attitudes.

*Advocates of the Accelerated Reader Program*

Topping (1999) questioned how teachers can closely monitor all their students’ day-to-day reading behavior, assess to see if the behavior is conducive to success, and intervene if needed. He believes that the AR program is a tool to help teachers with all of these duties, and that the effectiveness of AR might be more influenced by how it is used and not if it is used. Therefore, he lists both advantages and disadvantages of AR to aid in a more correct implementation of the program. Topping reiterates the point that students’ reading achievement can be raised with increased reading practice. He also states that the AR program is intended as a supplementary program and not as a substitute for balanced reading instruction.

Rogers (2003a) has a comparable opinion to Topping and sees AR as an effective component of reading programs. She stated that computerized reading management programs such as AR are strong motivating tools for students; they are a beneficial method of management for teachers, and play a potentially positive factor on students reading attitudes. Again, similar to Topping (1999), Rogers argued that the manner in
which the program is implemented in classrooms is even more important than if the program is used or is not used in a school.

Other written proponents of AR include librarians, teachers, authors, parents and students. Potter (2003), a librarian, has a very positive view of AR. She saw AR as a program to assist students to enjoy reading and to have a positive impact on reading accomplishment. Morey (2003), an eight grade teacher, is very positive about her seven years with the AR program. She is a strong proponent of AR as a springboard for reading instruction. Similarly, Hanley (2003) viewed AR as a positive incentive program for reluctant readers. With AR active in over 60,000 schools, there are a number of advocates for the program; however, there are also those that do not agree with all the positive claims.

Non-advocates of Accelerated Reader – Scholars and Experts of Children’s Literature

Although many of the previously mentioned studies seem to have yielded positive gains in students’ academic achievement with the implementation the AR program, there are still those scholars that find fault in these studies. Stephen Krashen for example, has written several articles (2002, 2003a) to support his claims. In his 2002 article, Krashen listed several studies that support the importance of book accessibility for students and increased recreational reading for students, both known underpinnings of the AR program. However, in both his 2002 and 2003 articles, Krashen found fault with research that claimed to favor AR in other areas. Krashen (2002) stated that there is “no real evidence that the additional tests and rewards add anything to the power of simply
supplying access to the high quality and interesting reading material and providing time for children to read them” (p. 26).

Krashen’s work (2003) refuted a number of studies arguing that the articles lack experimental evidence to support their claims. Krashen critiqued nine studies that were found on the Renaissance website finding faults within the comparison of published norms in all the studies. He stated that the research needs to have controlled studies. Although there are some studies such as Vollands, Topping, & Evans (1999) that do have comparison groups, Krashen finds that the study did not truly compare what it claimed to study, and that exposure to comprehensible text and sample sizes caused problems with the validity of their study.

A study that is repeatedly used by those that are not advocates for AR is Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipielewski’s (2003) research that investigated seventh graders who were exposed to AR during elementary school to see if they did more reading of books than those who were not in AR. The study included 1771 students from 10 different middle schools from three different school districts that ranged from rural schools to small city schools to suburban schools. A title recognition test was given to each student to determine if the claim that AR creates lifelong readers, students who continue to read independently after they no longer participate in AR, was true. The study found no support to the lifelong reader claim. According to Pavonetti (1997, 2003), it is people who influence young readers to become lifelong readers, not a computer bookkeeping system.

In a follow-up to Topping’s (1999) article “Formative Assessment of Reading Comprehension by Computer Advantages and Disadvantages of the Accelerated Reader
Software,” Linda Labbo addressed five questions to consider about AR. Labbo discussed the psychometric properties of the program and how they seem to resemble standardized testing situations rather than opportunities to think about or discuss the text. She also questioned the long-term effects of external motivation in regards to the implementation of AR. Does reading for points benefit intrinsic motivation? Labbo also wrote about a concern of implementation. Labbo questioned the role of AR in regards to other literacy activities (e.g., class discussions, curricular themes, etc.). Another area of concern Labbo shared dealt with the use of computers in that the classrooms. With all of the technology available for today’s classrooms is AR a narrow use of computers? Is it basically an electronic version of low-level paper-and-pencil tests?

Lamme (2003) criticized AR for its lack of literature perspective. Lamme agrees that AR gets students to read, but she is concerned that many important reading habits that help students become literate are missing from AR. She is concerned students who participate in AR miss rich literature experiences and that the idea of reader-response is neglected. It is her opinion that AR focuses too much on the testing and not the literature perspective. Similarly, Biggers (2001) and Galda (2003) argued that AR erodes a well-supported balance literacy program. Biggers also believed that the testing aspect of AR takes away from response activities and repeated interaction with the text.

Non Advocates of Accelerated Reader – Opinions

Other differences of opinion can be found by teachers, librarians, parents, and students. In Brisco’s (2003) article titled “AR: What are the Motives Behind the Motives?” the one time proponent of AR explained why she now questions the motives
of the program. Her concern explored the notion that the lack of higher-level thinking skills developed by AR students will hinder their ability to become lifelong readers. Carter (1996) also shared the downside of AR: devalued reading, diminished motivation, limited choice, lack of independent selection skills, incorrect drive of reading, and lack of efficient use of monetary resources. Pipkin’s (2003) positioned that all of AR’s potential positive accomplishments can be done without AR. O’Connor (2003) shared her dislike for the AR program because students won’t read books that are not on the AR list, and the students take tests over books rather than read for enjoyment. McCann (2003), a student participant in AR, wrote that she would not recommend AR because it focuses too much on goals and not on actual reading.

With all of the disparity from the previous research this study hopes to discover students’, teachers’, and principals’ perceptions of the program by interviewing individuals and observing AR in action all within one small school district.

Motivation

One significant characteristic of AR is the use of incentives and rewards. This section will explore a variety of studies in the area of motivation, both extrinsic and intrinsic. Ultimately, the studies will argue that it is the intrinsic motivation that is most important for a long-term effect.

The whole idea of motivation is important to examine because of its influence on students’ reading. “Teachers have long recognized that motivation is at the heart of many of the pervasive problems we face in teaching young people to read.” (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, Mazzoni, 1996, p.518). In a study by Veenman (1984) the motivation of
students was ranked by teachers as one of their most important concerns. A national survey of teachers revealed similar results. The survey results confirmed that “creating an interest in reading” was ranked as the most significant area of research to be conducted in the future (O’Flahavan, Gambrell, Guthrie, Stahl, & Alvermann, 1992).

Motivation is important in the elementary classroom. Teachers try a variety of methods to motivate their students, and extrinsic motivation is often used to motivate students to read. Teachers use incentives such as “Book-It” certificates, books, candy, ribbons, bookmarks, stickers, soft drinks, and snacks to help motivate students to read. Principals sometimes promote school-wide programs to also help motivate their students to read more. These principals have been known to kiss a pig, shave their head, sleep on the school roof, and participate in other peculiar activities to motivate their pupils to read. For many educators, extrinsic motivation is a tool used to aid students in acquiring the ultimate goal of intrinsic motivation (Bates, 1979; Cameron & Pierce, 1994). Often these reward programs are more prevalent in the upper grades as studies have confirmed that student’s motivation in learning decreases as they journey through their elementary years (Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie, 2000).

Several studies have directly explored the use of incentive programs in schools. In a survey of five school districts in the southwest United States, Fawson and Moore (1992), reported that 100% of the principals who responded reported that their school implemented some sort of reading incentive program. Of the teachers that responded, 95% reported that they had used at least one type of incentive program to develop their student’s intrinsic motivation to read. Adams (1989) surveyed a sample of teachers in regards to the Pizza Hut “Book-It” program to test his belief that incentives can positively
impact children’s reading motivation. The survey revealed that over a three-month period of time 80% of the students increased their enjoyment for reading, while 62% improved their attitude toward reading.

Voorhees (1993) conducted a study to examine if incentives could increase children’s motivation to read. The study took place for three months as 75 seventh graders participated. The students received certificates and ribbons for each books read. They also took a self reporting pretest and posttest survey. The results confirmed that incentives can increase children’s motivation. However, along with the implementation of incentives, several other methods were used such as: sustained silent reading, read alouds, and book sharings. Therefore, the results must take all the factors into consideration and not give all the credit to incentives alone.

Moore (1994) studied 10 fifth-graders that were reading below their grade-level. The students participated in an after-school reading program which gave them rewards for reading. Throughout the observations and student interviews, Moore concluded that the rewards motivated the students to read more, and the rewards gave the students a sense of pride. However, some students stated that the rewards were only a temporary motivator.

Although the external rewards may excite and even motivate students, it is the internal motivation that educators desire in their students. Cameron and Pierce (1997) wrote “A system of points and external rewards will not sustain the long-term, self-directed, collaborative learning that is required in highly integrated instruction” (p.89). They went on to recommend that teachers should plan actions that will “promote children’s “internal motivation” (p. 89). It is the internal or intrinsic motivation that will
support the long-term habit of reading. Students who have become intrinsically motivated to read make decisions about reading willingly without the prod of an incentive. According to Greaney (1980), students who read voluntarily develop a positive attitude towards reading that lasts a lifetime. Those readers who are highly motivated create literacy opportunities for themselves which helps determine their future as literacy learners (Guthrie, 1996).

The development of intrinsic motivation takes time. It is not a matter of simply conditioning students with incentives and then releasing them to create a self-desire to read on their own. Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie (2000) wrote, “Motivation that influences engaged reading is not based on temporary excitement or a passing whim. Intrinsic aspects of motivation such as curiosity, desire to be immersed in a narrative, and willingness to tackle challenging text are acquired slowly” (p. 10).

Intrinsic motivation is not only developed by time, but the attitude and the empowerment of the students also play an important role. This type of motivation is most common when people perceive themselves as having some ownership in their task and not under the dictate of others (Deci, 1975, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 1985). For example, in the case of reading, students have some say in their book choice and their reading experiences. Oldfather (1993) stated:

Ultimately issues of student motivation for literacy have to do with empowerment. For students to take personal ownership of their literacy learning, they need to feel that they have been able to have some say about what happens in the classroom. (p. 680)

Along with empowerment, students must also feel good about their literacy development. According to Spaulding (1995) “Competence and …self-determination are both
necessary for genuine intrinsic motivation to be the result” (p.492). All of these attributes influence the reading experience.

A study by Palmer, Codling, and Gambrell (1994) investigated the student-voice. Nearly 330 students in the grades 3-5 from two school districts participated in a year-long study. Forty-eight of the students were randomly selected to respond to questionnaires and conversational interviews. Four areas were identified as important motivational factors about reading:

1. *prior experiences with books* – books that had previously been read aloud to them or books they had seen on television or in the movies
2. *social interactions about books* – books that have been recommended to them by others
3. *book access* – classroom libraries were very important, yet home libraries played a role as well
4. *book choice* – students were more motivated when they were permitted to choose their own book

The results from this study by Palmer, Codling, and Gambrell were consistent with the conclusion drawn by Morrow and Rand (1994): “One of the ways children are motivated to engage in self-directed literacy activities is through peer cooperation” (p.3).

Throughout educational research, many studies identify a relationship between motivation and reading. Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie, (2000) may have summed it up best by stating, “If motivation is treated as secondary to the acquisition of basic reading skills, we risk creating classrooms filled with children who can read but choose not to” (p.1).
Reader-Response

AR is a very individualized activity; students find a book, read the book, take a quiz on the book, and the cycle repeats itself. The act of social learning is absent. This section of the literature review will focus on reader-response to argue the importance of student interaction in the act of reading. Two experts in the field of reader-response are explored, Louise Rosenblatt and Judith Langer. Separately, each scholar describes the importance of the student’s connection with the text, but they also encourage peer discussion as an element that enriches reader-response.

Louise Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory

Louise Rosenblatt is a scholar who made notable contributions to the field of reading and response to literature. In 1938 Rosenblatt published her first book, *Literature as Exploration*, which dealt with the area of reader-response, a book she has revised several times. In this book, she explored the social elements in literature and compared them to the esthetic elements. Rosenblatt also described the idea that literary works exist in a live circuit between the reader and the text, a transaction. She further explained how readers must draw on past experiences to shape the new experience represented on the page, and that readers take an active role not a passive one. Throughout the text Rosenblatt encouraged teachers to create an atmosphere conducive to support such a reading exploration.

Rosenblatt’s idea of transaction is an interrelationship between the text and the reader.
A novel or a poem or a play remains merely as inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between the reader and the text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the patterns of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized imaginative experience. (Rosenblatt, 1968, p. 25)

She explained how this imaginative experience can work because the author of the text and the reader have some commonalties in social origins and social effects, a common core of human experiences.

Much of the energy of this book actually deals with the idea that a reader’s interpretation of the text depends on what the reader has brought to the experience. Rosenblatt stated, “Anything that has entered into and shaped the development of the student’s personality may be significant for his literary development” (Rosenblatt, 1968, p. 96). This development may include not only past experiences but also present preoccupations. Factors such as family and community background, personality traits, present mood, memories of the past, etc. can all impact the reader’s response to a text. Without these past experiences and present interests the transaction will not come alive.

Rosenblatt (1996) encouraged classroom teachers to apply the idea of transactions between individual readers and individual literary works in their classrooms. She stated that in the past students demonstrated comprehension of a text by phrasing, defining, and summarizing, any of which can be done without personal response. Therefore she promoted the idea that instructors give students the opportunity to share a personal response, a response that has emerged as the students have “lived-through” and read the book. Furthermore, an atmosphere of informal friendly discussion should be encouraged. Rosenblatt described her text as a springboard for a philosophy of teaching.
Rosenblatt believed that there is more to a text than what is on the written page. Her theory supports the idea that the reader brings something to the text, and this something plays an important role in how the reader interprets, comprehends, and what he takes away from the text. Rosenblatt explained this transaction as “evoking a poem.” Rosenblatt’s *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978) described the experience that transpires when a reader creates meaning from a text. Rosenblatt used the term “poem” to refer to what the reader constructs as his response to a text. The poem is “thought of as an event in time…” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p.12). The event happens when the reader and the text connect. The reader brings to the text his past experience, his schema, and his present ideas and knowledge. As these elements connect with the author’s words a new experience is constructed, thus constructing the “poem”. Each individual reader will evoke different images even though they read the same text. This is because readers all have different backgrounds and different experiences; therefore, each reader has his own personal experience with a text. The poem itself can be described as the whole category of transactions between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1994).

*Building Envisionments - Judith Langer*

Langer is another scholar that has researched reader-response, and she constructs a theory that readers create or build envisionments while they read. She described envisionments as “…the world of understanding a person has any point in time. Envisionments are text-worlds in the mind, and they differ from individual to individual” (Langer, 1995, p. 9). Langer believes that the reader’s own background and culture, as
well as their current feelings and knowledge, play an important role in the building of envisionments. She stated:

Envisionments are understandings – the wealth of ideas that people have in their minds at any point in time. Envisionments include related ideas and images, questions, hunches, anticipations, arguments, disagreements, and confessions that fill the mind every reading, writing, speaking, or thinking experience. (Close and Langer, 2001, p.6)

The idea of envisionments building is that the individual’s current envisionments are always in the state of change or open to the idea of change, “exploring the horizon of possibilities” (Close and Langer, 2001, p.6). She felt that “we build envisionments all the time as we make sense of ourselves, of others, and of the world” (Langer, 1995, p. 9).

Although envisionments can be built as part of our everyday life, they can also play an important role in reading. Langer (1995) described envisionments as the type of understanding a reader may have about a text, whether it is being read, written, discussed or tested. These envisionments are able to change with time as the reader gains insights, develops new ideas, and reads more of a text. Over time some envisionments lose their importance, while some are built upon and others are reinterpreted. Any of these changes can happen while a text is being written about, thought about, or discussed in a classroom. Change can also happen while another text is being read.

Efferent and Aesthetic Stances

Louise Rosenblatt (1994) identified two distinct types of reading: efferent and aesthetic. In efferent reading the reader will focus on what he wants to take away from the text, “what will remain with the reader after the reading” (p. 23). An example of efferent reading might include the reading of a science textbook, a recipe from a
cookbook, a bicycle instruction manual, or a mathematic equation. In aesthetic reading the reader will focus on the actual reading event. The focus is on what happens during the reading, the “lived-through” experience. In this type of reading the reader “pays attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words arouse within him” (p. 25). Although Rosenblatt described these two types of reading in separate manners, she actually finds them part of a complex continuum.

It is more accurate to think of a continuum, a series of gradations between nonaesthetic and the aesthetic extremes. The reader’s stance toward the text—what he focuses his attention on, what his “mental set” shuts out or permits to enter into the center of awareness—may vary in a multiplicity of ways between the two poles. (p. 35)

Many texts are successful at being experienced at different points of this continuum by different readers or even by the same reader under different circumstances. However, Rosenblatt (1994) stated that schools often emphasize the usage of the efferent stance over the usage of the aesthetic stance.

By promoting reader-response activities and activities that can help students build envisionments while participating in the AR program, students can move within the continuum of both efferent and aesthetic reading. Students’ reading experiences will have the potential to be enriched if they are given the opportunity to make such connections while they read.

Children’s Literature and Classroom Contexts for Learning

One context of learning that may be absent in the students’ AR reading experience is participation in peer-lead discussion groups, also known as literature circles. This activity can help readers gain a deeper understanding of the text they have
read. Students in these groups can share, question, listen, critique, and support insights from other members of the group, ultimately enhancing the individual reading experience by adding the dynamic of group discussion.

For the purpose of this study, the term literature circles will be the overriding name to describe the variety of names—book clubs, novel groups, in-depth studies, literature groups, novel discussion groups, etc.—used to identify the teaching methods that shares similar elements. According to Noe and Johnson (1999):

In literature circles, small groups of students gather together to discuss a piece of literature in depth. The discussion is guided by students’ response to what they have read….Literature circles provide a way for students to engage in critical thinking and reflection as they read, discuss, and respond to books. Collaboration is at the heart of this approach. Students reshape and add onto their understanding as they construct meaning with other readers. (p. ix)

The description provided by Noe and Johnson is a general overview of how many teachers use literature circles in their classroom. However, each teacher may personalize the concept to meet their students’ needs, therefore, literature circles can and do take a variety of forms. Some teachers will implement a very simplistic program while others will implement a very structured program based on one of several researched programs.

The Book Club Program

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, McMahon and Raphael began the construction of their research, titled The Book Club Program (McMahon & Raphael, 1997). After a year-long piloted study they developed a framework for their program based on four areas: community share, reading, writing, and book clubs. Community share is a time for all participating class members to gather and share ideas from their
small-group discussions. *Reading* is the time where the students participate in reading. This may be done individually, with partners, or in small groups. *Reading* time is also where the students will apply their reading skills and strategies for: “(a) personal response, (b) building fluency, (c) comprehending, (d) interpreting, and (e) critiquing the literature they read” (p. xii). *Writing* is the time when students write to support their reading and discussion. Students write in literature response journals to put some of their initial responses and thoughts in writing. Some items from their journal will be developed into more formal pieces. *Book Clubs* is the time when the small groups gather together to discuss what they have been reading. According to McMahon and Raphael, “they share their personal responses, help one another clarify potentially confusing aspects of their reading, create interpretations and critiques of their text, discuss author’s intent, and so forth” (p. xii).

*Harvey Daniels’ Literature Circles*

Another specific program that is similar to The Book Club Program is Literature Circles as designed by Harvey Daniels. In 1993, Daniels gathered twenty teachers from kindergarten through college to research and write about the use of literature circles in the Chicago area (Daniels, 2002). Together they created a program that encouraged peer-lead book discussions. Daniels and his colleagues define their version of literature circles as:

Literature circles are small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book. While reading each group-determined portion of the text (either in or outside of class), each member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with notes needed to help perform that job. The circles have regular meetings, with discussion roles rotating each session. When they finish a book, the circle members plan a way to share highlights of their reading with the wider
community: then they trade members with other finishing groups, select more reading, and move into a new cycle. Once readers can successfully conduct their own wide-range, self-sustaining discussions, formal roles may be dropped. (Daniels, 2002, p.13)

Daniels’ literature circle program leans heavily on reader response theory.

According to Daniels (2002), “Literature circles is not just a trendy label for any kind of small-group reading lesson—it stands for a sophisticated fusion of collaborative learning with independent reading, in the framework of reader response theory” (pp.17-18).

Daniels’ literature experience leans heavily on twelve key features:

1. Students choose their own reading material.
2. Small temporary groups are formed, based on book choice.
3. Different groups read different books.
4. Groups meet on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss their reading.
5. Kids use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion.
6. Discussion topics come from the students.
7. Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome.
8. In newly forming groups, students play a rotating assortment of task roles.
9. The teacher serves as a facilitator, not a group member or instructor.
10. Evaluation is by teacher observation and student evaluation.
11. A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room.
12. When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and then new groups form around new reading choices. (p.18)

Together all of these features define the ingredients of Daniels’s literature circles.

Summary of Literature Circles/Book Clubs

Literature circles/book clubs provide an opportunity for students to read and collaborate about a text. Students can share their thoughts and feelings, activate on their schemata, make personal and/or intertextual connections, and build upon others students’ responses. This can be a time for students to take their reading experience to a higher level, an opportunity to move beyond recall into interpretive, critical, and creative
reading. It is important to note such classroom contexts because they can be used in conjunction with AR to promote a collaboration of discussion and comprehension.

Summary

In summary, this chapter has explored a variety of studies and programs that can impact the implementation of AR in a classroom. Studies that promote AR as well as studies that question AR were provided. A section on motivation shared a variety of research which can serve as an influential component to AR. The section on reader-response provided an exploration of Louise Rosenblatt’s and Judith Langer’s theories, which can enrich a teacher’s use of AR. Finally, a look at two different peer-lead discussion groups was provided to offer an additional context for the use of AR in the classroom.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to document and analyze students’, teachers’, and principals’ perceptions regarding the Accelerated Reader program in a small town school district in northwest Ohio. Specifically, the study explored the following: 1) how the elementary schools in this small city school district implement AR, 2) how AR affected the students’ reading experiences, and 3) the current perceptions of AR and how have these perceptions changed over time. All three questions were investigated through the perceptions of the students, teachers, and principals.

Documenting and analyzing these perceptions can help the school district evaluate the implementation of the program and determine the role it should play in their future literacy plans. The results can also help the district assess the time, money, and effort they have designated for the AR program. Giving the students a voice can enlighten teachers and administrators regarding the students’ perceptions of the AR program. The results add to the body of research that has already taken place with AR. It also contributes to the research in literacy and technology. The findings are important to university personnel who instruct preservice teachers in literacy classes. These findings
can help the university personnel assess implications the AR program will have for their preservice teachers.

The methodology was qualitative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 1990) and utilized interviews, both individual and focus group. Also analyzed were observations and artifacts from professional literature and media. The study focused on fourth, fifth and sixth-grade classrooms and the implementation of AR in these grades. These grades were used for several reasons. First of all, I am most interested in literacy designs from these grades. Secondly, students in these grades begin to read more chapter books, which add to the AR point value dynamic. Thirdly, I am interested in the factors that motivate children in these grades to read. On-site interviews were conducted with 20 students, 14 teachers, and 5 principals from each elementary school in the district. Classroom observations followed the teacher interviews for several reasons. First, the observations compared and contrasted the data collected by the interviews to see if similar trends existed. Second, the observations enriched the interviews by providing data regarding the classroom atmosphere and the moves of teachers and students during an actual AR time. All data collected from each school took place between March, 2005, and May, 2005.

The study was grounded in the interpretivist paradigm (Schwandt, 2000), and I intended to understand the different perceptions of the AR program as held by students, teachers, and principals. According to Sipe & Constable (1996), the interpretivist, “attempts to describe and understand from the point of view of someone else…from those experiencing the situation” (p.158). This is exactly what this study attempted to do to understand and share the voice of all three stakeholders. Schwandt (2000) states, “it is possible to understand the subjective meaning of action, yet do so in an objective
manner” (p. 193). Because this study explores a variety of personal perceptions that deal with the AR program, the interpretivist paradigm was the most conducive lens given the nature of the study.

Population and Study Sample

The study was conducted in a small town school district in northwest Ohio. This district was purposely selected for several reasons. First, the district used the AR program in a variety of ways. Three of five elementary schools within the district had used AR for some time. Of these three elementary schools, each one implemented the program differently than the other schools. A fourth school had purchased the program and was to begin implementation in the winter of 2005. The fifth elementary school in the district brought a unique perspective to the study because they had chosen not to implement AR in their school. Another reason this district was chosen was because I had an established rapport with school personnel which helped facilitate access.

The district’s elementary population was 1073 students in grades K-6. Approximately 91.5% of the students were White, 2.9% were Multi-racial, 2.4% were Hispanic, 1.7% was African American, and 1.2% were Asian Pacific. Nearly 25% of the students were economically disadvantaged.

There were five different elementary schools in this district. The names of the district, the schools, and the individuals involved were changed to insure anonymity. Four of the schools were K-5 buildings and one school was a K-6 building which housed all the sixth graders in the district.
Reagan Elementary

Reagan Elementary school was a K-5 building with 230 students. This school had two sections of each grade level. Two fifth-grade teachers, one fourth-grade teacher and the building principal were interviewed, and all three of these classrooms were observed. The other fourth-grade teacher did not participate in the study because this teacher retired before the program was fully implemented. By the time of the study Reagan was to have had the AR program in place and available for students; however, due to technology delays the software was not loaded on the school’s server until late spring 2005. Once the software was loaded, teachers were given an opportunity to explore it in their classrooms with their students. According to two teacher interviews the program was not running correctly after it was loaded therefore some teachers did not have the opportunity for exploration or even the training to initiate any sort of exploration. Due to the technology delays in the spring of 2005 the official launch for the program was moved to fall 2005.

Ford Elementary

Ford Elementary was a K-5 building with 221 students. This school had two sections of each grade. One fifth-grade teacher, two fourth-grade teachers, the AR coordinator, and the building principal were interviewed. At Ford Elementary the fourth-grade teachers taught their own class reading. However, one fifth-grade teacher taught both sections of reading/language arts for this level. Classroom observations took place in both fourth grades and in one section of the fifth grade. Both grade levels at Ford Elementary used AR as a supplemental reading program at the time of the study.
Carter Elementary

Carter Elementary School was a K-5 building with 201 students. This school had two sections of each grade. At the time of the study the current principal for this school also served as principal for Clinton Elementary School. This was the first year Carter Elementary was under the leadership of their present principal. Prior to their current principal, Carter Elementary was under the leadership of the school district’s assistant superintendent. It was this administrator who had chosen to not implement AR at Carter. For the purpose of this study it was important to acquire data from the assistant superintendent, and the perceptions that impacted the school’s decision not to implement the AR program.

Clinton Elementary

Clinton Elementary School was a K-5 building with 125 students and only one section of each grade level. The fourth-grade teacher, the fifth-grade teacher, the AR coordinator, and the building principal were interviewed, and both the fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms were observed. Clinton Elementary used AR as a key component to their reading program. Clinton had taken AR to the next level called Reading Renaissance. According to Renaissance Learning (1999), Reading Renaissance is a combination of AR, reading practice, and sound teaching strategies. Clinton Elementary tries to incorporate all of these items during their AR time.
G. Bush Elementary

The fifth school in the district was G. Bush Elementary School. G. Bush Elementary had 296 students in grades K-6. This school had one section of each grade level through grade five. However, G. Bush Elementary had eight sections of sixth-grade classrooms were comprised of, all the sixth graders in the district. The fourth-grade teacher, two sixth-grade teachers, the AR coordinator, and the building principal were interviewed, and both the fourth and sixth-grade classrooms were observed. Sixth-grade students representing each elementary school made up the five focus groups to help gather information for this school as well as the four other elementary schools. Twenty students in total participated in the focus group interviews. The fifth-grade teacher was absent during the duration of the study; therefore all data gathered in regards to the fifth-grade class were from a student focus group, the AR coordinator, and/or the building principal. At the time of the study, Bush Elementary used AR with sixth-grade students as a reading enrichment program, and the fourth and fifth grade used it as a supplemental tool.

Data Collection

As stated earlier in this chapter, the goal of this study was to document and analyze students’, teachers’, and principals’ perceptions regarding the Accelerated Reader Program and its implementation and impact within the district that was studied. According to Patton (1990) qualitative methods are useful “in making human actions and interventions more effective and by its practical utility to decision makers, policy makers and others who have a stake in efforts to improve the world.” It is my belief that
qualitative research is most conducive to gather the voices of the students, teachers, and principals as they surfaced throughout this study.

Interview data, classroom observation data, and artifact data were the primary information gathered for this study. Together these data collection methods provided opportunities for data triangulation. Triangulation is defined as “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, and verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, 2000, p. 443). Stake continues to state that “while acknowledging that no observations or interpretation are perfectly repeatable [triangulation] serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen” (p. 444). Triangulation was also present by gathering perceptions of three different groups of participants: students, teachers, and principals. The interview data came from principals, teachers, and student focus groups. The observation data came from classroom observations during AR time, and the artifact data came from professional documents or professional media given to me by any of the teachers or principals regarding AR.

Semi-structured Interviews

Principals and teachers from all five elementary schools participated in this study. This included four AR schools and one school that did not participate in AR. For schools that implemented the AR program, principals and all teachers of grades four through six who were participating in the AR program were interviewed. In addition, school staff members who provide supervision or in any way facilitate the AR program were interviewed. These staff members are referred to as AR coordinators for the study. For the school that did not implement the AR program, the principal was interviewed. As
mentioned earlier in this chapter, because this school has a new administrator the former principal who made the decision not to implement AR in the school was also interviewed. According to Fontana and Frey (2000) this data gathering method is “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” (p. 645). The interviews were semi-structured, and a set of pre-established questions served as a guide for all sessions (see appendices A-F). Although this is similar to a structured interview the questions were open-ended rather than scripted (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This format was more conducive to meeting the needs of individuals and it permitted flexibility in the interviews as well.

Each principal was interviewed twice. The first interview took place early in the study before any teachers or students were involved. This initial set of interviews provided background information regarding each school’s historical experience with AR. It also created a foundation of each school’s current implementation of AR (see Appendix A). In the case of the non-AR school, first set of questions provided information regarding the school’s decision not to use AR (see Appendix B). The second round of interviews took place near the end of the study. This second set of interviews focused more on each principal’s perceptions of AR (see Appendix C). At the non-AR school the second set of questions focused more on the principal’s perception of AR usage within the school district (see Appendix D). The principal interviews took approximately 30 minutes per interview.

Teachers in grades 4-6 and AR coordinators were individually interviewed once. These interviews took place over a three month period, but only after the building principals had completed their first round. Each teacher was asked questions that focused
on their school’s implementation of AR, any impact they may have seen in their students’ reading as a result of AR, as well as their own perceptions of the AR program. These interview questions also asked participants to reflect on their current perceptions of AR and how these perceptions may have changed over time. Participants were also asked what influenced these changes, if any changed had occurred (see Appendix E). Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes.

All principal and teacher interviews took place at school during the school day or just after school hours. The interviews were recorded on an audiotape and transcribed within 24 hours of the interview.

**Focus Groups**

In addition to individual interviews, five student focus groups were formed from sixth-grade students at G. Bush Elementary. These focus groups helped provide a “safe environment” (Madriz, 2000) for the students where they could share their information. This format also helped me gather information from 20 students in a more efficient manner than individual interviews. These focus groups were purposely gathered together based upon the prior elementary school that students attended. For example, the Carter focus group consisted of students all previously from Carter Elementary School whereas the Reagan focus group consisted of students all previously from Reagan Elementary School. This ensured that each focus group would have similar background experiences. A strength of this format was that it provided a direct commonality among each focus group member (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Each group was asked a series of questions in regards to their past and current perceptions of AR (see Appendix F).
These five focus group interviews took place during a period of time when
students were actively participating in the AR program. This was important because at
G. Bush Elementary School only two sections of sixth-grade classes participated in AR
per nine-weeks. All focus group interviews took place at the school during school hours
and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The schedule of the focus group was determined
by the schedules of the participants. Students did miss instruction time to participate in
the focus groups. The interviews were recorded on an audiotape and transcribed within
24 hours of the interview.

*Observational Field Notes*

The third data source was classroom observation. Field notes were collected in an
open-ended narrative through a natural setting (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). As part of the
teacher interviews, students and teachers were observed as they worked on AR activities
during their scheduled AR time. These observations helped clarify the teachers’
description of implementation and supported additional follow-up questions to ensure
accuracy regarding the implementation of AR in that classroom. Additional data
regarding the classroom environment and moves made by the teacher and students were
collected through field notes and typed the evening of the classroom observations.

*Artifacts from Professional Documents*

The last data source was a collection of artifacts (Hoddler, 2000) such as
professional documents or professional media given to me by teachers or principals. All
of these artifacts were originally supplied from the Renaissance Learning Company and were published to support their company. These artifacts served as additional support or insights to the information that was gathered in the interviews. For example, a video given to me explained in detail the difference between AR and Renaissance Reading. Again, these artifacts were not used in this study to add new data to the study, rather to clarify or support data that was already presented in one of the other data collection techniques.

Timeline for the Study

The data gathering for this study took place between March and May 2005. The following calendar displays a specific window of time each data collection techniques was administered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 14, 2005</td>
<td>Letters were mailed to building principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 14-April 8, 2005</td>
<td>Conducted first round of interviews with building principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 11-May 13, 2005</td>
<td>Arranged and conducted interviews with teachers, which were followed up by classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9-27, 2005</td>
<td>Arranged and conducted focus group interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 16-27, 2005</td>
<td>Conducted second round of interviews with building principals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Timeline for Study

Data Analysis

According to Bodgan and Biklen (1982) “data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and the other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them” (p.145).
Analysis is the time to work with the data by organizing, synthesizing and searching for patterns while breaking the data into controllable units.

Data for this study were analyzed in two phases. The first phase occurred during ongoing analysis throughout data collection. Through this process I was able to keep the original research questions in focus. Through informal reflection, I made notes concerning data that were not clearly understood. I was then able to go to the original source for clarification quite quickly after the initial data was collected. This phase was also a beneficial time to journal about what had been observed and what speculations had developed. Similarly, this was an appropriate time to write memos as themes began to develop. Both of these methods were an informal writing style that was conducive to letting ideas flow. According to Bodgan and Biklen (1982) this is an opportune time to try ideas and themes on subjects. I especially saw how this time was beneficial to the second round of interviews with the building principals. For example, if a question arose after several interviews and observations regarding building-wide incentives, I was able to address the question in the second round of interviews with that building’s principal.

Much of the second phase took place at the conclusion of data collection. However, some analysis took place immediately after the interviews had been transcribed. After data from individual and focus group interviews, classroom observations, and data collected from artifacts were transcribed into the computer, a hard copy was printed out, coded and analyzed by hand for similarities and differences among responses. As themes emerged a codebook was constructed to track common responses. Then all the data were placed into the NUD*IST software program to help electronically organize responses and codes. NUD*IST is a software program designed to help develop
systematic relationships among code categories (Glesne, 1999). This qualitative software is a tool to help me analyze data; the software itself will not analyze alone. At that time I also continued working with memos, writing notes, and developing some mental maps and charts, all to help me reflect on what had taken place as well as organize my thoughts.

Some of the initial themes surfaced as I analyzed by hand. Yet, by the time all the data were transcribed and the first codebook was constructed, I had created an abundance of codes. After further analysis, many codes were merged to be more manageable and to collapse coding categories. Some of the initial themes that emerged were: strengths, weaknesses, negatives, rewards, motivation, and 45 other codes. After multiple passes, many of these codes were merged to strengthen themes across the data. Some of the strongest themes can be seen in Table 3.2 and all pertinent themes will be described in Chapter Four.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moves</th>
<th>Students’ and teachers’ actions during AR time.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>The variety of ways AR is used in the schools and classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>The dynamics that impact students’ quizzing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>Training or in-service for teachers. Ways to help the teacher understand the program better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Factors that help the children accomplish a reading goal, and teachers to promote the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td>The variety of opinions and feelings held by stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Themes across the Data

Informed Consent

To make sure all participants in the study understood possible benefits and risks, procedures were followed regarding informed consent as required by the Human Subjects Review Board. All teachers and principals along with all child participants and their
parents were informed that their participation was purely voluntary and that there would be no consequences if they did not wish to participate or if they chose to stop participating once the study had begun. All individuals were assured confidentiality to preserve from any unwanted exposure (Christians, 2000). This was accomplished by giving each participant and each school pseudonyms. The students were informed of this verbally and this information was included in the parent letter (see Appendix G). Signed consent from the teachers, principals (see Appendix H), and parents (see Appendix I) were obtained prior to beginning the interviews. In addition, parents or guardians could withdraw their consent and terminate their child’s participation in the study at any time, for any reason, without consequence. Also, the child could ask to terminate participation at any time without any consequence. The Human Subjects Review Board approved all materials used in this study in the Winter Quarter of 2005.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, several measures were employed: I was somewhat of an insider to the school district; I used triangulation of methods in two different ways; I used reflexivity to tell the truth; and documents were transcribed in a timely manner.

Insider Perspective & Reflexivity

I was at one time a teacher at one of the elementary schools in the district, a parent of two children in the district, and a PTO president of an elementary school in the district. My wife teaches elementary school in the district, and I bring preservice teachers
from a local college to read in classrooms at the district. Each of these items and the fact that I am friends with many of the teachers and principals involved in the study gave me the advantage to be somewhat of an insider. This role helped me gain access and it also added in reflexivity. I did have my own history and perspective on the topic, but I also knew it was my duty to share all the information on the topic. To purposefully omit a stakeholder’s perception would be unfair, and a form of bias (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

As an act of reciprocity to the district, I have offered to share all the data with the district. The district is very interested in the findings and would like to use these findings to help them make decisions in regards to their future literacy plan. The results of this study can also help the district decide what role AR should play in this literacy plan, and what amount of time, money, and energy the program should receive. In regards to trustworthiness, I am held very accountable to my findings, as the results of data will be shared back to many of those that participated in the study.

Timely Transcription

In regards to interviews and observations specific precautions were taken to increase the validity of the results. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), it is important to have a positive relationship between the respondents and myself. To support this positive relationship, I conducted all interviews in the principals’ office, the teachers’ classrooms, or a small conference room as was the case for the focus group interviews. All principal and teacher interviews were scheduled at the respondent’s convenience. The focus group interviews were also schedule at the convenient time for teacher and the students. All interviews began with some small talk to relax the atmosphere, and then
respondents were told about the study. A semistructured interview format was used to keep data comparable, yet open-ended questions allowed for flexibility and an assortment of responses among respondents. The interviews were recorded on an audiotape and transcribed within 24 hours of the interview. After each teacher interview, a classroom observation was set-up to observe the students and the teachers in an AR setting. The observation was also a time to compare and contrast data received from the interviews. Following an observation, the notes were typed that evening. By transcribing and typing the notes so quickly after a data gathering setting, I was able to reflect and describe with greater accuracy.

Triangulation

To limit the potential for misinterpretation, I utilized various procedures to redundantly gather the data (Stake, 2000). The interviews, observations and artifact collection provided an opportunity for triangulation. Triangulation attempts to provide clarity in meaning by identifying multiple ways to view the phenomenon. The data collected by the interviews provided a foundation for interpretation, while observations and the artifacts clarified and enriched the findings. Triangulation of stakeholders was also important. To help gain understanding of the overall perception of the AR program, it was important to offer a voice to students, teachers, and principals. By including more than one perspective multiple layers of information was provided. Together, both of these triangulation procedures reinforced the validity of the data.
Limitations

The study was not without its limitations. It only explored the perceptions of teachers and students in grades four, five, and six. The perceptions of early childhood teachers and their students were not collected. These perceptions might bring many more layers to the study.

AR offers two components that were not implemented in the district at the time of this study. One component is voice quizzes. Students wear headphones while they quiz and the computer reads the question and answer choices to them. This is designed for young emerging readers. Presently, only one school in the district has this package, but the perceptions of students and teachers toward the voices quizzes would have added richness to this study. AR also offers a literacy skills quiz component that was not implemented in the district. The quiz questions for this package are designed to encourage higher-level thinking. To study schools that use that component would have also added a new layer to the data.

Another limitation was that the study took place in a small town school public school district in northwest Ohio. However this school district was not randomly chosen. It was selected because of its unique structure and implementation of the AR program. Data findings may have been different in larger school districts or districts of different demographics. Literacy programs in private schools and/or faith-based schools with different monies may also provide a unique perspective.

As with any qualitative research there is the limitation of researcher bias. Although steps were taken to avoid this limitation, bias is still present to some degree. Another limitation to this qualitative research dealt with respondents holding back from
completely sharing their perceptions. At times they may have only partially answered the
question because they were not sure of my perspective, and they responded the way they
thought I wanted them to respond. In a similar manner, students in a focus group might
answer in a way that is pleasing to their peers.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to document and analyze students’, teachers’, and administrators’ perceptions regarding the Accelerated Reader Program in a small town school district in northwest Ohio. This study gives the representatives a voice to share their thoughts and feelings about the program and the implementation of the program in their school. The study focused on all three perspectives to give a holistic look at the range of perceptions in regards to AR throughout the elementary schools in the district. The use of three perspectives also strengthens the validity of the study through triangulation. As discussed in chapter 2, three studies (Rogers, 2000; Moore, 2002; Clements, 2004) have focused on the idea of perceptions in regards to the AR program. This study explored all three perspectives, administrators’, teachers’, and students’ to help the district to evaluate their implementation of the AR program relative to their current reading programs and to gain insights into the perceptions that others hold. The following questions were the underpinnings to help gather the data.

1) How do elementary schools in one small city school district implement AR?

2) How has AR affected the students’ reading experiences?
3) What are the perceptions regarding AR and have these perceptions changed over time?

This study examined AR in the fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade classrooms in the district represented, and this chapter will focus on the themes of perceptions that emerged from the data collection. The chapter will begin with each school’s description of their implementation of the AR program at the time of the data collection. Following the exploration of the implementation methods, the principals’, teachers’, and students’ perceptions of methods will be shared. Next, the chapter will examine the theme of motivation, which will include the motivation for teachers to run the program and the incentives that entice the students to participate in the program. Again this will be followed by the three groups’ perceptions in regards to motivation. Then, the chapter will investigate the idea of professional development and the principals’ and teachers’ perceptions on the topic. The next category will explore the range of perceptions regarding the impact that the AR program has on students’ reading experiences. The last section of the chapter will be the current and possible changed perceptions of the program in regards to all the groups.

Implementation of AR

To begin this section it is important to introduce each school that is represented in this study and to describe how each school implements the AR program. Table 4.1 represents the grades that each school houses and the grade levels that use AR in each school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School (Population)</th>
<th>Grades Housed at the School</th>
<th>Grades Involved in AR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G. Bush Elementary (296)</td>
<td>K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6</td>
<td>K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter Elementary (201)</td>
<td>K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Elementary (125)</td>
<td>K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford Elementary (221)</td>
<td>K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan Elementary (230)</td>
<td>K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>Decision will be made in the fall of 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Elementary Schools’ Grade Levels and Grades Involved in AR

*Schools at a Glance*

**G. Bush Elementary School**

G. Bush Elementary was the only K-6 building in the district. This school had one section of each grade level through grade five. However, G. Bush Elementary had eight sections of sixth-grade classrooms, which housed all the sixth graders in the district. To gather the implementation data of this school, interviews took place with five focus groups of sixth-grade students, the fourth-grade teacher, two sixth-grade teachers, the AR coordinator, and the building principal. The fifth-grade teacher was absent during the time of the study. The two sixth-grade teachers were chosen because their students were actively involved in AR at the time of the study. The sixth-grade class used AR as one of their four special classes, and each classroom had AR for approximately 45 minutes a day for a nine-weeks period. Since there were eight sections of sixth-grade classes, two
classes participated in AR each nine weeks. Students left their homeroom and spent the AR time in a room that was connected to the school library.

Furniture in the AR room consisted of long tables, folding chairs, two soft chairs, a couch, several beanbag chairs, and four computers. Students entered the room, chose a seat, and began their AR time, where students read or quizzed. Students were able to choose an AR book or a non-AR, a book without an AR quiz. Books could be at any level, and AR quizzes could be taken on books at any level the reader chooses. After a student had tested, his/her score was charted on their own data sheets. At the end of the period the AR coordinator charted the collective scores from the day on a poster that was kept in the room. Some incentives were used to help encourage the students to read. AR for the sixth graders was isolated from the classroom’s language arts program, and therefore did not directly influence the students’ reading grade. The only direct overlap between AR and the language arts classroom was that some students might have read their AR book during the language arts SSR time.

The fourth- and fifth-grade students followed a different format. The fourth-grade class used the program all year long. The scheduled AR time was typically the last 30 minutes of each day; however, students sometimes had other reading opportunities throughout the day to read their AR books. Students took the quizzes in their room on one of the three computers that sat side-by-side. During the scheduled AR time students were permitted to sit at their desk, on the floor, or in the hallway to read. Although the teacher charted students’ progress, and added some incentives, AR was strictly a bonus activity. The program did not impact a student’s reading grade. Due to the absence of the fifth-grade teacher at the time of the study, the only official data came from the building...
principal and students. Each stated that the fifth grade ran the AR program in a similar method to fourth grade, with the difference that the fifth-grade students were only to read within their instructional level, commonly known as ZPD according to the AR material.

Table 4.2 represents how AR was used for the fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students at G. Bush Elementary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4th Grade</th>
<th>5th Grade</th>
<th>6th Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AR Directly Impacts Reading Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Must Read Within Their ZPD Until Goal is Met</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives are Used</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Get at Least 30 Minutes a Day for AR</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>√*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Houses at Least Three Computer for Student Testing</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Primarily Read at their Desks</td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Implementation of AR at G. Bush Elementary

*Note. √ = yes; ? = unsure; *four days a week for nine weeks only.*

**Clinton Elementary School**

Clinton Elementary School was a K-5 building with one class per grade level. To gather the implementation data of this school, interviews took place with the fourth- and fifth-grade teacher, the AR coordinator, and the building principal. A student focus
A group composed of previous Clinton Elementary students who are now sixth-graders at G. Bush Elementary was also used to gather implementation data.

According to the AR coordinator of the building, Clinton has taken AR to the next level called Reading Renaissance. Reading Renaissance is a combination of AR, reading practice and sound teaching strategies (Renaissance Learning; 1999). According to the Renaissance Learning five components are critical to the success of Reading Renaissance: TWI – Time spent reading to students, with students, and individually; RMS – Reading Motivation System; LIS – Learning Motivation System; MIMI – Motivate, Instruct, Monitor, and Intervene. Reading Renaissance also recommends 60 minutes of reading a day in the classroom and point goals for students each nine weeks. Clinton Elementary tries to incorporate all of these items during their AR time.

The fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms in the Clinton Elementary building use a similar method to implement the AR program. In the fourth-grade classroom students got approximately 60 minutes of AR time a day, half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the afternoon. The room had three computers that sat side-by-side for the students to take their tests. Students sat at their desk to read yet were permitted to go to the library to get a new book if needed. According to the fourth-grade teacher, “AR is part of a scaffold, a layering, of different types of reading activities.” Students were to read in their ZPD until they reached their goal, and then they had more choices in regards to books and magazines at a variety of levels. This teacher chose to use AR as a portion of the students’ reading grade. Students in this class also participated in a school-wide incentive program.
The fifth-grade teacher ran the program in a very similar manner. Students had the opportunity to read in the morning while attendance and lunch count was taken as well as the last 30 minutes of the day. This classroom also had three computers side by side. Students read at their desk, but were permitted to go to the library when needed to get books. They were also allowed to get books from their classroom library as well. In this classroom, students were to read within their ZPD until their goal was met. After the goal had been met it was acceptable for students to read anything they wished. This class did not use AR for part of their reading grade. As in the fourth-grade class these students also participated in the school wide incentive program.

Table 4.3 represents how AR was used for the fourth- and fifth-grade students at Clinton Elementary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4th Grade</th>
<th>5th Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AR Directly Impacts Reading Grade</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Must Read Within Their ZPD Until Goal is Met</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives are Used</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Get at Least 30 Minutes a Day for AR</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Houses at Least Three Computer for Student Testing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Primarily Read at their Desks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Implementation of AR at Clinton Elementary

*Note. ✓ = yes.*

**Ford Elementary School**

Ford Elementary School was a K-5 building with two classes per grade level. To gather the implementation data of this school, interviews took place with the both fourth-
grade teachers, the fifth-grade language arts teacher, the AR coordinator, and the building principal. A student focus group composed of previous Ford Elementary students who are now sixth graders at G. Bush Elementary were also used to gather implementation data.

Both sections of the fourth grade implement AR in a similar manner with only a few differences. Section I tried to get 30 minutes of AR time in each day if possible. In this section AR was used as “one tool to the reading program,” as stated by the teacher. It was implemented as the SSR time within the 4-Blocks reading model. In section II AR got 30-45 minutes a day, but it was not considered a part of the Four-Blocks program. Both classrooms had three computers each for the students to quiz, with each computer housed side by side. Since these two rooms are also adjacent to each other, a cart of leveled books sat in the hallway between the rooms. Students were able to get books from this cart, from the classroom, or from the library. During the AR time, students read at their desk, looked for books, or took quizzes. In one of the two sections the teacher did some conferencing with some individual readers. Both sections had some type of goal for the students to reach; although the goal was different for each room. The school itself also promoted some sort of incentive program. During AR time, students of both sections were to read an AR book within their ZPD, but after a goal had been accomplished the students were permitted to read anything they desired. Section I did use AR as a part of the reading grade for the first nine weeks of the year, but it was not used for a grade the rest of the year. Section II had used AR as a grade early in the year but had chosen not to use it as a component to the grades at later in the year.
At Ford Elementary School, the fifth-grade students had one language arts teacher. This teacher implemented the program during the language arts block. The setup in the fifth grade was different than the fourth grade. Here the students read an AR book within their ZPD on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, but on Tuesdays and Thursdays the students had an opportunity to read anything they chose. In the fifth grade AR was used as an incentive program to get students to read. It did not directly impact the students’ grades. Usually students got 25 minutes a day as AR time, but they may have had an opportunity to read and quiz during the 15-minute study hall at the end of each day if they chose to spend that allotted time for AR. This classroom also has three computers side by side. Books could be found on a bookcase in the classroom, leveled on a cart in the hallway just outside the classroom or leveled in the library. The fifth grade also took part in the school’s incentive program, but it was not a priority in the scheme of the program.
Table 4.4 represents how AR was used for the fourth- and fifth-grade students at Ford Elementary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AR Directly Impacts Reading Grade</th>
<th>4th Grade (Section I)</th>
<th>4th Grade (Section II)</th>
<th>5th Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Must Read Within Their ZPD Until Goal is Met</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives are Used</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Get at Least 30 Minutes a Day for AR</td>
<td>√**</td>
<td>√**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Houses at Least Three Computer for Student Testing</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Primarily Read at their Desks</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Implementation of AR at Ford Elementary

Note. √ = yes; *three days a week; **attempted.

Reagan Elementary School

Reagan Elementary School was a K-5 building with two classes per grade level. At the time of the data gathering the school had not begun to implement the program. However, the software was loaded in some of the classrooms, and some teachers had begun to experiment with the program. Other teachers were waiting for training before they tried the program. To gather the potential implementation data of this school, interviews took place with the one fourth-grade teacher, two fifth-grade teachers, and the building principal. A student focus group composed of one-time Reagan Elementary
students that are now sixth graders at G. Bush Elementary were also used to gather implementation data. No AR coordinator had been assigned at the time of the research.

Since the program was to officially be implemented in the fall of 2005 there were no data regarding implementation. Several teachers and the principal mentioned some possibilities but nothing was certain. However, it was important to discuss implementation with these individuals because it did impact the research in regards to their perceptions to the implementation of the program.

_Carter Elementary School_

Carter Elementary School was a K-5 building with two classes per grade level. Carter Elementary was the only elementary school in the district that chose not to implement AR into their reading program.

_Summary_

According to the data gathered, there were several consistencies across the district. Each classroom housed at least three computers for the students to take the AR quizzes, some sort of incentives were used in each classroom or for each school, and each school suggests at least 30 minutes of AR three days a week or more. There were also several inconsistencies in regards to the implementation throughout the district. These inconsistencies include: AR’s direct impact on reading grades, students’ choice to read within their ZPD, and the students’ choice to sit throughout the room.
Table 4.5: Implementation of AR at G. Bush, Clinton, and Ford Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AR Directly Impacts Reading Grade</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Must Read Within Their ZPD Until Goal is Met</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives are Used</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Get at Least 30 Minutes a Day for AR</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Houses at Least Three Computer for Student Testing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Primarily Read at their Desks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. √ = yes; ? = unsure; *three days a week; **attempted.

Perceptions of Implementation

Principals’ Perceptions of Implementation

When asked about the implementation of AR within the school district, most of the principals discussed their perceptions of the schools in which they administer. However, at times some of the principals discussed the general implementation of AR throughout the district’s elementary schools. This section will explore these perceptions.

AR’s role in the literacy program. A reoccurring theme that was mentioned by four of the five principals was how well AR fit into the schools’ reading programs. One
of these principals said, “…it is just a natural fit to supplement our overall literacy.” That principal proceeded to say, “In no way, shape or form am I saying it is a reading program itself. In my opinion, in its best form, it is a supplement, an opportunity for kids to get excited about reading.” A second principal supported the idea that AR is a good supplement to a reading program. This principal said, “If you use it in the wrong way it can be real detrimental. It should not be used as a reading program. It should be a supplement to your reading program, just a way to encourage kids to practice reading…This is just one little component in the whole big picture of what a good reading program is.” Both of these principals shared that it should not be the reading program, but a good supplement to a reading program.

Three elementary schools within the district used the Four-Blocks literacy model for reading instruction, and the principals from two of these schools commented that AR fits perfectly into that Four-Blocks model. The Four-Blocks framework was developed for teachers to incorporate guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words on a daily basis (Cunningham, Hall, Defee; 1991). One principal commented, “AR fit perfectly into that Four-Blocks model.” While another made a similar comment, “AR makes the self-selected block of reading time more productive block.” The third administrator agreed that the SSR time is important on a daily basis, “Critical, critical, I think that it needs to be a part of your language arts block on a daily basis.” However this administrator felt that the AR program was not needed to have an effective SSR time.
**AR’s role in grading.** The idea of using the AR program for a grade also surfaced with three of the four principals that had AR in their school. One principal commented that it was fine to use AR for grades, “If you develop a way to make it fit nicely into your reading program then you have an option to add it as a grade. I have never told a teacher they have to do that.” Another principal supported the idea of grades, “It is a portion of their reading grade. Certainly not the major part of their grade, but if they are taking all of these tests they have to have some impact. I just want it to have some kind of place in the (reading) grade, not a major part but it has to appear somehow.” While the third principal who looked at it from a different standpoint said, “I think the biggest detriment is if the teachers get a hold of it and uses it as a grade, which I don’t think it should be. It is for practice and enjoyment and for incentive.” Therefore in regards to the AR/grade relationship the administrators did not stand on common ground.

**Daily time allotment for AR.** Another category that surfaced in the interviews was Renaissance Learning’s recommendation that the students should read 60 minutes a day. Four out of five principals shared their perceptions of this recommendation and how they felt about the recommendation. One of the four principals thought that within the Four-Blocks program, 60 minutes a day was realistic. This principal also commented that the 60 minutes did not all have to be scheduled in a one time setting; the time could be divided up throughout the day. On the other hand, three principals did not support Renaissance Learning’s recommendation of 60 minutes. One principal said, “As teachers you have only so many precious minutes in the day. It makes it very difficult; in AR they recommend 60 minutes a day of just reading. At school [60 minutes] of self-selected
reading time, that is real hard to accomplish.” A second principal agreed by saying, “I think that 60 minutes a day is way too much.” The third administrator commented, “I would agree that it is a large chunk of time, and I think that time could be better spent in other literacy activities. SSR is critically important but in the delivery of balanced literacy there are other mechanisms to involve kids with print.”

Teachers’ Perceptions of the Implementation

Several threads that were common among the principals were also present among the teachers, such as the idea that AR is a supplement, the concern with 60 minutes of reading, and the option of grading. In addition, several new patterns were noted during the analysis of the teacher interviews. The following section explores the teachers’ perceptions in regards to implementation.

*AR’s role in the literacy program.* Ten out of 14 teachers interviewed made a positive comment that the AR program is or can be a good supplement to the existing reading program, but four were not as supportive. A common statement among supporting teachers was something similar to this statement, “It is only one tool. It is not the core reading program. It is not the way to teach reading, but it is one tool to use to help students to become better readers.” A teacher that has used AR for several years said, “For me personally AR is just a tool. It is one of the tools that I use for the whole reading program. I think it can be a useful tool in the area of reading itself. I don’t think it should be used as the only tool of instruction. It is only one piece of the puzzle.” Another teacher that has also used the program for several years commented, “…AR is
just kind of a back-up. I don’t rely on it. We can go a day or two without it, but I do
think kids look forward to that time. It is a quiet time for them.” A teacher that lacks
enthusiasm for the program but does use it as a part of language arts stated, “It’s purely
bonus. We encourage it. I talk to students who don’t take quizzes, but since it is not a
grade I don’t punish students who don’t do it. I require them to read an AR book when
they are doing it. If they don’t take a quiz on it then that is kind of up to them.”

**AR’s role in grading.** A second thread that both principals and the teachers
discussed was the idea of whether to use AR for a grade. Although not many teachers
went beyond briefly stating if AR was used as part of the reading grade in their own
classrooms, three made direct comments against the idea. One fourth-grade teacher said,

> I thought it [grading] was unfair because AR was not designed to be part of the
curriculum. That is what we were told by the representative from the AR
Company last year. Again and again he reiterated the fact that AR should not be a
requirement for the reading program. It should be an addition to the program.

When another fourth-grade teacher was asked about using AR for grades the
teacher replied, “I did average up the percentages at first and then I didn’t do it after the
first nine weeks.” When asked why grades were not taken after the first nine weeks the
teacher responded, “I don’t know.” Another teacher who is also a parent of children that
have been involved shared an experience about helping this teacher to choose against the
using AR for grades. This parent said, “[Student’s] grades dropped at least a letter grade
because they did not read the requirements, and then were punished because they didn’t
[reach the goal], and I didn’t like that at all.” The teacher continued to say that grading
AR can take away the joy of reading, “because now it is work again instead of it being a pleasurable experience.”

*Daily time allotment for AR.* Similar to the principals, some teachers discussed their thoughts about the recommended 60 minutes of reading per day. Nearly 75% of the teachers did share that 60 minutes of classroom time a day were too long to spend on AR activities. A fourth-grade teacher said, “…for the true AR program to succeed you are supposed to have an hour a day. There is no way in my classroom that I can attribute an hour to that.” This teacher did support 60 minutes of reading a day, but not all of it should be in school. “They can read another half-an-hour outside the school,” the teacher concluded. A parallel comment by a building and grade level colleague was made in regards to reading at home, “Let them take the books home. The time factor is another thing. An hour a day [at school] is almost ridiculous.” Another fourth-grade teacher from a different building said, “An hour a day is too much, but a half an hour is fine.” A teacher from the school that will begin to implement it in the fall of 2005 said, “I would have trouble trying to designate an hour a day for something that is supplemental.”

One coordinator suggested that although Renaissance Program recommends 60 minutes of reading a day the company has alternative suggestions for school that can’t spare that much time. The coordinator commented that, “60 minutes is what research says is the recommended amount, but they understand that a lot of school can’t give up that much time so they help you with goals for those that only read a half-an-hour a day.” Another coordinator supported the varying levels of appropriate time as she said,
They [Renaissance Learning] have a goal setting chart and they base everything on their ZPD so everything is set up on 60 minutes, 45 minutes, or 30 minutes. It has to be based on what kind of time you give them. If you are a teacher and you only give them 30 minutes then you can’t really expect them to have a 60-minute goal.

*Classroom distractions.* A new theme arose from the teacher interviews, the theme of distractions. Two teachers from Clinton Elementary implement the AR time in a similar manner. Both teachers had reading time at the beginning of the school day and at the end of the school day. One of these teachers mentioned, “Last year my students had a half-an-hour in the AR room. They read there and tested there. There were no distractions. Here in the room there are too many other things to distract.” The other teacher from that school supported the positive AR room environment versus the environment of the regular classroom. This teacher said, “I just wish they had fewer distractions. A lot of kids have to have it really quiet to read and we don’t always have that environment. So I worry about those things.” A teacher from a different school had a strong opinion about distractions in the classroom while students were trying to read or test. This teacher said, “I have found that a lot of kids are up out of their seat consistently looking for a book or taking a quiz. I would say that during an AR period there are probably a third of the kids not actually reading. I don’t like that. I like to see a lot of reading going on during quiet time.” The teacher went on to say, “Getting a book, going out into the hall to get a book and staying out there for ten minutes, getting on the computer to see if that book is an AR book, and nonsense like that. Hey this is reading time.” The concern from these teachers is primarily that those that want to read and quiz may have too many distractions. The two teachers from Clinton would prefer that the
students had their AR time in the AR room or that they could find a time to implement the program with fewer distractions.

**Additional Perceptions.** Throughout the teacher interviews there were a few isolated comments that dealt with the ways the schools or teachers implemented the AR program. One comment came from a fourth-grade teacher who was concerned for those readers that were above or below grade level and the content in the material that they were reading. This teacher said, “Some kids are higher level readers and they may get into things that are too mature for their reading, or vice versa and it is hard to find books at their interest level.” A coordinator was concerned with the inconsistencies of implementation within her own school. She said, “It is sad when kids get it one year and not the next. It is just different. It would be great to have everyone (staff) buy into it.”

**Students’ Perceptions of the Implementation**

To give the students a voice, a focus group was created to represent each elementary school in the district. The students that participated in the focus groups were sixth graders currently housed at G. Bush Elementary School, and were actively involved in AR at the time of the study (Please note that sixth-grade students only participate in AR for nine weeks of the school year).

To begin this section it is important to introduce the different focus groups that participated in the study. Table 4.6 introduces each focus group, their original school, and their prior years of AR experience before the current year of the study.
| Originally from G. Bush Elementary: Taylor, Allison, Katie, and Becca | All four of these girls have gone to G. Bush Elementary School throughout their elementary career. They have all participated in AR for several years. |
| Originally from Carter Elementary: Mike, Lizzy, Connor, and Hank | Three of the four boys that represented Carter Elementary School had not experienced AR until this current year at G. Bush. One student had participated in AR at a previous school before he entered Carter Elementary |
| Originally from Clinton Elementary: Caleb, Josh, and Madison | The three students that represented Clinton Elementary School had participated in AR for three years before entering G. Bush |
| Originally from Ford Elementary: Reed, Kyle, Zoe, Nick, and Claire | The five students that represented Ford Elementary School had participated in AR for two years before entering G. Bush |
| Originally from Reagan Elementary: McKenzie, Jules, Jordan, and Erica | The four students that represented Carter Elementary School had not experienced AR until this current year at G. Bush. |

Table 4.6: Student Focus Groups

*Classroom atmosphere.* As the students shared their perceptions of the implementation of AR, the most common pattern was about atmosphere. All five focus groups praised the atmosphere implemented at G. Bush Elementary. This atmosphere consisted of several long tables with folding chairs, two soft chairs, a couch, several beanbag chairs, and four computers. Students would enter the room and immediately start their AR time. If students needed to take a test, then they would sign-up on the chalkboard and wait if needed for an open computer. If the students needed a book, then they would go to the AR shelves which were leveled and chose any book that interested them even if it was not in their ZPD. When the Ford Elementary focus group was asked...
to share the things that they like about AR this year, it was unanimous in the group that the students enjoyed the laid back atmosphere.

Zoe: It is really relaxed.

Claire: It is fun reading.

Zoe: It is not like uptight. She will let us lay on the couch or just sit there and read the whole time.

Researcher: So am I hearing you correctly that what you really like about AR is that you can sit back, relax and read?

All: Yea.

A similar answer was recorded during when the students from the Clinton Elementary School was asked the same question.

Madison: I like that they have couches and stuff that we can read on.

Josh: Yea a comfortable habitat, because when you are actually relaxed and you are comfortable you would want to do something.

Caleb: In 3rd grade our teacher would let us bring a sleeping bag or pillow on Fridays and let us read where ever we wanted in the classroom. And with the comfortable environment it helps you read bigger books.

Caleb’s response reinforced the whole idea that atmosphere is a key to students’ enjoyment with AR no matter at what school. Through all five focus group interviews the students’ perception of the comfortable atmosphere surfaced.

ZPD. The second category that became important was the students’ feelings about reading within their ZPD, Zone of Proximal Development. Renaissance Learning labels ZPD as the zone between readings that are too easy and readings that are too difficult for an individual. All of the students that had come from a school which
implemented AR before the current year mentioned quite often they were to read books within their ZPD. If a set goal had been reached, then students may have been permitted to read outside their level. This was not the case for the sixth-grade students at G. Bush Elementary School. At G. Bush the students were allowed to read any book at any level. One student formerly from Reagan said, “You can read what book you want… you are allowed to read at another level if you want to read it.” A student from Clinton Elementary said, “You can read whatever you like. Some teachers at Clinton made us go into a level and we had to stick at that level and we couldn’t read no books out of our level, and this year we can. We can choose any kind of book that we want to read.” Although the topic was relaxed atmosphere, the students connected reader’s choice as a part of that relaxed atmosphere.

Several students from Clinton Elementary mentioned they were reading kindergarten books just to get points and participate in the program.

**Josh:** I like reading the little books personally, because I like them.

**Researcher:** Give me an example of a little book.

**Madison:** I just read kindergarten books so I can read it faster and memorize it easier and I can take a test on it.

One of the incentives for the G. Bush students was that the total amount of points scored by each student was tallied for a class score. During each nine weeks two classes compete against each other for a pizza party. In this case, and it was brought up in several focus group interviews, some students were reading books quite a bit below their ZPD just to score points for their class. A student from a third focus group reinforced this action, “You get to read pretty much any level you want and we are competing
against Mrs. Arbuckle’s class this year, and whatever class has the highest gets a pizza party.” In a focus group interview with students from Ford Elementary, the topic of reading little books was brought up and this group like the others confirmed that some are reading just for points.

**Researcher:** Do you sometimes just read quicker books to get the points to help out.

**Reed:** Sometimes.

**Nick:** yea.

**Kyle:** yes.

**Claire:** The little .5 books with three words on each page some people read those and then the points add up.

Another confirmation was made when a group was observed during their AR time. Some of the items listed below supported that some students were just reading for points, but the data also supports that others were reading books that would be more appropriate for sixth grades. The following bulleted list was taken from field notes.

- Some books being read: some non-fiction, Lemony Snickets, Junie B Jones, Magic Tree House, mostly fiction
- One student listened to a book on tape then took the test. She was excited to test, the teacher was curious, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, perfect score, teacher praised her.
- Most tests today were students just going for points with small books and multiple tests within time frame.
- One boy took four tests during my 30 minutes, all books were tiny, scored a perfect score on one test and said “awesome.”
- One student read two little books in less than five minutes and tested on them. He scored 3/5 on one test and looked at the missed question
- Student tested on *The Phantom Toll Booth*

In this case student attributed a relaxed atmosphere as a time to read in a comfortable setting reading any type of book they wanted.
Additional perceptions. Another implementation method that the students of G. Bush liked was that they were sometimes allowed to retake quizzes. Comments such as, “Sometimes she will let us (retest) and sometimes she won’t.” were found in four of the five focus groups. It was not clear why students were permitted to retest at times and not at others. It was also mentioned in one of the focus groups that students would like to participate in AR more than 9 weeks. Another interesting comment was that one student said she liked AR because they could do book clubs.

Becca: We get to read in book clubs.

Researcher: You had never read in book clubs before?

Becca: Well we did some last year, but Mrs. Fife didn’t let us read in book clubs a lot.

Katie: She like for us to read by ourselves.

Researcher: How many book clubs have you done this year?

Becca: A lot.

Katie: four or five.

Becca: That is just me and Katie.

Unfortunately the conversation was turned and before it could return to this topic, Becca had to leave the group for band practice. Within the spectrum of this study there was not time to develop these last two items, but they are worth further study in the future.

Implementation of Incentive Programs

There were a variety of areas to explore regarding the implementation of AR in this school district, and one important area was motivation. As with the assortment of
general implementation methods used by each school, there were also assortments of motivational methods used throughout the schools. These methods ranged from school-wide to incentives within individual classroom.

G. Bush Elementary

The motivation and reward systems used at G. Bush elementary vary according to grade level. Grades four and five were part of a program titled STARS. The STARS program was a mix of grades, attendance, attitude and books read. These books could be either AR or non-AR. However according to the observations and the interviews the AR books seem to get most of the attention. Goals were typically set for each nine weeks, and when a goal was met the students earned the reward that has been set. Some of the awards in the past have been swimming at the local YMCA, roller skating at the YMCA, going to a putt-putt golf and batting cage venue, or viewing a movie at the local cinema. Along with these large rewards, smaller incentives such as soft drinks, candy, bookmarks, and ice cream have been used.

The sixth graders did not participate in the STARS program, but each nine weeks they would have a contest between the two classes that were actively participating in AR. In this contest students were to get a certain number of points according to the AR book they read, yet to receive the points a minimum score of 85% correct must be reached. Points were charted and posted, and the class which scored the most by the end of the nine weeks earned a pizza party. Every so often the AR coordinator included special rewards for the classes such as dodgeball if they had been working hard. An added incentive was a current list of the top individual point scorers posted in the hallway.
Clinton Elementary

Clinton Elementary School had been experimenting with a variety of motivational methods, according to all three data sources. Several years ago there was a display case in the lobby of the school filled with a variety of items from the Renaissance Learning Company such as book bags, t-shirts, sunglasses, etc. Students would accumulate points and cash them in for the prizes. This went on throughout the year.

Another year, seasonal bulletin boards were posted in the lobby with graphs of a football field, a running track, etc. Each student’s name was on the graph and as they reached goals their individual icon would move across the field or around the track. If students did not reach a goal then their icon would stay put. In support of the bulletin board, each Friday there would be a 20-minute incentive assembly in the gym. Each student that had reached their goal for the week would actively participate in the assembly. The lights would be turned off, but a spot light would shine on each student whose name was announced. That student would get accolades in the form of high-fives, cheering, and clapping as they ran around the gym.

During the school year of 2004-2005, the fourth and fifth grade took a lower key approach and created their own incentive programs. Both classrooms had similar incentives such as soft drinks, candy bars, etc. Both classes also included a component that permitted students to read any type of book they wanted after individuals reached their own goals.
Ford Elementary

Ford Elementary was another school that had been trying to find a school-wide incentive program that was most effective for them. Although they used incentives, principals said they had not gotten involved in the “full blown” Renaissance Program of incentives because they want to try to instill more of an intrinsic value of reading. However within the last year, the school had explored several incentive techniques of their own. One technique rewarded the classroom in the school that had the highest percentage of students who averaged 85% or higher on their quizzes. The highest class was then awarded ice cream. After some internal evaluation the school moved to a more holistic reward program, one that awarded individuals rather than classes. Students that kept an 85%, read at least three books and got at least three points within a month’s time were eligible to win a prize. Students that made this goal received a card which needed to be signed by their parents, and was then placed in a drawing for a free book. At the time of the interviews, the administrator, the coordinator, and the teachers all said the school was still trying to find the correct niche for its incentive program.

Individual teachers also had the opportunity to create their own incentive program if they desired. One fourth-grade teacher used candy and soft drinks to reward readers. This teacher used a step-type program giving more significant treats for more points accumulated.

Reagan Elementary

Since Reagan Elementary was just experimenting with the AR program at the time of the study, there was no definite incentive program in place. However, the
principal and the teachers all thought that some sort of program would be implemented the next year, and each grade level would have the right to determine their incentives.

**Principals’ Perceptions of Incentives**

When the principals were asked about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, the implementation of incentives, and how these areas may fit into their school’s AR program, one theme surfaced in 100% of the interviews. Each principal stated that the teachers play a vital role in the success of any program, and that much of a child’s motivation comes from the classroom teacher. One principal stated, “So much of it goes back to the enthusiasm of the teacher…it comes back to the passion the teacher has in the first place.” Another principal had a similar comment, “I just really feel that the excitement the teacher brings to reading and the modeling that we do is in itself the best reward for kids.”

Of the four principals that implement AR in their buildings, all commented that the AR coordinator also plays an important role. Much of the teachers’ motivation and enthusiasm will come from the AR coordinator or even the enthusiasm of the principal. Each principal praised the efforts of their coordinators, yet they were also careful to say that the tone set by the coordinators does affect the enthusiasm the teachers have for the AR program.

Eighty percent of the principals went on to support the use of incentives with AR in their schools. Several principals have put quite a bit of energy into the implementation of incentives while others primarily leave that aspect to the coordinators or even to the
individual teachers. As a whole, the principals perceive that the teachers’ enthusiasm plays a large role in any incentive program.

*Teachers’ Perception of Incentives*

To help understand the teachers’ perceptions of incentives with AR, they were asked the following question: How do you feel about offering extrinsic rewards for meeting reading goals? The findings might best be summed up according to the following teacher’s response who said, “That is always the debate. Everyone has different opinions on the staff. Some of us like it. Some of us don’t.” This statement was consistent with the data. Within the whole idea of incentives, several themes were apparent: incentives are a part of the world; reading should be intrinsic not extrinsic; and competition among students could be an issue.

Nine out of fourteen teachers interviewed had no problem with incentives used to excite students to read. The supporting comments ranged from, “I have been accused for offering too many extrinsic rewards” to “I think it is fine…once you get them hooked on it. They are more likely to do it on their own, intrinsically.” One teacher said, “I tried AR without rewards and kids lost interest. Another said, “Some kids need it. We use Book-It.” Within these teachers that support incentives, four of them commented how rewards are a part of the world.” Comments such as: “The world is set up in that way”, “Hey, life is extrinsic”, “School is a job”, and “I don’t think they are needed, but they are the way of the world.”

Five teachers made comments that reading should be intrinsic and not extrinsic. One teacher said, “They need to be motivated to learn themselves, not by a sucker.”
Another teacher commented that she wanted students to feel good about the fact that they read a book. Other teachers in this category did not support the incentive program used at their school. A fifth-grade teacher said, “Kids are just reading AR books for points, just to get the reward.” Two other teachers said that the same students always get the awards; therefore the extrinsic system has little to no positive impact on those that do not get the awards.

There were other teachers who also thought awards had little to no value in the AR program. One teacher discussed that if students were enthusiastic about AR and the opportunity to read books, then no reward is needed. Another said that students were motivated enough by going to the computer. One coordinator said incentives should be low key and not a circus.

Throughout the teacher interviews the theme of competition became apparent as well. Two of the elementary schools that use or had used competition in the past as a motivating tool had teachers with mixed perceptions of competition. Three teachers thought that competition was frustrating for many students, especially if they never win. Three different teachers liked the idea of competition, and they saw it as beneficial peer pressure to get their students to read more.

The data supported the fact that there was no clear answer in regards to incentives, and that a teacher’s opinions will probably set the tone for each classroom. This assertion supports the data that principals’ perceive the teachers’ enthusiasm and passion as a factor that motivates students.


**Students’ Perception of Incentives**

Within the student focus groups the students had the opportunity to share their perceptions of incentives and competition. For the most part nearly every student mentioned that they liked incentives and that rewards were a factor in reading for AR points. Five out of five students from one focus groups said they read to get the points. In another focus the students were asked the following question, “Did you read for the goals or did you read because you wanted to read?” Two thirds of the students said they read for prizes or to win the competition. This was supported 100% by a different focus group when they said they would only read a book for points if they had an option to read an AR book or a non-AR book during AR time. When students were asked what encourage them to participate in AR the most common answer was “prizes.” Nearly every answer came back to incentives.

When the focus groups were asked about competition their answers continued to support that they were reading to win the pizza party. Not one student mentioned that they did not want to win the party. Each student was reading to help their team reach the goal. According to the data, it is the incentive program that has motivated the students to read.

**Teachers’ and Students’ Moves during AR Time**

To help understand the true application of the AR program within this school district it was important to not only interview those involved, but it was just as important to observe the classrooms. Observations were made as a part of the actual interview process. After a teacher was interviewed, an observation was conducted to observe the
teachers and the students during AR time. Together these interviews and observations focused on both the teachers’ moves and the students’ moves. For this study the term “moves” represents the actions of individuals during the observation time. Several patterns were made of the teachers and several made of the students. These patterns support the actual implementation of the program in the classroom

_Teachers’ Moves during AR Time._

Throughout the teacher and principal interviews it was evident that teacher-students conferences were important to a successful AR program. When asked about important elements for a successful program a coordinator replied,

> If it is being used in the way it was intended with not only the students doing silent reading and taking the quizzes, but the teachers are conferencing with the students, and students are setting goals then it usually is very successful. If it is only read a book and take a quiz then it won’t be. If it is only read a book and take a quiz then it won’t be that successful. The conferencing, working with the students to set goals and meet those goals and the teacher keeping a close eye especially on the strugglers to make sure they are reading at their appropriate level. So much depends on how the teacher implements it in their classroom.

Another teacher mentioned that conferencing gives her time to independently work with each child. However, she went on to say, “There is a little one-on-one time.” Two principals also brought up the importance of conferencing in statements such as, “The key is…conferencing with that child to see that progress happens. The teacher can provide some good direction.” Another principal mentioned it their understanding that conferencing should take place. “In the Four-Blocks approach…conferencing is a part of the whole delivery system,” the principal concluded.
The importance of conferencing was reported by teachers and principals as an important tool in the AR program. However, very little conferencing actually took place during the observations. Of the seven classrooms observed, not one teacher spent more than a minute with any individual student in a conference situation, and only three of the seven did any type of conversing with students in what would be considered a one-to-one conference. Most of these conferences would be considered congratulatory support for passing a test or some type of reinforcement to those that did not pass a test. Throughout the observations nothing was noted in regards to instructional help. All seven teachers played the role of the facilitator and roamed the room making sure the students were on-task. Nearly every teacher made some type of directional announcement to start the period. Two teachers modeled their own reading during part of the time. Three teachers did a general check of the students with a “Status of the Class” to see who would quiz that day, who needed a new book, etc. Two teachers worked some on a classroom score chart. Three teachers graded papers or prepared other lessons. One teacher recommended books for some students to read. One coordinator might have summed it up best when she said, “Not as much conferencing as I would like to see.”

*Students’ Moves during AR Time*

Several themes were evident in regards to the students’ moves during AR time. The three biggest areas to explore were the initial moves by the students when the AR time started, the moves of the students while they searched for books, and the moves that happened while students tested.
Across the observations the following scenario was very consistent in regards to the students’ move at the beginning of the AR time. Students listened to the teacher give instructions for the period. Then students got a book from their desk and began reading, got out of their seat to look for a book, or went directly to the computer to take a test. It was observed in all seven classrooms that students were very familiar with the process and therefore most of the students made smooth transitions among any of these moves. These moves were routine, and there were only minor distractions that were usually ignored by most of the class.

As time went on in the AR period, the act of finding a book became more and more prevalent. Each school had a different method for selecting a book. At Ford Elementary both the fourth and fifth graders were permitted to find books from a bookcase within their classroom, from a cart of leveled book in the hallway just outside their room, or from the library. The latter option was not observed. The fourth- and fifth-grade students at Clinton Elementary were permitted to find books from a bookcase within their classroom or students could sign the board, to let the teacher(s) know that the students went to the library to select a book. The students at G. Bush Elementary found books a little differently. The fourth graders were only observed selecting books from their classroom library, but according to their teacher, they may also be permitted to get AR books from the library during library time. The sixth graders were observed getting books from the labeled shelves in the library and in the AR room. Both of these rooms are adjoined only to be separated by a bookcase or two.

To gain an understanding of the types of books the students chose to read, each student was asked in the focus group interviews and notes were taken throughout the
classroom observations. Those students that were to read within their ZPD, instructional level, did choose books within their level. However, some classes were permitted to read just about anything after they reached a goal that had been set for them within their ZPD. According to the data collected, the sixth-grade students were permitted to have free choice at anytime during their nine weeks of AR.

Book and genre choices varied among individuals readers. It was very common to find students reading fiction as well as non-fiction. Actually 100% of the material that was observed being read was fiction and non-fiction trade books. From the observations, no students read magazines or any other reading materials even if they had earned free choice selections by meeting their weekly or monthly goal. Of the two types of trade books, fiction was more widespread than non-fiction. Students chose literature across genres; contemporary fiction, science fiction, historical fiction, information books, biographies, and some fantasy. Of these genres, contemporary fiction and fantasy were the most prevalent. Throughout the observations not one poetry book was being read or at least was not visible to the researcher, even if the students had earned their free choice selection. In the focus group interviews, the students were encouraged to talk about books they were currently reading and books they usually chose to read. After a conversation with one focus group about points and book choices, the sixth-grade students were asked if they ever read little books just for points. Across the interviews most students said yes, the point value was a factor in selecting a book, but most books were primarily reading at their grade level. However, there were eight of the 20 students who said they pick smaller books with lower point values. This allows them to read more books to accumulate points for their team rather than large books that can take weeks to
get through. Josh, a sixth-grade student, explains why he prefers “kindergarten” books over long books such as Harry Potter: “I read one Harry Potter book…for the points. You may get a bunch of points but it takes so long to read the book and you forget some of the stuff at the beginning of the book so then you go back to that and then you forget stuff from the end of the book. With the kindergarten books they are real short and easy.” Two students from the Carter Elementary focus group discussed their preference for smaller books.

**Connor:** I read real fast to get some points.

**Researcher:** Connor, you said that sometimes you like to read the quick ones to get the points. Does it matter for you what grade level or are you just going for points?

**Connor:** Going for points.

**Researcher:** Tell me something you have read lately.

**Connor:** Carrots.

**Researcher:** How many points is that worth, .5?

**Connor:** Yea?

**Researcher:** And you have to get five out of five (correct) to get the points.

**Connor:** At least.

**Researcher:** So how many do you read in a day?

**Connor:** …three or four.

**Hank:** A bunch of kindergartner books.

A similar conversation took place in the Clinton Elementary focus group.

**Josh:** I like reading the little books personally, because I like them.

**Madison:** I just read kindergarten books so I can read it faster and memorize it
easier and I can take a test on it.

Some students in the G. Bush focus group confirmed strategy. They too were reading just for points.

**Researcher:** What is everybody reading right now? Taylor what are you reading?

**Taylor:** Small books

**Researcher:** Are you pretty much going for points?

**Taylor:** (nods her head yes)

**Allison:** Just for points.

A sixth-grade student that was not part of a focus group but was part of an observation took tests over two little books in less than five minutes. In that same class two students started to take a new quiz over books after the teacher had announced that there was less than two minutes left in the period. A third student then started a quiz as the rest of the class was leaving the AR room to go back to their classroom. During this observation, the majority of the students did not participate in the activity of reading small books or extending the period to start a new test at the end of class.

While students attempted to select books to read, several patterns were observed. Students from each class except the sixth graders at G. Bush typically explored books within their ZPD. It was common for students to first read the title, and then look at the cover. This move was often accompanied by the back of the book being read or the inside flap of a book being read. If a chosen book did not have an identification label with a reading level, then some students would go to the computer station, type the title of the book into the AR database, and check the reading level. As mentioned previously
in this study, one teacher was clearly frustrated with the commotion that took place during AR time. This teacher stated, “I have found that a lot of kids are up out of their seats consistently looking for a book, taking a quiz. I would say that during an AR period there is probably a third of the kids not actually reading….Getting a book, going out into the hall to get a book, and staying out there for ten minutes.” Although this was not observed in every classroom, it definitely is a move that would keep students from having a maximum amount of reading time.

The last of the most frequently observed student moves was test-taking. In every observation each class had a workstation of three computers that sat side by side; however, the sixth grade AR room at G. Bush had an additional computer at the coordinator’s desk that students were permitted to use for test taking. In most cases students would go directly to the computer to test when they had completed a book. If all the computers were occupied, then it was common for students to sign the chalkboard to queue themselves for a computer. Most students that were in queue went back to their seats to wait for a computer or began to find a new book to read. A couple students were observed standing behind students that were test taking, sometimes even talking to students that tested. Talking at the testing station was not uncommon. Nearly one half of the students that tested attempted to talk to another test taker, talked to themselves, or carried on a conversation with other test takers. Most of the talk was at the test center focused on the score that was just earned. Sometimes it was positive, such as “I got a 90%” or “Yea.” Other times the talk dealt with the some sort of frustration from not receiving a passing score.
The AR tests are set-up in a way that students get immediate feedback with their test scores as soon as they complete a test. With this immediate feedback and the computers housed side by side, another interesting find was that nearly 30% of the students covered their scores when the computer displayed it on the screen. This action was brought to attention in the Ford Elementary focus group, but not one of the members said they had a problem with their peers seeing their score.

Researcher: How about when you are taking the test? Do you ever hide the score so others can’t see it?

Zoe: It doesn’t matter

Claire: It doesn’t matter

Zoe: People don’t care if you miss.

There was not enough data from the interviews to support or conflict with the observation data. Yet, it is important to note that 30% of the children did not feel comfortable with peers seeing their scores on the computer. In at least three of the classrooms, passing scores were charted in a visual place for the class members to view. This may look like a positive element to some, but when students’ scores are not posted on the public chart it is known that the student did not pass their test.

Another pattern observed was the inconsistency of students checking the answers to their missed questions. As mentioned above, the AR tests are set-up in a way that student can not only get immediate feedback with their test score, but they can also review each question that was missed to find out the correct answer. According to the observations approximately 60% of the students that tested took time to look at their missed questions. The focus group interview had a slightly different conclusion to that
question. When students were asked about checking missed answers the comments ranged from “I do every time,” to “Sometimes.” Not one student came out and said that they chose not to look at questions. However, the answer sometimes and the lack of answer from some students may support the 40% that do not always check their missed questions.

To truly get a feel for the implementation methods used across the district it was important to take note of the moves made by teachers and students during AR time. Of course the moves vary according to individuals and their philosophy of the program, but it is important to explore teacher and student moves to get a solid grip on what is really happening in the classroom.

Professional Development

Although there are mixed perceptions in this school district about the Accelerated Reader program, there are several commonalities between many administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of the program. One of those commonalities is that both administrators and teachers feel that teacher training is important in regards to AR, and although there have been some training opportunities many will agree that more teacher training opportunities are needed. This finding surfaced while interviewing elementary building administrators, fourth- and fifth-grade classroom teachers that deal with AR, sixth-grade teachers whose children were participating in the program at the time of the study, and several AR coordinators that lead the program in their respected elementary school.
Throughout the interviews comments were made by four out of five administrators and seven out of fourteen teachers about teacher training in regards to AR. More than 50% of the principals brought up the fact that there have been training opportunities since the buildings have implemented the program, yet two out of three AR coordinators also discussed that some teachers may not have been trained sufficiently. Over 50% of everyone interviewed recommend that additional training be offered to the staff.

Professional Development for Building Coordinators

When asked about teacher training, three principals mentioned that the initial training went directly to the individuals that would coordinate the program, a teacher, or reading specialist from each building. These AR coordinators were trained, yet their actual training opportunities varied at each school. In one school, the building principal chose to participate in the initial training as well. Many of these coordinators continue to learn more about the program by participating at conferences in Texas that are sponsored by the Renaissance Learning Company or taking advantage of other learning opportunities in the area. Comments by both the administrators and the coordinators supported the fact that lack of training was not an issue for AR coordinators that ran each building’s program.

Principals’ Perspective of Professional Development for Classroom Teachers

In regards to teacher training, there were three principals that spoke of the need for more teacher training. The fourth principal did not mention the need for additional
teacher training, and the fifth principal only discussed teacher training in general without a focus on AR. In one interview with a building principal, several comments were made in regards to the need for more training. The principal speculated that originally it was “hit or miss” in regards to the staff that was trained. The principal continued to comment on the situation by stating, “That’s the biggest thing I see. The teachers aren’t really trained.” Although this principal states that some teachers are trained, others are “just kind of going by the seat of their pants.”

In a different interview a principal stated, “We need to give teachers a clearer vision. We need to train them better so they can understand it better. We must continually update and work with teachers to keep them on board and how this all fits together.” This principal went on to say in the second interview, “I need to do more staff development and training for a better understanding.”

The principal of the school that was just about to implement the program in the fall of 2005 knew that training was valuable to the success of the program. The principal stated, “We want to make sure all the teachers are in-serviced in it and what it is all about, and how they can best utilize it. As soon as school starts next year we are going to have an in-service for half a day. Along with that we will talk about how it should be used, and what we see as a goal of it.”

A fourth principal came from a slightly different perspective and mentioned that the staff had “lots of experience in training…had some exposure…some of the basics about AR.”
Teachers’ Perspective of Professional Development for Classroom Teachers

In the teacher interviews which included the AR coordinators, 50% of the teachers mentioned they desired more training. One teacher who has used AR for several years commented that, “Some sort of continuing education on AR would be beneficial to the whole system. Sometimes I don’t think I am doing the program justice.” This teacher is a proponent to the AR program and strongly desires more educational opportunities to help her and others use the program to its potential.

Two out of three teachers that are a part of the school that will begin to implement the program in fall 2005 also mentioned the desire for training. The teachers from this school were to have training in the spring of 2005 to help them get a feel for the program prior to their implementation in the fall. Unfortunately, there were some technology problems in the school the day the training was scheduled that caused the in-service to be canceled. This made two of the three teachers concerned about beginning the program in the fall without any training. The teacher that was not concerned had some prior knowledge about the program since her own children participated in AR at a different school district. Another teacher was very excited about the program as she also had similar knowledge of AR, but this teacher was concerned about what the guidelines would be or if there would even be any guidelines regarding the implementation of the program. “We are excited but at the same time a little bit worried as to how to implement it most effectively. How much time to designate to it…?” This teacher also commented that training would have to be made available to aid in the understanding of the program in addition to the guidelines. The third teacher interviewed at this school worried about
implementing the program in the fall without any training, “Someone needs to come in and train us.”

Another group of teachers from one of schools also stated they lacked training. In one interview, the participant stated that the sixth-grade language arts teachers are not exposed to AR, and their training would only have come from a previous school prior to their present. In this school the reading specialist coordinates and runs the AR program for the sixth graders. The set-up at this school is that AR is a supplemental activity, and it has nothing officially to do with the student’s language arts experience in the classroom. For the sixth graders at this school, AR is its own entity for nine weeks out of the year.

*Coordinators’ Perspective of Professional Development for Classroom Teachers*

When each coordinator was asked about what they hoped to see in the future, several of their answers dealt directly with the idea of teacher training. “We could probably use training,” was stated by one coordinator. Another offered a goal that, “All teachers are trained to ensure the efficiency of the program.” A third coordinator mentioned that their school, “…has had opportunities to be trained. Some have chosen to do it, and others have chosen not to or have not followed through with it.” This coordinator mentioned that training could be given anytime a teacher asked for it.

Throughout the interviews, both administrators and teachers made a variety of comments identifying the need for more staff development in AR. The principals felt that staff development would benefit their teachers by providing a better comprehension of AR as well as helping the teachers have a better focus in the implementation of the
program. The teachers felt that more staff development opportunities could help them integrate the program more proficiently and understand the guidelines that are expected. Although there was an assortment of comments made about teacher training across the interview, it was a common thread among principals and teachers that more staff development would be beneficial.

AR’s Impact on Students’ Reading Experiences

To help document and analyze the students’, teachers’, and administrators’ perceptions of the AR Program this study explored how each of these stakeholders perceived AR’s impact on students’ reading experiences. Clements (2004) studied teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions; Moore (2002) and Rogers (2000) examined teachers’ and students’ perceptions. This study looks at all three representatives, students, teachers, and administrators, all from the same district.

Principals’ Perceptions

Of all three groups involved in the study, the principals had the least to say about AR’s affect on students’ reading experiences. Four principals mentioned their library selections have increased in volume since the addition of AR in their schools, and they attribute that increase to AR. Students now have more books from which to choose. One principal mentioned that since implementation of AR, students’ reading choices are not as random as they were prior to the program. Now students read books within their level. Two other principals agreed that AR has helped their students identify leveled books. Neither principal went on to say if the students were choosing these books or not, but
now students have the opportunity to pick within their level. Each of the three principals, whose schools used AR at the time of this study, mentioned that AR has helped motivate students to read. On the other hand, one of these three principals went on to say that some students in the upper grades have lost motivation due to AR. One principal shared that students’ reading scores on the state proficiency test have risen since the implementation of AR, yet a different principal saw no hard data that supported AR as the reason for increased scores. This principal said, “There are a number of factors that may attribute to that [increased scores].”

*Teachers’ Perceptions*

To explore the teachers’ perceptions of AR’s effect on students’ reading experiences, eleven teachers were asked specifically about this topic. The three teachers that are at Reagan Elementary were not asked the question because they had not begun the program at the time of the interviews. Several findings surfaced in the teacher interviews. Teachers perceived the AR program to affect students’ reading experiences in areas such as an increase in motivation to read, a desire to read more carefully or in-depth, and an exploration of more titles. However, not every teacher felt the same way.

The most common impact mentioned by teachers in regards to AR’s affect on students’ reading experiences was students’ motivation to read more. Eight of the eleven teachers interviewed shared that students were motivated to read. These teachers noticed students reading not only at AR time or SSR time, but students were reading during leisure time as well. According to these teachers, students had a stronger desire to read. Three of these teachers believed the increase in motivation actually came from the
competition aspect of the AR program. Students were reading more books and more often for points. Points go for prizes and/or help a class in a competition against another class. A fourth-grade teacher, however, commented that some students thrive off of competition and others shy away from it. This teacher remarked that the competition may motivate some to read more, but it might take away the pleasure of reading from others. According to the data, it is clear that the majority of the teachers perceive that AR has encouraged students to read more than they did before AR was implemented.

A second finding was that teachers believed students were reading more carefully than they did before. One teacher said,

…[when] students are having their self-selected reading times they are actually reading whereas before you would walk in and a lot of times see kids just flipping pages and looking at pictures, which of course is part of the reading experience, but it is a lot more in-depth reading with AR than without it.

This comment was supported by two other teachers. All three of these teacher noticed that students were reading more carefully than they did before.

A third impact dealt with students’ book choices. Teachers have observed students reading from genres that they normally would not read, and students were reading books within their level. Both principals and teachers noticed that latter finding. Two teachers shared that students’ choices were actually narrowed by AR, and they perceived that students were not as excited about independent reading because of these narrowed choices. In this case a narrowed choice refers to students only reading books within their ZPD. The principals liked the structure of students reading leveled books, yet some teachers have found that this concept had negatively affected some students’ reading experiences.
The findings for this question are mixed, but the most of the data supports that AR has positively affected students’ reading experiences. According to the teacher’s perceptions AR has increased students’ motivation to read, has sparked students to read more carefully, and has affected students’ choices when selecting a book.

*Students’ Perceptions*

Of all the questions asked to the students, this question stimulated the least response with only small amounts of elaboration. However, two topics that were found in the principals and teachers discussions were also prevalent among the student focus group interviews, motivation and leveling.

Four out of five student focus groups perceived motivation to read as one way AR has affected students’ reading experiences. Of these four groups, three stated the motivation was in winning a competition or earning prizes. The following dialog represents this thread, but also adds a perspective that was not perceived or at least mentioned by the adults.

**Researcher:** How do you think AR affected student reading at Clinton?

**Caleb:** I think most kids liked to read and get the prizes, but I think some kids like we have right now just don’t care.

**Researcher:** Do you think AR impacts student reading at G. Bush?

**Madison:** Kind of.

**Caleb:** I don’t really think it impacts people.

In the case of AR at Clinton Elementary, Caleb shared his opinion that prizes were motivating the students to read. When the question of impact was asked about their
current school, G. Bush, Madison mentioned that there was some type of impact but neglected to elaborate. Then Caleb shared that he did not notice any impact at his recent school, G. Bush. This comment confirmed his previous comment, “… I think some kids like we have right now just don’t care.” At two separate times Caleb said he does not perceive that AR impacts student reading at G. Bush elementary.

Students from Ford Elementary shared that students were motivated to read more than they did without AR mainly because of the competition and charts that were posted. Although there was disagreement among the students with using charts to motivate, they did agree that students were reading more. The students from Reagan Elementary also agreed that competition motivates them to read.

The fourth group did not elaborate much more than stating that AR had caused more of them to read. One student commented, “Taylor never reads. Really she never reads, but she reads a little now.” Through nods and quick comments the whole group concurred that AR has motivated students to read more.

The other thread apparent among the students, teachers, and principals was leveling; however, students had a different perception. The students’ response to leveling was not a positive response. The students agreed when they were in fourth and fifth grade they had to read within their ZPD, but now in sixth grade they did not. According to the principals and most teachers leveling was a positive aspect. These principals and teachers observed students reading within their ZPD with AR, yet they had observed more of a random selection of books choice before AR. The students disagreed with the adults and found that they enjoyed their sixth grade experience better, where they were
not required to read within their ZPD. In this case, what was perceived by the adults as a positive impact was not perceived by the students in the same manner.

Summary

Regarding how AR affects the students’ reading experiences. There was a mix of opinions. Principals perceived AR’s impact as more books for students to choose, a greater motivation to read, and students reading within their ZPD. Teachers perceived AR’s impact as an increase in motivation to read, a desire to read more carefully or in-depth, and an exploration of more titles. The students perceived AR’s impact as students were more motivated to read because of the competition and prizes.

Current Perceptions and Changed Perceptions

Since the implementation of the AR program into this district’s elementary schools, principals, teachers, and students have had the opportunity to develop their own perceptions. Over time some of these perceptions have remained the same, and some of them have changed. Some individuals had positive perceptions; some had negative perceptions; and some had mixed perceptions. This section will explore the variety of perceptions that were shared through individual interviews, focus groups interviews, and observations.
Positive Perceptions

Principals’ Positive Perceptions

All five administrators shared both positive and negative perceptions about the AR program. The most significant pattern found in the principals’ positive perceptions dealt with motivation. All five principals shared that motivation was a strength of the program. They see AR as a program that promotes excitement in regards to students’ desire to read. One principal stated that, “…fostering an opportunity for kids to develop a love of reading…” This statement was reinforced throughout most of the principals’ interviews. Other similar comments about AR’s ability to promote reading included, “…an opportunity for kids to develop a love of reading,” “It becomes a nice tool for the child…many kids get real excited,” and “…it will be exciting for them and anything we can do to promote reading…is going to help.” Three of these principals commented that it was the incentives used with the AR program that played a significant role in the motivation, and none of these three actually said that AR itself was the motivational factor.

A second pattern found among the principals was the natural fit between AR and the current literacy program used in their respective school. Three elementary schools used a version of the 4-Block literacy program, and two of these principals believed that AR was a nice supplement to the 4-Block program. One principal said, “It is just a natural fit to supplement our overall literacy.” The second principal stated, “AR makes the self-selected block of reading more productive.” Another principal supported the fact that AR would help students get SSR time on a daily or regular basis.
Three principals also brought up that instant gratification in terms of the tests was a strength of the AR program. These principals liked the idea that students and teachers had access to results immediately with the AR program. Two principals liked how AR gave an immediate score at the conclusion of the quiz. This allows the student to see their score, look at any missed questions, and retake the test if needed. One of these principals also compared this immediate assessment to the world of video gaming in which some students get involved because they like the immediate engagement that some games offer to its players. The other two principals focused more on the ease of record keeping that AR provides for teachers. They believed AR’s record-keeping capabilities are beneficial to teachers as teachers could get various records directly from the computer or printed copies for data to be placed in students folders.

Another important pattern found among all of the principals was the inclusion of trade books into the classroom. Three of these principals mentioned that their libraries have increased in book volume since implementation the AR program and a fourth principal perceived that AR would increase the amount of library books in the Reagan School as the program progressed. Four principals commented they liked the idea that their students had the opportunity to read “real literature.” In conjunction with the inclusion of trade books, two of the principals also found student choice to be a positive with AR. According to these principals, students had the opportunity to choose what they want to read.

Principals also believed that it was important for students to read books at their level. Three principals perceived AR as a tool that helps students read within their level or ZPD. Two principals shared how prior to AR some students read whatever they
wanted and the level of the book did not matter. These principals worried that students were reading books that were too easy or too difficult at times, and now students were reading appropriately leveled books.

There were a few other items mentioned by the principals in regards to what they perceived as positives of the AR program. One principal praised AR for its comprehensive nature in terms of quizzing. Two other principals liked the idea that AR gave the students reading and comprehension practice. Another principal liked the ease of the AR program such as the ease of testing and getting on the computer.

**Teachers’ Positive Perceptions**

Many patterns found within the teacher interviews were very consistent with those found in the principal interviews. Similar to principals, the teachers perceive AR’s strengths as instant gratification, leveled books, motivation, and the inclusion of trade books. Teachers also mention that comprehension, conferencing, assessment, independent reading, and the idea of practice reading were positives of the AR program.

One of the most apparent patterns among the teachers was that AR provided an instant gratification for students and instant results for teachers. The fact that students could see their result immediately after completing a quiz and teachers could get results and data immediately were perceived as positive of the AR program. This topic was mentioned by five different teachers.

Teachers also liked that students were reading leveled books. One teacher mentioned, “I was buying fourth-grade leveled books…I failed to see that there were kids that were not going to be reading at that level…I feel if I had AR back then I could have
had my kids reading (at) their level.” AR helped this teacher discover that classes need a wider range of leveled books to reach all the students. Three other teachers also perceived that a strength of AR was that students would read at their individual reading level.

Although 100% of the administrators perceived motivation as a strength of the AR program only two teachers made a similar statement. One teacher said, “It promotes reading. It motivates kids to read more books.” The other said, “It provides the motivation for reading that is not there in today’s kids.” Other teachers touched on motivation, but only these two noted it as a positive.

Another pattern found among the teachers was the inclusion of trade books into the classroom. Four teachers mentioned this as a positive, and two said that the biggest strength of AR was that children were reading trade books. This was a pattern among the principals as well.

Three teachers perceived that AR helps students practice their reading skills. All three mentioned that the more reading a student does, the better reader the student will become. They perceived AR as a practice tool, and one of these teachers said, “Any kind of help we can get to them…can’t hurt.”

Some other patterns found among the teachers included comprehension, conferencing, and assessment. Three teachers felt students struggle with comprehension and they perceived AR as a tool that helped correct this problem. Two teachers believed a strength of the AR program was its one-on-one conferences, a time for the teacher to meet with students individually. Four teachers mentioned that AR provides some good assessment tools for teachers. One teacher said, “I like the fact that you can go back and
see what questions they (the students) miss.” Two of these teachers discussed how it gave teachers another tangible element to use when talking with parents about their child’s reading development. All four were happy with the reports that were available.

The teachers reported several other areas which they perceived as positives of the AR program. These items include: student choice in regards to book selection, the individualized nature of the program, goal setting, ease of the program, and student accountability.

Students’ Positive Perceptions

Among the student focus groups it was unanimous that the best thing about AR was the relaxed atmosphere. All five focus groups commented that their sixth grade AR atmosphere had been their favorite AR atmosphere. When the students were asked, “What are the good things about AR?” the topic of atmosphere dominated the discussion. As stated earlier in this chapter, the sixth-grade students were actively involved in AR for only nine weeks out of the year. During these nine weeks, students go to the AR room to read and quiz. The room has comfortable seating which includes soft chairs, couches, and beanbag chairs. The room also has folding chairs that students may use if they wish. The students liked that they can sit anywhere in the room and that the seating was comfortable.

No other pattern was as strong as the relaxed atmosphere pattern in regards to “the good things about AR”, but the students shared some other items of AR which they perceived as positive. Many students shared that they enjoy the incentives, and these incentive did motivate them to read. One student shared that AR benefits students’
reading even if they dislike reading. This individual said, “Some people don’t like to read, but even if they are just reading to get points they don’t know they are helping themselves by reading.” Two students mentioned that they like to get on the computer. A focus group from one of the schools said they liked the competition, and two other students supported this as a positive as well.

**Negative Perceptions**

*Principals’ Negative Perceptions*

The most significant pattern found in regards to the principals’ negative perceptions of AR was the lack of higher-level questioning. All five principals agreed that the AR quizzes their schools purchased limited students from higher-level questioning. One principal said, “They [Renaissance Learning]…needs to develop quality comprehension questions, not just on a knowledge level. Questions that take us to a higher level of Bloom’s [Taxonomy] such as synthesis, etc.” Another said, “The questions do not promote higher-level thinking.” While commenting on the higher-level thinking, one principal stated that although AR asks questions at the comprehension level, it does not model comprehension strategies. Although all five perceived AR as a program that does not meet the needs of students in the area of higher-level thinking, three principals went on to say their teachers were responsible to cover that area of cognitive learning. It should be noted that AR does offer literacy skills tests which address higher-level thinking skills; however, none of the elementary schools have opted to purchase these tests which are more expensive that the traditional tests.
In relationship with the higher-level thinking problem, three principals mentioned that the quizzes are weak. One principal stated, “Some of the quizzes ask pretty minute detail…There are some flaws with the quizzes.” Another principal added that the quality of questions do not support research of modeling comprehension strategies through authentic experience. This principal was concerned that AR is too individualized and the format along with the quizzes does not promote best practices.

Another concern among the principals was book availability for above and below grade level readers. The principals mentioned that they need to deal more with providing socially and developmentally appropriate books for those students above or below grade level. Originally they had found themselves purchasing books for students at grade level. Now it has surfaced as a dynamic that needs to be addressed. One elementary school had addressed this issue by creating a special bookcase that housed literature that was appropriate for the above and below grade level readers.

Three principals mentioned that they would like to see a larger variety of research on AR. They perceive that much of the positive data that support AR comes from the Renaissance Learning Company. One principal that is a proponent of AR said, “My biggest frustration is that Renaissance Learning doesn’t have a vast wealth of research to support AR. A lot of their research is in-house.” Another principal said, “I think there is sufficient research to indicate that there are some weaknesses with AR.” This principal was wary of canned programs, and believes that many of AR’s claims could be accomplished by schools that use best practices.

Three principals have struggled with the incentive part of AR. It is not that the principals do not support incentives, but each year they tweak or revamp the incentive
portion within their school. In relation to the incentive program, one principal had been working with the AR coordinator and the teachers to find a system that eliminated the competition among classes. It got so bad in this school that the principal called Renaissance Learning for advice as to handle the unpleasantness of their competition within their school.

Several other negative perceptions surfaced in the data. Three principals were concerned that AR might take over self-selected reading time. They wanted children to read other material in the classroom, materials such as magazines, poetry books, non-AR books, newspapers, etc. Three principals were also concerned about grading. They were concerned that AR would be used as a reading grade. One principal was concerned that students might cheat during AR tests. Since the quizzes are multiple choice and the computers sit next to each other students could look at each other’s monitors. Another concern was the idea of extrinsic rewards. Two principals mentioned this topic as a concern. They felt that it was more important to focus on intrinsic motivation.

**Teachers’ Negative Perceptions**

There were six significant patterns found among the teachers in regards to their negative perceptions of the AR program. The first issue of concern dealt with motivation. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers interviewed were concerned that their school’s implementation of the AR program promoted extrinsic motivation by giving rewards for reading. One coordinator shared that the complaint most heard was teachers did not want extrinsic rewards tied to it. A second coordinator mentioned their students may think they have to be rewarded or there must be extrinsic rewards to read a book.
Two other teachers commented they did not like prizes and rewards tied to the program. It was also shared by two teachers that students were reading for the wrong reasons and the rewards were affecting the material read. One said:

…kids feel that pressure to get that 85%, and they want to know how many days do we have left in the month and all these things. So we get down to the last couple days of the month and that pressure is felt and you [the student] play the game of I will get little books so I can read them faster. So I can get done. So I can get a good grade. So when you [the student] start playing that game…and I even fall into that game sometimes, because you [the teacher] want your kids to succeed. So I start playing that game and then I say hey wait a minute that is everything [I] disagree about AR. The fact that you [the student] are reading things you are not interested in and reading them quickly. Just to get some arbitrary score on this test.

These teachers would prefer an approach that aids the students with intrinsic motivation rather than the extrinsic. One of the teachers mentioned above summed up this concern by saying, “It is almost like we have to motivate and offer something like a carrot to make the horse plow the field, and that really aggravates me.”

Over half of the teachers interviewed also perceived the AR quizzes to be weak. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers shared some sort of negative in regards to testing, and this data did not include a problem with higher-level questioning which was addressed separately. Some of the concerns mentioned were: “the tests are limited”, “some pass the tests without reading the book”, “some of them seem trivial”, “…just skims the surface of what they know”, “they get really picky about certain information”. One coordinator shared that at times students interpret an AR question differently than AR intended it to be interpreted. Children then answer the question correctly according to their personal interpretation but do not receive credit for the question because it was interpreted
incorrectly. Another teacher shared an experience which dealt with students testing after an in-depth literature circle. The teacher stated:

We did lit. circles where we took three weeks to read Where the Red Fern Grows. [The whole class] talked about it everyday and every two days the group got into their own groups and they talked about. It was in-depth study if ever there was an in-depth study of the book, and students had a very hard time passing the quiz.

The data presented represents the voice of over half the teachers interviewed; however, it should be noted that two coordinators shared that teachers have the ability to create their own questions for tests.

The next area of concern was an area that was also a concern from the principals, the lack of higher–level questioning. Fifty percent of the teachers interviewed perceived this as a problem. Two teachers shared a concern that their school’s proficiency scores were weak in the higher-levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. One said:

…on the proficiency one of our weak areas were constructing meaning and extended meaning….Yeah, it is a lot of just basic recall and the kids that have the great memories go in there and cough it up and go on.

Another teacher mentioned how it was important for students to move forward in their thinking, and the AR questioning did not promote that type of thinking.

A fourth significant area of concern found among the teachers was students were neglecting non-AR books to read AR books. For this study, a non-AR book is a book that does not have an AR quiz. This may be because a school has not purchased the quiz or it may be that AR has not developed a quiz for the book. For whatever reason, 43% of the teachers interviewed perceived this to be a problem. Teachers felt the students were neglecting good literature because there was no quiz to go with it. One teacher said, “I have a lot of excellent books right here [in the classroom], and some will neglect them
because they are not AR.” Another made similar comment, “I have a book available for them and they will sometime ignore it if it is not an AR book.” One fourth-grade teacher shared:

A lot of books that I have in my room they don’t really even touch anymore unless they can’t get an AR book. I noticed that when I brought in…books [for my students] to read to the kindergartners, it was neat to see them read books that were a lower level for them. I thought it was good for them to get away from where they were at because they are always trying to just read the AR books just to get the points, just to get the reward.

Teachers found this to be an important concern that has surfaced since implementation of AR in their schools.

There were several other negative perceptions that were discovered in the data. Teachers were concerned that children who read larger books, such as a Harry Potter books, struggled to score as high on quizzes than those who read smaller books. The perception was that it took students much longer to read these lengthier text than those that read smaller books. Although the children know the storyline of the longer books well, they might miss questions from a passage that was read a week or two earlier.

Three teachers shared that they were encouraged to implement AR 60 minutes a day, but these teachers thought that was too much for a supplemental tool. Three teachers commented that in-depth discussions or opportunities to express feelings were limited to students because of AR. Three teachers shared that technological support was not strong in the district which directly impacted AR when problems arose. It was also recorded that three teachers perceived a strong push for AR had taken the joy out of reading for some students. The pleasure reading had been substituted with reading and quizzing.
One coordinator was disappointed about the inconsistency of the programs implementation throughout the elementary schools.

*Students’ Negative Perceptions*

There were several patterns across the student focus group interviews, but the most prominent was the lack of student choice. Three of the five focus groups shared how reading within their ZPD limited their choices of books. These students wanted to read out of their ZPD at times, but in many cases they were not permitted to move out. It should be noted that the students are currently allowed to read at any level below or above their ZPD while they participate in AR at G. Bush Elementary. Therefore much of dissatisfaction toward this topic is a reflection of their prior experiences. Students from the Clinton Elementary School focus groups shared their frustration.

**Josh:** Some teachers at Clinton made us go into a level and we had to stick at that level and we couldn’t read no books out of that level …

**Researcher:** Did you ever feel like you read everything you wanted to read in that level, and there were other books in your level that did not interest you but you still had to read them. Did you ever feel that pressure?

**All:** Yea.

**Caleb:** I was kind of mad because I just wanted to read what I wanted to read.

Students from Ford Elementary had a similar conversation in their focus group. They perceived that it was of value to read above their ZPD at times.

**Researcher:** …did you have to read in your level at Ford?

**All:** Yea.

**Researcher:** So what do you like? Do you like reading within your ZPD or going out of it.
Reed: Going out.

Zoe: Out.

All other students: Out.

Researcher: Tell me why.

Zoe: Because it makes you feel better about yourself. It makes you feel higher than your level.

Claire: I think it helps you read higher words that you are not used to reading.

Zoe: It helps you learn too.

These two conversations represent some of the dialog that took place in the focus groups about reading within a ZPD compared to reading above or below level.

Another topic the students perceived as a problem was the unfairness of book sizes. This pattern was also evident with some of the teachers. The students compared a 300-page book versus a kindergarten book. As long as both readers scored 85% or above then credit was given. Similar to the teachers, the students thought this scenario was unfair because it took much longer to read a 300-page book, and sometimes parts were forgotten. Even though a 300-page book was worth more points than a kindergarten book, it was much more difficult to score 85% or above to get credit. Two responses that support the students claim were: “I don’t really think that is fair,” and “I don’t like how they do that.”

The last significant pattern found among the student focus groups in regards to negative perceptions dealt with a limited supply of AR books. Focus groups shared they wished the schools had better books and different kinds of books. They felt the book selection was not strong especially when they had to stay within their ZPD. They also
wanted a wider variety of genres. In regards to genre, the two most desired areas were Christian and adventure books.

\textit{Changed Perceptions}

\textbf{Principals’ Changed Perceptions}

This study also investigated any perceptual changes overtime. Principals, teachers, and students were all asked if they perceived AR the same today as they did when they were first introduced to it. For the most part, the principals agreed their perceptions were stronger today than when they were first introduced to it, mainly because of the positive impact they have seen in their schools. Their perceptions had also changed because they have seen their schools improve in their implementation of the program over time. However, one principal’s perceptions have not changed overtime. This principal said,

\textit{… I have not changed in my opinion from the perspective that I feel that AR is sold as a core program and it doesn’t meet the rigorous standards that we need to in schools, and I think sometimes schools are looking for quick fixes.}

For the most part the principals did not comment much about how their perceptions have or have not changed over time.

\textbf{Teachers’ Changed Perceptions}

Eight teachers commented about how their perceptions had changed, and all but one shared that their perceptions had changed in favor of the program. One coordinator said, “So has it changed over time. It started out for me as just a tool in a tool box of
things you could use for reading. But then it became a complete way or philosophy about
teaching reading.” Two teachers mentioned they did not want anything to do with AR at
the beginning, but now they see it as a worthy tool. One teacher took a different stance
than the others. This teacher’s perceptions changed for the “worst”.

Now that I’m involved in it and have felt the pressure that is initially held over
our heads or that I felt was held over our heads is about AR, AR, AR, AR. Announcing on the announcements the class that had the highest classroom
participation and success rate. Getting things in our mailbox about the number of
students that have or have not passed AR quizzes. I’m not sold on it as the only
way we should do silent reading…..my initial thoughts have certainly changed for
the worse.

*Students’ Changed Perceptions*

The student data were also weak for this question. Most students did not mention
any change in perception; they just stated if they liked AR or not. However, from the
data that were gathered, there was one significant pattern. Four students explained they
had lost interest in AR as sixth graders because they were not rewarded immediately or as
often as they were when they were in other grades. The following comment represents
this pattern, “…in fourth grade they gave us suckers and pencils and everything. Now
you have to read until the end [of the nine weeks] to get anything.” In sixth grade the
class with the most points each nine weeks wins a pizza party.

Little data were collected regarding changes in perceptions; therefore, it would be
more appropriate to make any type of assertion regarding this question. However, the
data that were present does represent both positive and negative changes throughout the
district.
Summary

Throughout this chapter, principals’, teachers’, and students’ perceptions were explored in three major categories: perception of AR’s implementation in the elementary schools; how AR has affected student’s reading experiences; and current perceptions of the AR program and how these perceptions may have changed over time. Each represented group was given an opportunity to share their perceptions. Their voices were shared, documented, and analyzed.

In regards to the implementation of the AR program, there was quite a mix of perceptions. Some common topics were: AR’s role in the school’s literacy program, AR’s role in grading, and daily time allotted for AR. Other areas of significant conversation included: distractions, atmosphere, and ZPD. Among the stakeholders other topics that surfaced included: motivation/incentives, moves during AR time, and professional development.

In regards to AR’s effect on student’s reading experiences, there were some common perceptions among stakeholders and some perceptions that were present only within certain stakeholders. For example, motivation surfaced among all three groups as did leveled books. However, not all the stakeholders were in agreement with their opinions of students’ reading leveled books.

The last area investigated was current and past perceptions of the AR program. All three stakeholders listed both positive and negative perceptions of the program. In regards to changed perceptions, both principals and teachers developed more of an appreciation for the program over the years. The students did not provide enough data to make an assertion about their perceptions of the AR program as a whole.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to document and analyze students’, teachers’, and principals’ perceptions regarding the Accelerated Reader Program in a small town school district in northwest Ohio. This study gave the participants a voice to share their thoughts and feelings about the program and the implementation of the program in their school district.

The study took place in a small town school district in northwest Ohio. Fourth-grade, fifth-grade, and sixth-grade classrooms from five elementary schools provided the student, teacher, and principal data. Five principals were interviewed twice. The first time they were interviewed for historical background and general implementation data; the second time they were interviewed for their perceptions of the AR program. Fourteen teachers were interviewed for implementation and perception data; each interview was followed-up with a classroom observation. Twenty sixth-grade students were interviewed in focus groups that were determined by their previous home school. The sixth-graders were housed in the same building which facilitated data collection. These student interviews provided perception data and some implementation data.
Data were gathered from each stakeholder’s perspective, analyzed, and compared within each specific group (i.e., students) and across groups. Common themes and patterns as well as unique perspectives were shared in Chapter Four. This chapter is a discussion of the interpretations of the findings, how those interpretations relate to existing research, implications of the study, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Findings and Classroom Implications

*Role of Accelerated Reader*

In the current study, teachers and principals from four of the district’s five elementary schools perceived AR as a supplement to their reading program. The fifth school did not implement the AR program in any manner. Of those schools that implemented AR, not one individual used the program as the main part of their reading curriculum. This coincides with Topping’s (1999) study about appropriate practice with AR. He stated that AR is a tool to help teachers monitor their student’s day-to-day behavior, assess this reading behavior and intervene if needed. He also stated that AR was intended to be a supplementary program and was not intended to be a substitute for a balanced reading program.

The teachers and the principals from my study agreed with Topping (1999) that AR is intended as a supplement to the reading program and not a substitute for a balanced reading program. However, through interviews and observations, this study revealed some inconsistencies between Topping’s study and this school district’s application of appropriate practice. Topping sees AR as a program that can help teachers closely
monitor students’ reading behavior and intervene when needed. This study, however, was inconsistent with Topping’s statement about teacher’s monitoring of their student’s day-to-day behavior. Only a small percentage of the teachers did a “Status of the Class” activity to gain an understanding of the students’ daily objectives and/or to know which books the students were reading. In other actions of monitoring by the teacher, several surfaced even less than the “Status of the Class.” Although AR can provide teachers with a variety of student and class reports, the current study recorded few instances where teachers printed and read the reports. Not one teacher was observed conferencing in a way that would be considered intervention on behalf of the students.

During the interviews, a number of teachers and principals were asked about the role assessment should play in AR with regards to student’s reading grades. Data analysis revealed mixed feelings among teachers and principals. Two principals and two teachers supported AR as part of their students reading grade. The two principals believed that AR fit nicely into their Four-Blocks (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1991) literacy model, and therefore they felt the students’ quiz scores should have some impact on their reading grade. On the other hand, two other teachers had used AR for a grade at one time, but decided to use it only as a supplement after some self-reflection. Several other teachers and one principal commented that AR should not be a part of the reading grade. These individuals went on to comment that they were told by an AR representative that AR should not be a part of their reading grade. Although it can be summarized that there were mixed feelings in regards to using AR as a portion of a students reading grade, the majority of the teachers felt that it should not be a factor.
According to two AR coordinators, some AR material, and Topping’s (1999) study, intervention is an important component of the AR program; however, this study did not provide any examples of intervention. In the schools studied, AR is a time that is set aside for students and teachers. Students are supposed to read, quiz, and conference with the teacher. Data analysis revealed no conferencing that would be considered as intervention. Each classroom had a specific AR time, which was very conducive for teacher-student one-on-one conferencing to take place. In most cases a classroom had 30 minutes of AR time, and in some cases up to 60 minutes. Although teachers have limited time during the school day to have one-on-one conferencing with their students, I believe that AR time is favorable for such a conference. The time is already set aside; AR recommends such a move; therefore, it makes sense for teachers to take advantage of such an action. Unfortunately, my study did not document any intervention. Of the seven classrooms observed, not one teacher spent more than a minute with any individual student in a conference situation, and only three of the seven did any type of conversing with students in what might be considered a one-to-one conference. Most of these conferences would be considered congratulatory support for passing a test or some type of reinforcement to those that did not pass a test. Throughout the observations nothing was noted in regards to instructional help.

I would assert that two factors play a role in this situation. First of all, from my observations, I believe the teachers only do a surface check because: they are busy with preparation for another activity or lesson; they are modeling reading; they are grading papers; or they are keeping their students on-task. I believe the second factor is that some
teachers lack sufficient training that would instruct them to use conferencing as an important component of AR.

*More Teacher-Training Desired*

Throughout this study it was clear that both principals and teachers saw the need for more teacher-training although both agree that the AR coordinators from each building have been trained well, and continue to be trained over time. According to the data, 80% of the principals and just over 50% of the teachers feel there needs to be more staff development opportunities for the teachers. This recommendation was for development opportunities that would benefit teachers at all ranges of the implementation spectrum.

At the time of this study, the teachers from Reagan Elementary School still needed to receive their initial training for the program. Their current and limited knowledge of AR had come from an AR sales person, their peers, and/or their own children’s experiences. These teachers were to implement the program in the fall of 2005, yet by the month of May they had not had any training. However, these teachers did have the program loaded on their computers at the time of the study and they were encouraged to allow students to experiment with the program.

Teachers from other schools that desired training were at different levels of competency with the program. Some wanted training to get the most out of the program while others desired training to implement the program effectively. Their hope was more opportunities would be available in the near future.
According to the voice of the principals and the teachers, there appears to be a disconnect between desired implementation of AR and the actual implementation. Although there have been training opportunities provided by the AR coordinators, over 50% of the teachers feel that more is needed. In the AR coordinators’ interviews, each one mentioned that they have volunteered to offer additional training to any teachers that so desired it. However, the problem is still evident. Teachers voiced that they want to receive training that gives them a clear understanding of the AR program, and how to use the program effectively and competently in their classrooms. It is important that they understand the variety of reports available and how to use these reports. If conferencing is such an important part of AR, then teachers need to be trained and encouraged to conference with their students during the AR time. More training opportunities for the teachers is a desire of the teachers and principals; however to take that training to the next level, AR coordinators may need to more actively serve as coaches to the teachers. Through training and coaching, there will be less opportunities for disconnect between the desired implementation and the actual implementation of the AR program.

Integration of Accelerated Reader and other Literacy Activities

In addition to the specific AR training, I suggest training that will help the teachers integrate other literacy activities with AR. I recommend activities that can take the students beyond a time of silent reading and quizzing where students lean heavily on the efferent side of the reading stance continuum (Rosenblatt, 1994). Teachers could receive training that helps them incorporate literature circles (Daniels, 1994), book clubs (McMahon & Raphael, 1997), or other opportunities that will connect reader-response
activities with AR. Two of AR’s strengths are students’ access to literature and students’ time to read. Both of these strengths can be used to enrich the current implementation of the AR program.

During the current study there were no observations of students sharing, making connections, or questioning each other. Everything was isolated and individualized. There were no reader-response activities, no book talks, and no peer recommendations. Students found books on their own, read individually, took quizzes, and then repeated the cycle. What does this efferent experience of reading and quizzing say to a child about reading? Louise Rosenblatt (1994) stated that schools too often promote efferent reading and do not allow enough aesthetic reading experiences for students. Galda (2003) echoes this concern and wrote that AR takes the aesthetic response out of literature. In the case of the current study, the student focus is on what they take “away from” the book rather than what they experience while reading the book. Their personnel connections, feeling, attitudes, and ideas are ignored; the opportunities provided for them were to quiz, not to share and explore. If teachers were offered staff development opportunities to help them explore a range of activities that promote aesthetic reading, then maybe their students could move from the efferent side of the continuum to a reading that flows between the efferent and the aesthetic stances. Do teachers want students to associate their AR reading as an efferent activity, or do teachers want students to associate their AR reading as an activity that supports both stances? If the latter is the answer, then students must be given opportunities to move beyond the efferent stance, and teachers might need to be trained to help their students make such a move.
One hundred percent of the students observed in this study participated in AR as an individual activity. This individualized experience supports Lamme (2003), who critiqued AR for its lack of literature perspective. She agrees that AR gets students to read, but she believes students miss out on the literature rich experiences involved with reader response activities.

According to data analysis, only two individuals, one principal and one fifth-grade teacher, mentioned anything about these areas, yet both supported Lamme and Galda’s claims. The teacher shared about an in-depth book club his students were involved in prior to my study. The students were reading, sharing, and learning from each other throughout this book club activity. The teacher felt this was a great opportunity for students to get deeper into a book and share thoughts and feelings with each other. This activity was completed as part of the class’s “traditional” reading time; then, at the completion of the book club, the students took an AR quiz on the book that was read. This teacher in this case integrated AR with the literature rich experience of a book club. No other individual even discussed the importance of reader-response let alone its role in AR. If a teacher did not want to mix AR with their traditional reading time, they could still integrate literature circles during the AR reading time. From my observations and interviews it can be asserted that few teachers have ever been trained with any type of reader-response theory. Although a select few may incorporate book clubs or literature circles, for their core reading program, most do not integrate reader-response activities as part of the experience and only the fifth-grade teacher integrated it with AR.
I recommend that teachers are trained to build on the strengths of AR and integrate other literacy activities with the program. Teachers can learn a specific program such as the Book Club Project (McMahon & Raphael, 1997) or Daniel’s (1994) Literature Circles, or they can be trained in the general concept of literature circles. Such training can strengthen the current implementation of the AR program of this study. Teachers can still play the role as the facilitator during AR time, only now they can add to their individual conferencing. Before the integration of literature circles, the teacher-student conference focused primarily on the student’s diagnostic reports and book selection guidance. With the integration of literature circles, teachers will have the added dimension of group observations to use in their conferences with the students.

How can literature circles benefit the students? At the time of this study, AR was very individualized. With the integration of literature circles, students can gain insights from others, view the book from a different perspective, share their thoughts and feeling, bounce ideas off their group, etc. Each of these can add to the literature experience and strengthen the AR program as well. Such integration can help students learn that reading can be a social activity as well as an individual activity.

Other staff development opportunities could also help the teachers integrate author studies, thematic studies, or text communities with AR. Any of these opportunities could aid in a movement from individual experience to activities that support reader-response (Rosenblatt, 1978; Karolides, 1997).
In this study, there were mixed perceptions in regards to student choice. Students perceived that a negative factor in their school’s implementation of the AR program was that they often did not have enough choice in selecting their reading material. The students did not like it when they had to read within their ZPD. The majority of the sixth-grade students liked having the freedom to read any book they desired even if the book they had chosen was above or below their assigned reading level. From my observations and interview data, students read kindergarten books through young adult literature books. However, when they were in the fourth and fifth grades, they had to stay in their ZPD until their point goal was met, and in some cases they were never allowed to go out of their ZPD. For the most part students perceived this as a negative.

On the other hand, the principals and teachers perceived students reading within their recommended reading level as a positive. Most of the fourth-grade and fifth-grade teachers along with the principals liked that students were reading within their ZPD. They liked the fact that students were not reading material that was too easy or too difficult. However, there were a few teachers that permitted students to have more ownership in selecting the level of their books. This was either done after students had reached their reading goal, or on a specific day of the week that was designated free choice.

A related finding dealt with students who were reading below their grade level or above their grade level. Teachers struggled with some young students that were reading considerably above their grade level. Without age-appropriate books, children may be introduced to material that is above their maturity level. On the opposite side of the
spectrum are older students that are reading considerably below their level. It can be embarrassing for a fifth grader who is reading at a second-grade or third-grade level to pick a book from that level when his/her peers are watching.

A direct classroom implication deals with the purchasing of age-appropriate books for both above and below level readers. One school in the district has already begun to address the problem by purchasing appropriate books. These books are housed on a special shelf in the school’s library. Schools will need materials that are still age-appropriate for above and below grade level readers.

The whole idea of leveling is more complicated then some might think. Although it may be appealing to support students as they read, it is an issue that has been challenged by some experts in the field (Szymusiak & Sibberson, 2001). It is true that teachers want their students to feel successful when reading, but at the same time those teachers are warned not to overdo leveling. Too much leveling can ignore the motivation a child has to read a certain book, one that has sparked their interest. For example, some students may be excited to read a *Harry Potter* book because many of his friends have recommended it, or because the books are so popular. This excitement can turn to disappointment if the child is not permitted to read the book because it is out of the students ZPD. A second example explores a child that reads at a level that has little to no books of interest to that child. This may be due to a program that has just begun or because the school has little money to purchase a variety of quizzes. In either case, the concept of leveling has negatively effected a child’s motivation to read. It is not that all leveling is bad; but teachers might provide opportunities where students can read above or below their level at times.
In AR, those teachers that overuse leveling give their students an artificial taste of choice. Students’ choose books because of level and point value, limiting them to only a select section. This was clearly present in the data. According to the student interviews, students felt as though their choice was too limited in both fourth grade as well as fifth grade. My study also revealed that some teachers did give their students opportunities to read books of their choice; however, all but one did this only after students met their weekly or monthly goals. I would recommend that teachers give other opportunities throughout a given period. Continue to encourage the students to read books at their level, but also give them opportunities to go outside that level. When choice is limited or taken away from students, motivation can be affected.

*Increase of Time Spent Reading*

All of the elementary schools in the district have opportunities for students to practice reading in school, and four of the five elementary schools have used AR as a tool for students to get extra reading practice. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the Renaissance Learning Company recommends 60 minutes a day for reading practice. This amount has been evaluated by each school, but it is only implemented by one of the five schools. Three principals stated that 60 minutes a day was too much time for an activity that is considered a supplement to the reading program. Seventy-five percent of the teachers also found 60 minutes a day of AR in-class reading practice was too much time. Of the schools that did implement the AR program, each attempted for the most part at least of 30 minutes a day for AR activities. Again, both the principals and the teachers did agree
that there should be time for students to practice their reading skills, but that amount of
time differs from AR’s recommendation.

**Time Wasted Due to Distractions.** One pattern that surfaced in regards to AR
time was students distracting each other; three teachers mentioned they wish that there
were fewer distractions. A fourth-grade and fifth-grade teacher from one school said that
their school used to have a room specifically for AR, but that has changed. At the time of
this study, the students read and took computer quizzes in their classroom which was
more conducive to distractions. A third teacher was very concerned about the amount of
AR time that was wasted in the classroom. This teacher said approximately 33% of the
students spend their reading time searching for AR books to read. All three of these
teacher found the distractions as a hindrance to the actual time spent reading and would
like the students to be more focused AR activities.

**Lack of Higher-Level Thinking Skills.** For those teachers that do implement AR in
their classroom, it might be assumed that their students get plenty of practice in the
cognitive areas of knowledge and comprehension because this is the style of questions
found on the AR quizzes. However, according to this study, both principals and teachers
are concerned with the absence of any higher-level thinking skills. Students might be
spending more time reading, but they have not increased amount of time spent with
higher-level thinking. Teachers will need to spend time challenging students with higher-
level thinking opportunities to make up for this absence.
**What Motivates the Students to Participate?**

This study analyzed two different strands of motivation. The first strand investigated a tie between AR and students’ motivation to read, while the second strand explored motivational factors in regards to students’ participation in AR.

The data analysis revealed four out of five student focus groups, nine out of fourteen teachers, and three out of three principals agreed that AR has positively impacted students’ motivation to read. These data seem to support Rogers’ (2002a) study which found AR as a strong motivating tool for motivating students and as a potentially positive factor on students’ reading attitudes. However, there were also some dimensions to the research that can be labeled as inconsistent with Roger’s research. Three of the four student focus groups that said AR has been a tool to motivate them to read went on to say that it was really the incentives and prizes that have done the motivating. They liked the competition, prizes, and recognition when they were successful. All five of the student focus groups also agreed that as sixth-graders the atmosphere and freedom to read out of their ZPD also had influenced and motivated them to read more. The sixth-grade students all liked the AR atmosphere of the room they used for AR. The room had a couch, soft chairs, and bean bag chairs to sit in while they read. Students also said while in sixth grade they have enjoyed the freedom to read books at any level they choose. Together, both atmosphere and freedom of reading at any level have also played a role in the students’ motivation to read.

In regards to the second strand of motivation, the principals perceived that the enthusiasm and leadership of the AR coordinator as well as the enthusiasm of the teacher...
impacted the students’ motivation in a positive manner. Each principal stated that the teachers play a vital role in the success of any program, and that much of a child’s motivation comes from the classroom teacher. Both teachers and principals commented that not only is the teacher a vital influence to make AR successful, but so is the enthusiasm of the AR coordinator or even the enthusiasm of the building principal. This finding strongly supports Pavonetti’s (1997, 2003) arguments that people are the primarily influences, not a computer book keeping system.

Stephen Krashen’s (2002, 2003a) studies support that two of AR’s underpinnings, the book accessibility and recreational reading time, are important to readers. However he also states that students are more motivated by high quality interesting reading material and having time to read these items, than the quizzes and incentives. One principal, the principal from the school that did not use AR, wholeheartedly agreed with Krashen, and actually used some of his research as a reason not to implement AR. This principal thought the monies and energies that went into AR could be spent to provide teacher training in the area of “best practices in teaching reading” and to provide high interest books and reading material for students. Four other principals differed from Krashen to a degree. These principals thought that incentives also played a role in the motivation of students’ reading. Although the principals perceived incentives to play such a motivating role, the principals still had mixed feeling how to implement the rewards. Several of the principals have struggled trying to find the best way to handle the incentive without going overboard. They still wanted to instill an intrinsic value of reading without offering too many extrinsic rewards.
Teachers had mixed feeling about incentives as well. A number of teachers felt as though the program promotes reading for the wrong reasons. Although many did implement small extrinsic rewards, some were apprehensive about creating a “circus” with the reward system. They also felt it was important to stress the intrinsic motivation over the extrinsic.

At the time of the study, there were mixed opinions about the implementation of rewards. Most participants agreed that rewards play a major role in motivating students to read, but many were not sure at what level the incentives should be used. One of the most disturbing findings was when a small number of sixth graders were reading kindergarten books to get points, to reach their goal, and to ultimately get their reward. Although the point values for these books were extremely small, students were able to read enough to make an impact toward their AR reading goal. While this was not a widespread problem, it was an important finding. This example actually exhibits what can happen if some students have too much choice and teachers do not follow through with the “Status of the Class” or other areas of guidance and/or intervention. The example also appears to reveal that the reward is more important than the actual reading. Students in this case wanted the prize, and they sacrificed the opportunity to read quality age-appropriate books to get that prize.

*Accelerated Reader’s Impact on Students’ Reading*

This study specifically asked each stakeholder if AR has affected students’ reading experiences. According to all the data, each stakeholder did perceive that AR has influenced students’ reading experiences. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, every
stakeholder mentioned that students were more motivated to read. Both teachers and students agreed that the prizes and competition played a major role in this motivation; however, teachers also perceived that because of AR students were reading at other times throughout the school day. In addition, teachers also perceived that students were reading more carefully. According to the principals, the school’s libraries have a better selection of trade books because of AR. They perceived this as an impact on students’ reading because it gives students more choices when selecting books. All three groups of stakeholders also perceived that AR has helped students read within their ZPD. Both teachers and principals see this as a positive impact, but students see this as a negative.

Clements (2004) found that both teachers and administrators had mixed perceptions in regards to the impact AR had on students’ reading experiences, attitudes and habits. My study also found some mixed perceptions. Like the Clements (2004) study, my study includes the voice of the principals and the teachers; however, my study adds the important voice of the students. Because students are involved in the program on a personal level, I thought their voice was worthy to be heard. Although all three of the stakeholders in my study agreed that AR had a direct impact on students’ reading experiences, the impact perceived varied from positive to negative depending on the specific topic. For example, the students’ perceptions of impact were often different than the perceptions of the adults (e.g., leveling and choice).

In 2000, Rogers found that AR did have a beneficial impact on students’ reading abilities and their time spent in sustained silent reading. Although my study did not investigate the perceived impact of reading abilities, it did have similar findings in
regards to students’ increased time spent in SSR. Both studies confirmed that students were given more opportunities to read silently throughout the school day.

*Is Accelerated Reader an Appropriate Supplement?*

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, each school in the district used AR as a supplement to its literacy program. However, the review of literature and the results of this study may encourage educators to question if AR is the most appropriate supplement. Nearly all the advantages cited by teachers and administrators in this study that promote AR could be accomplished in schools without purchasing the AR program. For example, teachers and principals like that AR gives students access to books and time to read those books. I would agree that these are important components to a successful literacy plan, but schools can purchase books and schedule time for students to read without AR. Schools can even buy more books for students to read if they did not spend money on the AR software and quizzes. According to teachers and principals, another strength of AR is that students can read leveled books. Again, I argue that if this is a desire of the schools, then schools can implement leveled reading without purchasing AR. For those schools that want some type of incentive program, I recommend that the school create a task-force to develop a program that sets all students up for success and focuses on intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic rewards.

Decisions about time and money are important to schools as they develop their literacy program. I question if the implementation of AR as a supplement is the best usage of such components. From my observations and interviews, I saw no examples how AR benefited a student more than sound teaching without AR. I recommend that
districts spend their time and money on staff development that benefits a child’s all-around literacy development, rich literature that is accessible to all students, and activities that are conducive to all levels of thinking. Why limit our students to AR when we can create powerful literacy experience for our students that help them develop into well-rounded readers with a personal love for literature? I challenge teachers and principals to lean on their beliefs of best practices towards reading instruction rather than a computerized program that isolates students, relies in low-level quizzes, and motivates with external rewards.

Ideas for Future Research

The purpose of my study was to document and analyze students’, teachers’, and principals’ perception of the AR program in one small-town school district. Because this research focused only on the implementation of AR in fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade classrooms, the findings should not be considered reflective of the current practice in the younger grade classrooms throughout the district, or even in a middle school setting. Since all of these perceptions were from a small-town school district, there is a need for more research with big city districts or a larger scale study with a variety of districts each with various population sizes and in various socio-economic settings. Similar research that investigates implementation of AR in lower elementary classrooms or in K-5 or K-6 buildings would provide data in regards to AR’s role in the primary level of reading instruction. This would provide a more balanced study and holistic exploration of each school studied.
Since students spend so much time reading books, a worthy study might include an examination of books that consume their reading time. Do these books reflect characters as recommended by children’s literature scholars? Is there a strong selection of multicultural literature available for the students? Are students reading recent books that have just been published? This study could investigate the availability of various perspectives of books, the range of genres offered, and/or obtain ability of the classics or other well-known books. The study could specifically focus on book availability as offered through the Renaissance Learning Company’s catalogue.

Additional research should be conducted to explore the relationship between student’s perceptions and the number of years they have participated in the program. In my study a principal stated that the students in the upper grades were not as excited about the program as those students that had just been involved in AR for a year or two. My study did not pursue these findings to see if there was any specific correlation between the two because the topic surfaced too late in the data gathering.

A further study could lean on Pavonetti’s (1997, 2003) research that found people more than computers to be more influential in guiding students to be lifelong readers. My study found some evidence that principals, teachers, and the AR coordinators play a vital role in the overall atmosphere of the program. However, a study that compares incentives versus motivational leadership would contribute to this discussion.

In addition, other studies comparing a classroom that uses high-interest literature while also implementing literature circles and reader response activities to a classroom that just uses AR would be important. According to my study, students, teachers, and principals liked that AR implemented trade books in the classroom. Therefore, the
a proposed study would give students of both classrooms exposure to literature, but each would use the literature differently.

My study found that principals and teachers liked students reading within their ZPD, while students did not like to be limited within their ZPD. A study that compares students that only read in their ZPD and students that can read at any level they want would benefit those individuals that are making decisions how to implement student choice and ZPD restrictions in their AR program.

Although my study focused only on traditional AR quizzes, a study that compares the literacy skills quizzes and the traditional quizzes might benefit the field. This study could look at student’s growth in higher-level thinking questions as well as the growth in the knowledge and comprehension area. This might help schools decide which type of quizzes to purchase.

My study looked at five elementary schools, four of which decided to implement the AR program while one did not. A study that explores schools that have chosen not to use AR and/or have stopped using the program might be worthy for those schools that are contemplating whether or not to purchase the program.

A final study could be the variety of ways AR related to reading programs. This study specifically investigated five elementary schools. A large scale study that explores all the unique ways schools implement AR, and the perceptions of all the stakeholders involved would be beneficial for those schools that are considering purchasing the program. This might help the schools implement AR in a way that they had not previously considered before exploring the study.
APPENDIX A

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS
FIRST SET (AR SCHOOL)
1. Describe the research that was involved before your school made decision to purchase AR.

2. Why did your school choose the AR program?

3. Describe your school’s historical background with AR.

4. Describe how AR is implemented in your school, and the role(s) it plays in your schools reading program.

5. What changes have you make in the implementation of AR in your school?

6. If you were to start over, is this program you would purchase, why or why not?
APPENDIX B

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS
FIRST SET (NON-AR SCHOOL)
Guiding Questions for Principal Interviews
First Set (Non-AR School)

1. Describe the research that was involved before your school made decision to not purchase AR.

2. Why did your school choose not to purchase the AR program?

3. What do you feel are AR’s biggest strengths?

4. What do you feel are AR’s biggest weaknesses?
APPENDIX C

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS
SECOND SET (AR SCHOOL)
Guiding Questions for Principal Interviews
Second Set (AR School)

1. How have your initial perceptions of the AR program changed in comparison to your current thoughts of the program?

2. What do you feel are AR’s biggest strengths?

3. What do you feel are AR’s biggest weaknesses?

4. Tell me how AR has affected student reading at this school.

5. What do you notice about students’ voluntary reading? Are students neglecting non-AR books to read AR books? If so explain.

6. Describe how AR is implemented in your school, and the role it plays in your schools reading program.

7. What changes would you make in the implementation of AR in your school?
APPENDIX D

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS
SECOND SET (NON-AR SCHOOL)
Guiding Questions for Principal Interviews
Second Set (Non-AR School)

1. How have your initial thoughts of the AR program changed in comparison to your current thoughts of the program?

2. Tell me how AR has affected student reading in your school district.

3. What are your thoughts about the variety of ways AR is implemented in your school district?

4. What changes would you make in the implementation of AR in your district?
APPENDIX E

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER INTERVIEWS
Guiding Questions for Teacher Interviews

1. Tell me how AR has affected student reading at this school.

2. What do you feel are AR’s biggest strengths?

3. What do you feel are AR’s biggest weaknesses?

4. How have your initial thoughts of the AR program changed in comparison to your current thoughts of the program?

5. What have you noticed about students’ voluntary reading? Are students neglecting non-AR books to read AR books? If so explain.

6. Describe how AR is implemented in your school, and the role it plays in your schools reading program.

7. What changes would you like to make in the implementation of AR in your school?
APPENDIX F

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS
Guiding Questions for Student Focus Groups

1. Tell me how you used AR in your previous school?
2. Tell how AR is used this year.
3. How do you feel about the work you do in AR?
4. Tell me how AR has affected student reading at this school.
5. What are the good things about AR?
6. What are the changes you would make to AR?
7. How do you feel about the work you did in AR at your previous school compared to this school?
8. What encourages or discourages your participation in AR?
9. Tell me about the books you are reading outside of the AR program. Are students neglecting non-AR books to read AR books? If so explain.
10. What else would you like to tell me about AR?
APPENDIX G

PARENT LETTER
Dear Parent,

My name is Quinn White. I am conducting dissertation research that will examine the ways Accelerated Reader (AR) has impacted students’ reading experiences. Specifically, I want to explore students’, teachers’, and administrators’ perceptions of the AR program.

I have chosen to use student focus group interviews to gather information regarding the students’ perceptions of the AR program. Each focus group will be constructed of three to six sixth grade students. All focus group interviews will take place at the school during school hours and will last approximately 30 minutes. I will be working closely with the classroom teacher so the focus group interviews will not interfere with regular class instruction.

As a participant, your child would be asked questions about AR. The sessions will be audiotaped to ensure accuracy. All names, locations, and other identifying characteristics will be changed in order to insure complete confidentiality. Please be assured that your child’s responses will be kept completely confidential. Research materials will be catalogued and kept in a secure place.

I have also chosen to observe the classes as they work on AR activities. These observations will not interfere with the student’s work.

If you are willing for your child to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and have your child return it to school.

If you would like more information on this research study in order to make your decision, or if you want to discuss any questions or concerns you might have, please contact me at 419-238-4150 or Dr. Patricia Scharer, supervising professor at The Ohio State University at 614-292-2480.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Quinn White
The Ohio State University
APPENDIX H

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION FORM (PRINCIPALS & TEACHERS)
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH


Protocol number: 2005B0002

Principal Investigator: Dr. Patricia Scharer

I consent to my participation in research being conducted by Patricia Scharer and W. Quinn White of The Ohio State University.

The investigator(s) has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures that will be followed, and the amount of time it will take. I understand the possible benefits, if any, of my participation.

I know that I can choose not to participate without penalty to me. If I agree to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time, and there will be no penalty.

I consent to the use of audiotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for this study.

I have had a chance to ask questions and to obtain answers to my questions. I can contact the investigators at 419-238-4150. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can call the Office of Research Risks Protection at (614) 688-4792.

I have read this form or I have had it read to me. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Print the name of the participant: _______________________________________________

Date: __________________________ Signed: __________________________

(Participant)

Signed: __________________________ Signed: __________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative) (Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)

Witness: __________________________

(When required)

HS-027 (Rev. 05/01)
APPENDIX I

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION FORM (PARENT)
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH


Protocol number: 2005B0002

Principal Investigator: Dr. Patricia Scharer

I consent to my child’s participation in research being conducted by Patricia Scharer and W. Quinn White of The Ohio State University.

The investigator(s) has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures that will be followed, and the amount of time it will take. I understand the possible benefits, if any, of my child’s participation.

I know that my child can choose not to participate without penalty to my child. If I agree for my child to participate, my child can withdraw from the study at any time, and there will be no penalty.

I consent to the use of audiotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for this study.

I have had a chance to ask questions and to obtain answers to my questions. I can contact the investigators at 419-238-4150. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can call the Office of Research Risks Protection at (614) 688-4792.

I have read this form or I have had it read to me. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Print the name of the participant: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________ Signed: ________________________________

Signed: ________________________________ Signed: ________________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative) (Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)

Witness: ________________________________

(When required)

HS-027 (Rev. 05/01)


Paul, T., VanderZee, D., Rue, T., & Swanson, S. (1997). Impact of the accelerated reader technology-based achievement and school attendance. Madison, WI:


Children’s Books


