

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ACCELERATED READER PROGRAM

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green

State University in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master in Education

May 2009

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers perceived the Accelerated Reader program. The Accelerated Reader program is one tool that many teachers use because they believe the program helps them in the classroom and helps their students with motivation and comprehension.

Surveys and interviews were used to gather teachers' beliefs about whether Accelerated Reader helped them and their students. The surveys were delivered to 150 teachers, with 22 responding. Three teachers were interviewed. Data were collected and organized into three categories: motivation, comprehension, and benefits.

The results of the study indicated teachers believed that Accelerated Reader was helping them in the classroom. Teachers believed that Accelerated Reader was motivating their students to read. Some teachers believed that Accelerated Reader helped their students with comprehension, but on the lowest level. Teachers indicated that there were some benefits to having the Accelerated Reader in their classroom.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....                         | 1    |
| Statement of the Problem.....                        | 3    |
| Research Question .....                              | 3    |
| Rationale .....                                      | 3    |
| Definition of Terms.....                             | 4    |
| Limitations .....                                    | 4    |
| CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....               | 6    |
| Theoretical Orientations for the Study.....          | 6    |
| Zone of Proximal Development.....                    | 6    |
| Motivational Goals.....                              | 7    |
| Accelerated Reader Program .....                     | 9    |
| Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading..... | 12   |
| Studies Involving STAR.....                          | 12   |
| AR Studies of Time Spent Reading.....                | 13   |
| Impact of AR on Comprehension .....                  | 16   |
| Studies Regarding Independent Reading.....           | 17   |
| AR Investigations with Special Populations.....      | 19   |
| AR Studies Related to Comprehension Improvement..... | 20   |
| Summary .....  | 20   |
| CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES .....            | 23   |
| Methods.....   | 23   |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Research Design.....                                     | 23 |
| Participants.....  | 24 |
| Instrumentation .....                                    | 25 |
| Procedures.....  | 27 |
| Data Collection .....                                    | 27 |
| Data Analysis .....                                      | 28 |
| Summary .....  | 28 |
| CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS..... | 29 |
| Results.....   | 29 |
| Demographics .....                                       | 29 |
| Motivation.....  | 30 |
| Comprehension .....                                      | 31 |
| Benefits .....   | 32 |
| Discussion of Results.....                               | 33 |
| Motivation.....  | 34 |
| Comprehension .....                                      | 34 |
| Benefits .....   | 34 |
| Summary .....  | 35 |
| CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS .....   | 37 |
| Summary .....  | 37 |
| Conclusions.....   | 38 |
| Recommendations.....                                     | 39 |
| For Teachers.....  | 39 |

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| For Teacher Educators .....       | 39 |
| For Further Study .....           | 40 |
| Summary .....                     | 40 |
| REFERENCES .....                  | 41 |
| APPENDIX A .....                  | 45 |
| LETTER OF CONSENT .....           | 45 |
| APPENDIX B .....                  | 48 |
| SURVEY TO TEACHERS.....           | 48 |
| APPENDIX C .....                  | 50 |
| INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....         | 50 |
| APPENDIX D .....                  | 52 |
| DATA RESULTS OF SURVEY .....      | 52 |
| APPENDIX E .....                  | 54 |
| INTERVIEW ANSWERS SUBJECT 1 ..... | 54 |
| APPENDIX F.....                   | 57 |
| INTERVIEW ANSWERS SUBJECT 2 ..... | 57 |
| APPENDIX G .....                  | 60 |
| INTERVIEW ANSWERS SUBJECT 3 ..... | 60 |

## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2003) defines the verb "assess" as, "to judge or decide the amount, value, quality, or importance of something" (p. 83). There are many forms of assessments used in today's classrooms. Students are given quizzes, pre-tests, and tests; these could be multiple choice, fill-in the blank, and/or essay. Teachers give these assessments to determine whether or not students have mastered the content being taught. Those who teach reading are no different. Since one of the main goals for the teaching of reading is for students to comprehend what they are reading, teachers of reading have to find a way to assess whether their students actually comprehended what was read.

While many strategies are used to teach and assess reading performance, some teachers believe that Accelerated Reader (AR) helps improve their students' comprehension and is a good tool to use in the classroom for assessment. However, other teachers who use AR, or are expected to use AR, may be asking if Accelerated Reader is an effective tool for them to use to reinforce and evaluate their students' comprehension. The use of the Accelerated Reader is commonplace in many schools. Statements likely to be heard in a school that use AR include: "Johnny, you need to stay in for recess and read so you can take an AR test as you are falling behind the rest of the class." "Cindy has 100 AR points and she receives a free ice cream cone at Toozers." As one can tell, these may be positive or negative, but what exactly is the Accelerated Reader, or AR?

The Accelerated Reader is a computer-based reading program that includes leveled books and tests that students take which provides teachers with information so that they may monitor their students' reading practices. To start, a teacher must determine each student's reading level.

Once a reading level is established, then the teacher must determine what range of books is appropriate for each student.

Students then read a book on the AR reading list and then take a multiple-choice test to demonstrate their reading competency. Once a student has completed a test, the student and the teacher will then record what score he or she received and decide whether the child should stay at the same level or move to another level.

Accelerated Reader comprehension tests are multiple-choice tests on the computer. A student first selects a book from more than 25,000 titles. Each book is assigned a point value based on the number of words it contains and its reading difficulty. After reading his or her own book, the student then takes the comprehension test on the computer and the computer scores the test immediately. The test consists of recall questions and the test is simply used for the purpose of assessing comprehension. This computer software shows teachers the average percent of correctly answered questions, the overall points earned, and the reading difficulty of each book. Accelerated Reader usually takes little time, as the most questions asked are 20. Most students can take the tests themselves by second grade, and some even by first grade.

A student will receive more points if he/she scores high on the test. For example, if a student achieves a 100% on a book valued at 10 AR points, that student will then get all 10 points and 9 points if he or she scores a 90% (and so on). The ideal situation would be that the student selects a book at the appropriate reading level and comprehends what was read to pass the test. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. Teachers cannot constantly monitor all their students and thus, students may be choosing books that are way too easy just so they can get an easy 100%. Another ideal situation would be that the students have time for sustained silent

reading in the classroom, but due to many unforeseen circumstances, this is not always the case. As one can see, the Accelerated Reader may be falling short.

#### Statement of the Problem

The AR program is basically a tool for assisting with comprehension practice and for assessing student performance in reading comprehension. While some teachers may find value in using the Accelerated Reader in their classes, other teachers do not like the AR and don't care to use it. There can be a variety of reasons why teachers seem to have mixed opinions about the use of and effectiveness of the Accelerated Reader. Some teachers believe that the Accelerated Reader program takes time away from the teacher and the student(s) reading together. Others believe that AR does not motivate students to want to learn to read, nor does it promote reading for pleasure and enjoyment. With such mixed reviews from classroom teachers, it is important to identify teachers' attitudes and beliefs toward the Accelerated Reader because each teacher's approach to AR may be rooted in his/her opinion of the AR program.

#### Research Question

Many of today's teachers are being required to use Accelerated Reader, while other teachers extol the virtues of AR. There does not seem to be universal agreement about the benefits of AR. The Accelerated Reader program was designed to motivate students to become lifelong readers, but some say that this program may not be achieving this goal. The purpose of this study was to answer the following question: What are classroom teachers' perceptions of the Accelerated Reader program?

#### Rationale

Because the use of Accelerated Reader is becoming more prominent in classrooms around the country, it is important that we understand what teachers believe to be true about the



use of the Accelerated Reader. Because the teachers' attitudes toward something often impacts how they project to their students in the classroom, it becomes essential to identify what teachers believe about using AR.

### Definition of Terms

There are several terms that are relevant to this investigation. The Accelerated Reader and the Developmental Reading Assessment have been explained briefly and will be expanded upon in Chapter II. Several other terms need to be introduced and explained and will also be expanded upon in Chapter II.

1. The Accelerated Reader is a curriculum-based assessment software program that provides a summary and analysis of results of student's comprehension to enable teachers to monitor both the quantity and quality of reading practice engaged in by their students (International Reading Association, 1999). The correct implementation for the Accelerated Reader will be discussed.
2. The STAR Reading program is also a computer assessment program that students complete in the classroom to provide teachers with information on their students' reading levels (explained in detail later).
3. Renaissance Learning is the company that started the Accelerated Reader program and STAR.

### Limitations

The Accelerated Reader was used in the primary grades; therefore, a discussion of results or benefits will be limited to grades one through five. The teacher interviews were conducted only with teachers currently using the Accelerated Reader in their classrooms. In addition, this investigation was dependent on teachers answering the questions honestly and not with answers

they suspect the researcher wanted to hear. The study was conducted in two local suburban schools; therefore, any discussion or results will be limited to districts with the same demographic make-up as the schools utilized in this investigation.

## CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Accelerated Reader has been used in classrooms since 1988. According to the Renaissance Learning website (2008), one of the goals of Accelerated Reader is to “build a lifelong love of reading and learning.” Since then, much research has been conducted regarding its use and its outcomes. There have been documented advantages and disadvantages for the Accelerated Reader program. Throughout this chapter, the advantages and disadvantages associated with this program will be discussed as well as the debate that continues between those supportive of AR and those who do not support the use of AR. Factors such as time allotment, incentives, teacher training, and availability impact the performance of the Accelerated Reader program. As a result of all the research, there is no uniform conclusion whether it is beneficial to all students. In addition, there is no evidence that the program has created readers who have a lifetime love of reading. Through the use of reports, assessments, and opinions, one will have to determine on his/her own whether the Accelerated Reader is a beneficial tool to use in today’s classrooms. This chapter will provide some background on the issues surrounding the Accelerated Reader.

### Theoretical Orientations for the Study

#### *Zone of Proximal Development*

One theoretical orientation to this study is based on notions related to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1978) defined the zone of proximal development as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more knowledgeable others” (p. 86). Vygotsky believed one would learn better if something is not too easy, yet not beyond his/her own learning potential.

The region of immediate potential for cognitive growth is the zone of proximal development.

Biggers (2001) states, “Vygotsky refuted the idea that testing, such as STAR, could determine what a child is capable of doing because it measures only independent performance” (p. 72).

According to Renaissance Learning (1999):

Students who read books within this zone show optimal reading growth because they are reading books that are challenging, but not frustrating. Books that are too easy prevent students from building the vocabulary and comprehension abilities required to become proficient readers, while books that are too hard frustrate students and cause their reading volume to decrease. (pp. 1-2)

With AR, it becomes the responsibility of the classroom teacher to monitor the books students are reading so that a student does not select a book that is too easy for him/her or a book that is way too difficult. Sometimes the students will read a much easier book to pass the test and receive more points that lead to more rewards.

Vygotsky also believed in the importance of social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) states that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)” (p. 57). Renaissance Learning claims that students who are reading books within their zone of proximal development will succeed but there is no mention of whether students are reading and discussing their books, which is the social aspect that Vygotsky believes is necessary for higher learning.

### *Motivational Goals*

The second theoretical orientation to the study involves the theories of motivation.

Dweck (2000) identified two types of motivational goals that children may have. The first type

of goal is *learning-oriented goals* where children are motivated to learn or master a task. In this type of motivation, students are interested in learning and are challenged by difficult tasks.

The other type of motivational goal is *performance-oriented goals* where students are motivated to look good and perform well. In this form of motivation, students are interested in how well they are being perceived by others and they want to get the correct answer, regardless of whether they have learned the material.

Baker and Wigfield (1999) believe that “engaged readers are motivated to read for different purposes, utilize knowledge gained from previous experience to generate new understandings, and participate in meaningful social interactions around reading” (p. 452). The AR program does not provide opportunities for students to engage in social interaction before, during, or after they take the Accelerated Reader quiz. Generally speaking, students read a book and then go to the computer to take the quiz either the same day or the next day, before they forget what the book was about.

Gambrell (1996) states that there are four key features associated with the motivation to read: access to books in the classroom, opportunities to self-select books, familiarity with books, and social interactions with others about books. Each student is motivated to read in a different manner and it is up to the teacher to discover what will motivate each individual. Gambrell’s notion of what motivates students to read seems to be out of alignment with the ideas of AR. According to Renaissance Learning (2008), the motivation behind the Accelerated Reader program is the many rewards the students will receive. Such rewards may include pizza parties, tickets to the movies, and perhaps money. This may also create a sense of competition in the classroom.

### Accelerated Reader Program

The Renaissance Learning (2008) website lists five goals that Accelerated Reader sets out to accomplish. They are as follows:

1. Make essential reading practice more effective for each student.
2. Personalize reading practice to each student's current level.
3. Manage all reading activities including read to, read with, and independent reading.
4. Assess students' reading with quizzes.
5. Build a lifelong love of reading and learning.

Whether or not the AR accomplishes each of these goals is the topic of much debate. For example, it would appear that the goals of Accelerated Reader do not cover the social aspect that students need according to Baker and Wigfield (1999), Vygotsky (1978) and Gambrell (1996). Goal number two isolates a student to read on his own. The student is confined to his reading level, which is usually determined by the teacher and not from input from the student. Another example of controversy over the goals is goal number five. Goal number five may be hard to prove. These goals are powerful claims that will be analyzed in light of the data collected later in the study.

The Accelerated Reader program is an assessment that is designed to assign reading levels, provide reports, and alert teachers to students who are having difficulties. Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipielewski (2003) explain, "Books that are included in the Accelerated Reader program are assigned two numbers: reading level and points" (p. 301). The Accelerated Reader system assigns points to each book based on the number of words in the book and its reading

level. According to Mathis (1996) the formula to calculate the point value of a book using reading level and number of words is:

$$\text{AR points} = \frac{(10 + \text{Reading Level}) \times \text{Words in Book}}{100,000}$$

Efficiency appears to be one of the major advantages of the AR program. Topping and Fisher (2003) argue:

...detailed feedback on the reading performance of all pupils in the class is provided without expenditure of teacher time. An indication of the successfulness of each pupil's reading performance is available, in relation to each pupil's current reading capability and the number and difficulty of books they are choosing to read. Of course, information on pupil learning is of no significance if it is not acted upon. (p. 269)

Students first read a book on the Accelerated Reader list: afterwards they take a computerized test to acquire points. There may be 5 to 20 questions on the test and the numbers of questions are based on the length and reading level of the book selected (Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipielewski, 2003).

There are two forms of quizzes available in the Accelerated Reader program: the Reading Practice Quizzes and the Literacy Skills Test. The Reading Practice Quizzes are designed to provide evidence that students have read the book. Renaissance Learning (1999) explains, "Questions typically focus on significant events, characters, and literary features of a book. In addition, questions are presented in an order that matches the chronology of a book, a practice that reinforces the story grammar as a student takes a quiz" (p. 2). These quizzes are multiple choice and they focus on literal understanding. The Literacy Skills Tests determine a student's

strength and/or weakness in reading. According to Renaissance Learning, “Examples of the kinds of skills tested are inferential reasoning, main idea, cause and effect, characterization, and recognizing plot” (p. 3). Once a student completes a quiz, a score is given immediately. Topping and Fisher (2003) state:

The software designers recommend that teachers target a quiz success rate of 85% correct as optimal for pupils, with either independent or supported reading. Automatically computer-generated ‘at risk’ reports flag a need for the teacher to intervene with any pupil whose reading activities appear currently ineffective. (p. 269)

A student should not pass a test if he/she has not read the book or the book was too hard for him/her. Depending on a student’s performance, points are awarded. The better a student does, the more points he/she receives. Engvall (1999) states, “Accelerated Reader awards points based on the length and difficulty of the book, and the student’s comprehension” (p. 29). The competition and incentives come into play when teachers offer extrinsic rewards to those students who have many points.

The Accelerated Reader program offers reports to teachers, grouping together the students who are having trouble passing quizzes together (Renaissance Learning, 2008). This report provides the teacher with a list of students in the classroom and includes a diagnostic code for those who may need help. For example, if a student has a D near his/her name, it tells the teacher that the student has a low number of points which may mean that the student is reading low-level books or may need to read more books. This is a quick glance report, saving teachers a great deal of time.



### Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading

STAR, the acronym for Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading, is a computer assessment tool by Renaissance Learning (School Renaissance Institute, 2000) that may be used in the classroom to help teachers determine their students' reading levels; it is frequently used with the Accelerated Reader program. Students can take this assessment in 10 minutes.

STAR Reading estimates "students' reading levels so they can match students with the appropriate levels of books to maximize their reading growth" (School Renaissance Institute, 2000, p. 5). When students take a test, they begin with an item at the low end of their ability level. As students answer questions correctly, the computer presents more difficult items. When a student makes an error, the computer presents a less difficult item. According to Biggers (2001):

STAR does not incorporate oral reading comprehension or any teacher observations of reading behaviors, yet it claims to be able to accurately identify student strengths and weaknesses and the necessary courses of action for improvement without this more comprehensive data. (p. 72)

STAR assessments are intended to provide feedback about the student, classroom, and grade level progress to the teacher. STAR assessments can be used with Accelerated Reader to help teachers in their classroom.

### Studies Involving STAR

In 2000, a comparison study was conducted comparing the STAR Reading Computer-Adaptive Test and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Interactive Test. During January of 2000, approximately 10 students per grade, in grades 1 through 11, were tested once in STAR

Reading and twice in SRI-Interactive. Each student took a STAR Reading Test once and a SRI test twice (School Renaissance Institute, 2000).

The objectives to be met included: (a) compare average overall test times of the STAR and SRI tests; (b) determine amount of variance in overall test times; (c) compare test score distributions of the STAR and SRI test; and (d) measure the test-retest reliability of the SRI test and compare it to STAR. Students were asked to complete a survey at the end on which test was easier. The results of the evaluation showed that the SRI test took twice as long and was less reliable than the STAR test. Students in the lower grades, or who may have had lower reading abilities, often had a harder time answering the questions on the SRI test. According to the School Renaissance Institute, “The STAR test was superior in all measurable respects important to teachers and students” (p. 6). The STAR program, AR, and the SRI are all tools that teachers may use to assess their students’ comprehension. These programs should provide students with reading time in the classroom and should motivate them to want to read more.

#### AR Studies of Time Spent Reading

Operating under the assumption that the more time a student spends reading, the better reader he/she will become, the AR program was studied to determine the relationships between success in the program and time spent reading. A series of three studies were conducted that related to the time spent reading while using AR.

#### *Idaho Studies*

The first study was completed in Idaho in 1998 to determine whether the STAR program and AR were beneficial to the teachers and students. Data were collected from 12,984 students enrolled in grades one through nine at 50 schools across Idaho (School Renaissance Institute, 1999). The study showed that the data consisted of two parts: growth in reading achievement

from STAR Reading data and measurement of reading practice from AR data. Data from the AR provided measures concerning quantity, quality, and challenge of students' reading practice:

The quantity of reading practice can be measured by the number of books students read, the points earned, and the amount of time spent reading. The quality of reading practice is indicated by how well students score on Accelerated Reader Reading Practice quizzes.

The level of challenge students experience in their reading practice arises from the relationship between the difficulty of the books read and the students' tested reading ability. (School Renaissance Institute, p. 10)

According to School Renaissance Institute, "The target reading time each day was set at 60 minutes a day but that did not happen. The average reading practice time was for 19 minutes a day" (p. 18). The first-year study recommended teachers allow students 60 minutes a day and that all students should maintain an average level of at least 85% correct on all AR Reading Practice quizzes. Less than 50% of the Idaho schools examined were at that level.

The second-year study in Idaho was conducted in 1999-2000. This study included 10 schools from the previous study and 27 additional schools and there were 7,879 students involved in grades one through nine (School Renaissance Institute, 2000). Analysis of the progress from the first study in 1998 toward the quality, quantity, and challenge goals showed that most schools were falling short. The study showed that only 51% of students were averaging at least 85% correct on Accelerated Reader quizzes and students were only averaging about 18 minutes a day of reading practice.

The third-year evaluation in Idaho included 21,534 students in grades one through nine from 76 schools. This sample included "students from schools that participated in the previous two studies, students from districts that were part of a special foundation-sponsored focus group,

and students from 10 randomly selected districts” (Renaissance Learning Monograph, 2002, p. 1) The key results reported in this study identified growth in the quantity and quality of students’ reading practice. Over the three years of the study, “students starting out in grades 1 through 4 increased their daily reading time each year” (p. 14). Throughout the three years, students were still not reading within the recommended time of 60 minutes as previously stated.

### *Project Studies*

Vollands, Topping, and Evans (1999) conducted two studies which they named Project A and Project B that involved children in two different groups with different reading times. Project A was an AR group of children who had 15 minutes of reading time per day for the first five weeks, which was then increased to 30 minutes. Students were also read to for 30 minutes per day and were allowed to take AR tests on books read to them (Vollands et al.). Another group read for 30 minutes per day but had to give a book report.

Project B was similar to Project A, but with a few nuances. In Project B, students would write their name on a public chart when they had finished their book. A comparison group was also involved in an incentive program. Vollands, Topping, and Evans (1999) concluded:

Taking both projects together, the results suggested that the Accelerated Reader program, even when less than fully implemented, yielded gains in reading achievement superior in a number of respects to both regular classroom teaching and an alternative intensive method, even with less time devoted to class silent reading practice than in comparison classes. Additionally, the program yielded significant measurable gains in attitudes to reading for girls. (p. 209)

The study suggested that the AR program is effective when the quantity of time spent on reading books increases.

### Impact of AR on Comprehension

Topping and Sanders (2000) conducted an investigation to determine whether AR would help students improve on a standardized test (Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System or TVAAS). Their data were compiled from 62,739 students in grades two to eight in the Tennessee school system. The analysis indicated “that value added rose with increased number of books read by students, except where a very large number of very easy books were read in the fifth grade and beyond” (p. 327). In a follow-up article by Topping and Fisher (2003), they noted that the study showed a “positive and statistically significant relationship between increased number of books read and value added in Grades 3 to 6” (p. 270). Chenoweth (2001) wrote in the *School Library Journal* regarding Toppings’ and Sanders’ results:

The most surprising thing Sanders said he found is that when children read significantly above their reading level, such reading practice did not result in increased reading comprehension as measured on standardized scores. It’s what Sanders calls “nudging up” students’ reading levels that creates [sic] reading comprehension growth. (p. 50)

Sanders and Topping believed that teachers needed to monitor the students’ progress and intervene when needed.

Data suggest, however, that this is not always the case. Topping and Paul (1999) report, “The data suggest that on the average, the amount of literature-based reading practice increases until the sixth grade and then declines” (p. 223). Once a student reaches sixth grade, his/her reading practice goes down and again declines even more after eighth grade. According to Topping and Paul, “students scored 26 points in the Accelerated Reader program in sixth grade and dropped down to 24 points in seventh grade” (p. 1).

Mathis (1996) conducted a study where the question posed was, “Does the use of Accelerated Reader cause an increase in the reading comprehension scores on the SAT of sixth grade students compared to the previous year in which they did not use the program?” (p. 9) The study was conducted in a rural area in Illinois. The ethnic background was 93.9% White; 2.3% Black; 1.8% Hispanic; 1.8% Asian; .3% Native American. Mathis reported:

After one year of being exposed to the Accelerated Reading program there is not statistically significant increase in reading comprehension scores from fifth grade to sixth grade. Overall, the data leads to the acceptance of the null hypothesis: There will not be a significant increase in reading comprehension after being exposed to the AR program. (p. 11)

Mathis found that because many of the students picked books that were below their grade level, their comprehension was not increasing since the books were too easy for them.

#### Studies Regarding Independent Reading

Rosenheck, Caldwell, Calkins, and Perez (1996) conducted a survey to determine whether use of the Accelerated Reader program would result in increased frequency of library use. Three fifth-grade classes in Florida were used for the survey. Questions were asked about the number of books checked out and enjoyment of reading. One school did not have the Accelerated Reader program; one used it as a voluntary program, and one school used AR as a mandatory program. Out of 222 surveys completed, the study did not find any relationship between use of Accelerated Reader and frequency of library use. Rosenheck et al. report that the survey “did not support a more positive attitude in students involved in a voluntary Accelerated Reader program over those not involved in the Accelerated Reader program” (p. 12). There was no indication of how long any individual had participated in the Accelerated Reader program.

Perhaps students need to be involved in the Accelerated Reader program for a longer time to increase their library use.

A study, conducted by Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipielewski (2003), used a measure called the *Title Recognition Test*. This instrument was used with seventh grade students in three different school districts where some used the Accelerated Reader and some did not. Students were given a *Title Recognition Test* and asked to put a check mark next to the names of the books they knew. Some of the titles were real and some of the titles were make believe. The test measured whether students recognized certain book titles that they may have read on their own.

The purpose for the study was to determine whether students who used the AR program could recognize more book titles than those students who were never exposed to the AR program. Pavonetti et al. (2003) reported "...that the suburban school district that continued to use the program in middle school showed a significant positive difference in the amount of reading done by those students having had AR in elementary school..." (p. 307).

Pavonetti et al. (2003) did note that some districts "had hoped to include in the study – low socioeconomic status, minority districts - did not have AR in their schools..." (p. 301). The study also showed that having AR in elementary school does not seem to support the fact "that students who continue to read independently after they no longer participate in the AR system, as compared with those students who did not use the AR program" (p. 307). The study concluded that they could not support the AR claim that those who participated in the program became lifelong readers. The study mentioned the fact that there are always other factors involved when reading such as motivation, school, and home. Readers are not motivated by rewards or points, but by teachers, parents, and peers. Pavonetti et al., collected data that suggested that "many districts, schools, and teachers have corrupted what was designed as essentially a bookkeeping

system, converted it to part of the reading program, and encourage students to read for points tied to report card grades” (p. 309).

### AR Investigations with Special Populations

There have been various studies over the years that have supported the Accelerated Reader program and how it has helped others. McGlinn and Parrish (2002) examined the effects of the Accelerated Reader program on ESL (English as a Second Language) fourth and fifth grade students in North Carolina. The study only involved 10 students who had approximately 45 minutes of time for free reading daily during a three-month period.

McGlinn and Parrish (2002) noted that ESL learners are “often reluctant readers since reading does not always come easily or naturally, and teachers are constantly faced with the challenge of finding ways to encourage ESL students to read” (p. 1). The AR monthly reports indicated that 8 of the 10 students had read zero to three books for the month of September. By the end of the study, the average number of books read was 21 and half of the students improved their reading level. McGlinn and Parrish recommended, “AR should be only one of the components of the reading program for students with learning disabilities since they often benefit from a combination of direct instruction and guided reading” (p. 4). Accelerated Reader is just one tool to help ESL students, but they still need guided learning instruction.

ESL students and students with disabilities have much harder time learning in the classroom and need as much help as they can get. Scott (1999) investigated whether the Accelerated Reader program had any effect on the reading achievement and attitudes toward reading of students with disabilities. According to Scott,

A control group made up of two special education classes had never used the Accelerated Reader program. An intervention group of two other classes had been using the program



two months before the study began. The Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR) was given to all students at the beginning and end of the research to determine if changes in reading achievement occurred. (p. 11)

The study lasted four months and involved 28 students. Scott (1999) reported, “A treatment group consisting of sixteen middle school students used the computerized reading management system. A control group of twelve middle school students did not use the program” (p. 12). Overall, the control group was higher in reading comprehension, but the treatment group improved reading attitudes by 13%. Even though the Accelerated Reader program may not aid in comprehension, it may motivate students with learning disabilities.

#### AR Studies Related to Comprehension Improvement

A more recent study was compiled by Melton, Smothers, Anderson, Fulton, Replogle, and Thomas (2004). The Terra Nova standardized reading achievement test was used with fifth grade students to determine whether Accelerated Reader improved reading growth (Melton et al.). Two schools with similar demographics were used in the Jackson, Mississippi area throughout a one-year period. Melton et al. discovered that those who used the program “...did not reflect a significant increase in reading achievement growth when compared to fifth grade students...who did not participate in the Accelerated Reader program” (p. 23).

#### Summary

Data regarding the effectiveness of the Accelerated Reader program are conflicting. Vollands, Topping and Evans (1999) concluded that the AR program was effective when more time was allowed for the students to read. Additional studies have shown that the more time allowed for recreational reading in the classroom, the more positive a student’s attitude towards reading becomes. Krashen (2003) states, “...that those students who are provided with more time

to do recreational reading show better gains in reading achievement than comparison students. The effect is especially strong when such programs are allowed to last for one year or longer” (p. 16).

Regarding improved performance in comprehension, Topping and Sanders (2000) agreed that meaning did increase when students read more books, but the books had to be at their own level of reading and not below. McGlinn and Parrish (2002) concluded that AR helped ESL students while Samuels (2003) concluded students made more gains in comprehension and vocabulary when they used AR.

These positive studies show that Accelerated Reader can help a teacher and her students in the classroom. It has been advised that teachers be trained when administering the Accelerated Reader program in their classrooms. Most of the studies also mentioned the use of incentives either individually or in the classroom when implementing the Accelerated Reader. For students to gain the maximum points, (and earn prizes) some students choose to read at a low level.

Some studies believed incentives were beneficial, while others argued students found the joy in rewards and not reading. On the plus side, diagnostic reports are readily available to teachers to monitor students reading level and points earned. Topping and Paul (1999) point out the positive effects schools using AR will have if they continue to use them: “Schools using the AR program for longer periods of time show higher rates of reading practice” (p. 226). However, there have been studies that are not as favorable as the ones mentioned above.

Mathis (1996) stated that after one year of being exposed to AR, there was no statistical increase in students’ reading comprehension from fifth grade to sixth grade. Rosencheck, Caldwell, Calkins, and Perez (1996) conducted a survey with students in third-fifth grade. Their surveys showed that there was no increase of library time with those who used AR. Pavonetti,

Brimmer, and Cipielewski (2003) showed that AR does not support that students continued to read independently after using the AR program. Melton et al. (2004) indicated that AR did not show an increase in reading growth compared to those who did not participate in AR. Many studies continue to wage the debate on the Accelerated Reader program. As long as teachers continue to use the Accelerated program and students continue to take the tests, the more studies will develop.

### CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Research continues to show that significant numbers of students struggle to comprehend what they are assigned to read and lack motivation to read on their own, thus, teachers are always looking for new and exciting ways to help their students want to read on their own. The Accelerated Reader is a program that is intended to benefit teachers and students by constructing better readers in the classrooms and hopefully motivating students to read more books. The idea is that those who read more, and with greater comprehension, will become better readers. A significant feature of the Accelerated Reader program is its ability to help teachers with assessment in the classroom and to help students in their comprehension. However, despite claims of success, there have been many studies conducted which have tried to determine whether Accelerated Reader is an effective assessment to use in the classroom, and the results continue to be inconclusive. This research study explored the effectiveness of Accelerated Reader by examining how teachers viewed the Accelerated Reader program in their classroom. This study was designed to answer the following question: What are classroom teachers' perceptions of the Accelerated Reader program?

#### Methods

##### *Research Design*

To answer the research question, this study employed two layers of data collection: surveys and interviews. The first layer of data collection involved the administration of a survey (see Appendix A). The purpose of the survey was to gather a fairly large sampling of quantitative data that could be analyzed statistically. The surveys were designed to address three categories of interest: motivation, comprehension, and benefits. These three categories were selected based on

the claims from the Renaissance Learning website and the goals of the AR program as identified by Renaissance Learning (2008).

The second layer of data collection involved interviews (see Appendix B). The purpose of the interviews was to explore qualitative data that elicited opinions from teachers on the motivation, benefits, and comprehension skills obtained by using the Accelerated Reader program in the classrooms. The semi-structured interviews were of a qualitative nature since the questions were exploratory and inductive. The purpose of both structured and open-ended questions in the interview was to clarify the teachers' opinions of the Accelerated Reader program in their classroom. The open-ended approach allowed a richness of data, but the data collected from the different participants was different and therefore was not always comparable; this may raise issues of reliability and validity for data collected this way. In addition, with open-ended questions, teachers were able to make additional comments on a related subject matter to the AR program.

### *Participants*

A total of 150 elementary teachers in Northwest Ohio were selected to receive surveys. Only schools known to use Accelerated Reader were selected for participation in this investigation. A convenience sample was used since the schools were in a local area that was familiar to the researcher. Phone calls were placed to all seven principals before the surveys were distributed to make sure they all approved. Cover letters (see Appendix C) and surveys were hand delivered to seven elementary schools and were placed in the teachers' mailboxes. The surveys were to be completed by September 30, 2008, and returned in the self-addressed stamped envelope that was provided.

After the due date, follow-up phone calls were made to the secretaries at all seven schools to make sure the surveys were sent. The teachers were asked if they were willing to be interviewed on the bottom of the consent form which was attached to the survey, and if so, to write their name and contact information. Out of 150 surveys sent, 22 surveys were returned and nine teachers agreed to be interviewed. All nine teachers were contacted by phone calls or email to arrange an interview. Only three teachers actually responded to the request for interviews and were actually interviewed. The teachers interviewed were teachers ranging from first grade through fifth grade. All teachers interviewed had experience with the Accelerated Reader program. The teachers who agreed to be interviewed wanted the questions emailed to them and they returned their answers by email.

#### *Instrumentation*

The instruments used for the study were a researcher-developed survey consisting of 10 questions (see Appendix A) and an interview protocol consisting of six structured core questions, upon which a semi-structured interview was grounded (see Appendix B).

The surveys (see Appendix A) were structured questions and the teachers were instructed to pick one choice out of two or three. There were 10 questions on the survey. There were two questions on motivation, two questions on comprehension, two questions on the benefits of AR, two background questions, and two general questions. The questions on the survey pertaining to motivation, comprehension, and benefits were developed based on what research suggests from Accelerated Reader. The first question asked teachers how long they had been using the Accelerated Reader program in their classroom. The second question asked teachers if they shared the students' scores with the parents, administration, or other teachers. Question 3 asked how often the Accelerated Reader program was used in the classroom. Questions 4 and 10 were

questions that related to comprehension. Questions 5 and 7 related to the category of motivation, and questions 8 and 9 related to the category of benefits. Question 6 inquired if the school administration follows up on the AR results. Questions 1 and 3 were general background questions to determine how long and how often AR was being used in the classroom. Questions 2 and 6 were general questions to determine with whom the teachers shared the scores and if the Administration asked to see the scores.

The interview questions were based on the goals of Accelerated Reader according to Renaissance Learning. The interview questions for teachers who have used Accelerated Reader are as follows:

1. Do you believe that your students have developed an intrinsic love for reading by using the Accelerated Reader program? Why or why not?
2. Have your students showed an improvement in their critical thinking skills through their reading? How?
3. Has the AR program helped you obtain reliable and objective information about your students' reading levels? Why or why not?
4. Has the AR program helped your students master the standards they need to succeed on the standardized tests? Why or why not?
5. Do you believe that the AR program has improved classroom management such as higher attendance, less discipline problems, or improved attitudes towards reading and school? What has improved and what has not improved?
6. Has the AR program kept your students challenged? Are they performing at their maximum? Why or why not?

## Procedures

Surveys were first developed to obtain some basic general background on the Accelerated Reader program. Questions in the survey were based on whether AR motivated the students, if teachers believed AR helped students with comprehension, and teachers' perceptions of the benefits of AR. Surveys were approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University. After the surveys were delivered, it took approximately three weeks for them to be returned. The cover letter asked teachers to indicate whether they were willing to be interviewed. Once the surveys were collected, nine teachers responded that they were willing to be interviewed so they were contacted by either phone or email to set up a face-to-face or answer questions by email. Of the nine teachers contacted, only three teachers actually responded with answers to the interview questions by email. The surveys and interview questions were based on a review of the literature and on the goals of the Accelerated Reader program. Questions from the interviews were more in-depth so that teachers could expand on the AR program.

## Data Collection

Data collection was completed through surveys and interviews with teachers and their responses were used to generate conclusions regarding their perceptions of the Accelerated Reader program. Once the surveys were completed, the questions and answers were gathered and put into three different categories of motivation, comprehension, and benefits. These three categories were developed after the data were analyzed to appropriately categorize teacher responses. Each answer on the survey was also tallied. Once the questions were tallied, then all the answers were given a percentage (see Appendix D). The surveys were more quantitative in nature. Questions 1, 2, 3, and 6 were general background information. Questions 5 and 7 related to motivation; questions 4 and 10 pertained to comprehension, and questions 8 and 9 explored



the benefits of AR. After the surveys were compiled, contact was made to schedule the interviews. The interviews were qualitative as the teachers' answers varied. Three interviews were actually accomplished (see Appendixes E, F, and G). After the interviews (through email), notes were taken to compare answers. The interview questions were also put into the categories of motivation (questions 1 and 6), comprehension (questions 2 and 4), and benefits (questions 3 and 5).

### Data Analysis

The data collected from the surveys and interviews were analyzed for interpretation and discussion. Tally marks were made for each question on the survey to determine which choice (A, B, or C) was favored. The survey questions were placed into the categories of motivation, comprehension, and benefits.

The interviews were designed to be unstructured and the questions asked were open-ended, with the participants providing responses in their own words. Interviews were conducted via e-mail which was printed and each interview question was examined individually. Answers from the interviews were compiled according to what each teacher said about each question. Once the answers were placed into their separate categories (motivation, comprehension, and benefits), they were then perceived as either a positive or negative comment on the teachers' beliefs towards the Accelerated Reader program.

### Summary

This study was designed to answer the following questions: What are the classroom teachers' practices and perceptions as they relate to the Accelerated Reader program? Surveys and interviews were completed to answer the research question. Data were collected and evaluated based upon teachers' perceptions of the Accelerated Reading Program.

## CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The goal of this project was to answer the research question: What are classroom teachers' perceptions of the Accelerated Reader program? The Accelerated Reader is meant to help teachers aid their students in reading comprehension and to also motivate them to want to read more. The program also claims to be able to help teachers manage their classrooms' reading activities. Teachers were first given a 10-question survey to complete regarding their perceptions of the Accelerated Reader. After reviewing the responses, interviews were then conducted to ask more in-depth questions on what teachers believe about the Accelerated Reader's effectiveness in the classroom. Surveys and interview questions were categorized into three main groups: motivation, comprehension, and benefits. Each survey and interview had two questions for each category. The results are reported by teacher demographics, followed by data collected about motivation, comprehension, and benefits. A discussion of the data follows the results section.

### Results

#### *Demographics*

The teachers' surveys concentrated on whether teachers believed that the Accelerated Reader program benefited them in the classroom and whether the program motivated their students to read and help them with their comprehension. The first few questions (questions 1 and 3) on the survey related to how long the teachers had been using Accelerated Reader and how often they use the program in their classroom. According to the surveys, 35% of the teachers have been using Accelerated Reader between 4-6 years and 35% of the teachers have been using AR between 7-10 years. Teachers also indicated (68%) that their students used the Accelerated Reader three-five times a week and 27% indicated that their students used AR once or twice each week.

### *Motivation*

Question five on the survey asked teachers if they thought rewards motivated students to read the Accelerated Reader books. Teachers (63%) believed that students were motivated by the rewards they received; however, when teachers were interviewed, two of the teachers said that students need more of a motivation to read than rewards. One teacher commented that students need to set reading goals to help in motivating them to read.

Question one on the interview specifically asked, “Do you believe that your students have developed an intrinsic love for reading by using the Accelerated Reader program and why or why not?” One of the three teachers believed that the AR program helped children “discover that they are able to read a story and understand it well enough to be successful on a quiz and that encourages them to read, which in turn, helps to develop a love of reading.” The other two teachers believed that AR did not help students develop an intrinsic love for reading. One teacher responded, “Since I teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I felt that the kids needed more of a motivation to read. My age group is so involved with other outside activities that reading was being put on the back burner. In rare instances does AR develop an intrinsic love for reading.” The other teacher said that AR was just a motivational technique and students may or may not have an intrinsic love for reading prior to the program.

Question seven on the survey asked if the students liked the books used in the AR program. Teachers (99%) believed that the books used in the AR program were current and that students liked them so they believed the book selection did motivate the students to read books that they liked. The last question on the interview asked teachers if they thought the AR program kept their students challenged and why or why not. One of the teachers commented that her students tended to select books that were harder to read versus easier whether this was because

students were motivated to do better or not was not said. Another teacher said that her students wanted to receive rewards and then move on to reading more challenging books so both the rewards and the books motivated her students. She believed that AR encouraged her students to read each night and that AR was the only way that many children would do that. The last teacher interviewed believed that the challenging part for kids was to achieve their reading goal each quarter, but if a child didn't like to read or didn't take the time to read, he/she would not reach his/her reading goals.

### *Comprehension*

According to question four on the survey, most (77%) teachers believe that the Accelerated Reader program does help their students with comprehension. Question 10 on the survey asked, "Instead of the AR program what would you recommend for comprehension?" The choices given on questions ten were: (A) STAR program, (B) Directed Reading Activity (DRA) and (C) Other. Of the three choices for question 10, 68% of the teachers selected DRA as their first choice and the STAR program (36%) as their second choice.

When teachers were interviewed, question two asked whether they thought their students showed an improvement in their critical thinking skills through reading. One teacher confirmed that her students' critical thinking skills were improving because they were reading more and had more ideas to compare and share. The students could relate one story to another and see how characters have similar personalities. Another teacher did not believe that the AR program helped students with comprehension since the program was based on the lowest level of reading which she called the fact level.

Teachers were also asked in the interview (question 10) if AR helped their students master the standards they need to succeed on the standardized tests. The first teacher interviewed

believed that the AR quizzes give students valuable experience with multiple choice questions. The next teacher interviewed believed that AR helped students in looking for specific detail questions in a reading passage, but she didn't think it helped students with questions that asked for a more definitive answer. The last teacher interviewed replied that she did not think that AR helped her students master the standards they need. She believed that AR was only used as a supplement to the wide variety of reading strategies in the classroom.

### *Benefits*

Teachers were asked questions on the survey and in the interview regarding the benefits of the program. The survey (question eight) inquired if the students could use the program independently or if they had to obtain help from another student or the teacher. Out of the 22 teachers who responded, 12 teachers marked that the students could take the quizzes on their own; five indicated that they needed help and five didn't answer the question. Question nine on the survey asked, "Do you feel the AR program is beneficial to you as a teacher?" Teachers (77%) believed that AR was beneficial to them.

On the interview, question number three asked teachers if they believed they obtained reliable and objective information about their students' reading levels and why or why not. The answers on this question were mixed. The first teacher said she found the lower reading levels (preK-1) to be inconsistent, but when students read books leveled near the end of first grade or higher, the levels seem more on target. She did pay attention to the students' scores and if they did not pass a quiz, the students took the book home and reread it or she would give them an easier book to read. She also looked at the average book levels to determine whether students were reading books that may be too easy for them.

The second teacher interviewed said she was the one who selected the books for her students. She did not think that AR had reliable information on the reading levels. The last teacher interviewed said that she did get reliable information, especially with the STAR test that accompanies the program.

Question five on the interview asked, “Do you believe that the AR program has improved classroom management such as higher attendance, less discipline problems, or improved attitudes towards reading and school?” One teacher believed that the AR program did help with improving students’ attitudes towards reading and school. She believed that her students were excited about reading and they felt successful when they received a reward or did well on a quiz. This same teacher also added that AR encouraged her students to read at home each night. Another teacher was also in favor of AR. She said that the program motivated students to read books so they could achieve their goals. The AR program gave them a purpose for reading she said. The last teacher was not as positive in her praise for Accelerated Reader. This teacher replied that in a few small cases, the students enjoyed taking the quizzes, but in the vast majority, it really has not changed any of the students’ attitudes towards reading and school.

#### Discussion of Results

The guiding question for this study was: What are the classroom teachers’ perceptions of the Accelerated Reader program? Surveys and interviews were analyzed to answer this question. Specific areas in reading that were addressed in the survey were motivation, comprehension, and benefits. There were two questions each on the surveys and on the interviews that pertained to motivation, comprehension, and benefits. Teachers seemed to answer more positively on the surveys than they did when interviewed.

### Motivation

Teachers were asked whether they believed the AR program developed an intrinsic love for reading. Two of three teachers believed that AR might motivate some students to read, but AR does not help develop a love for reading. Two teachers believed that there was a wide selection of books from which to choose and their students wanted to continue to receive rewards and move on to reading more challenging books. Some of the students even tended to pick books that may be harder to read. According to the interviews, it does not seem that AR is developing an intrinsic love for reading.

All but one teacher indicated they believed the books used in the AR program were current and their students enjoyed the books they chose. According to the two survey questions on motivation, teachers believe that AR is helping their students become more motivated in wanting to read.

### Comprehension

While motivation is important to teachers in the classroom so is comprehension. Teachers were asked if their students showed any improvement in their critical thinking skills through reading by using Accelerated Reader. One teacher believed that AR has helped her students' critical thinking skills. The other two teachers believe that the questions offered on the AR quizzes are based on the lowest level of reading. Teachers do believe that AR may help with the more simple, detail questions. Question four on the survey indicated that 77% of the teachers believed that Accelerated Reader helped their students with comprehension.

### Benefits

Teachers also were asked what they perceived the benefits of AR to be. Teachers said they believe they know their students well enough to match the books with the students' reading

levels. One positive comment made was that the program shows a teacher how many quizzes each student has taken and each student's score. The teachers said they look at the scores and make their own decisions regarding each student's reading level and don't rely on AR.

Teachers were also asked whether they believed the Accelerated Reader program helped them with classroom management such as higher attendance, less discipline problems, or improved attitudes towards reading and school. One teacher thought AR only helped a small number of her students with their attitudes towards reading. The other two teachers thought that AR has helped with improving their students' attitudes towards reading and school. There were no comments on higher attendance and less discipline in the classroom. The benefits of the Accelerated Reader seemed minimal to the teachers. The teachers use the program because some or most of the students like to take the quizzes and feel a sense of accomplishment if they do well.

### Summary

Overall, the surveys indicated that teachers believe that Accelerated Reader does motivate their students and gives them a variety of books from which to choose. When interviewing the teachers on their beliefs whether or not the program creates an intrinsic love of reading and challenges their students, the teachers had mixed viewpoints. The majority of teachers believed that AR does help their students with comprehension. Teachers who were interviewed commented that AR did not help their students with their critical thinking skills. A little over half (55%) of the teachers believed that AR is beneficial to them in the classroom. Other teachers believed that AR is beneficial when used with the STAR program.

Because this program is being used in many classrooms, the way a teacher views Accelerated Reader will affect how a student looks at the program. Each teacher has his/her own



perceptions of Accelerated Reader and depending on how he/she believes will determine how it will be used.

## CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this investigation was to answer the question: What are classroom teachers' perceptions of the Accelerated Reader program? This chapter provides a summary of the research study. Conclusions drawn from the research will be presented here, as well as recommendations.

### Summary

This study analyzed teachers' perceptions of the Accelerated Reader program and whether they believed it was helped with motivation and comprehension and whether they believed there were additional benefits to using the program. Teachers were also asked to discuss other perceived benefits of the program. Many studies have been conducted on the advantages and disadvantages of AR. Some of the teachers surveyed and interviewed believe that AR motivates their students to read more. However, there are teachers who believe that there are other programs, like Directed Reading Activity and the STAR program that they would rather use instead of having AR in their classroom.

To gather information on teachers' perceptions of AR, a survey and an interview were used. Seven schools were given surveys and of the 150 surveys distributed, only 22 were returned. Upon completion of the surveys, the data were organized and placed into the categories of motivation, comprehension, and benefits. Once the surveys were returned, three teachers agreed to be interviewed and those questions and answers were placed into the same three categories as the survey of motivation, comprehension, and benefits.

## Conclusions

One conclusion that is obvious from this investigation is that teachers remain very diverse in their opinions as to their perceptions of the benefits of the AR program. In both the surveys and the interviews, some teachers voiced positive comments in terms of motivation and comprehension as well other perceived benefits of the program, while other teachers were not so positive. This indecisiveness is not unexpected as it is portrayed throughout the research related to AR. For example, Mathis (1996) concluded that after one year of students being exposed to AR, there was still no significant increase in reading comprehension scores from fifth grade to sixth grade. On the other hand, McGlinn and Parrish (2002) and Scott (1999) were in favor of Accelerated Reader. McGlinn and Parrish believed that Accelerated Reader helped ESL students, while Scott believed that AR helped students with disabilities.

Based on the data from this study, teachers are uncommitted as to whether they believe that AR assists with the development of lifelong reading habits as well as the intrinsic motivation necessary to become a lifelong reader, as Renaissance Learning claims. Volland, Topping, and Evans (1999) did believe that AR helped students in their reading achievement. However, Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipielewski (2003) could not support the AR claim that those who participated in the program became lifelong readers.

Teachers who were critical of the AR program seem to believe that the AR program works at the surface level, but does not provide experiences to work toward the advanced comprehension levels. Vygotsky (1978) believed that students will learn better if something is not too easy, but not beyond the students' learning potential. Some of the teachers interviewed believed that AR only gave simple recall questions. Accelerated Reader does not provide the social aspect that Vygotsky believed students need in order to grow in their learning.

## Recommendations

This study indicated that some teachers do perceive Accelerated Reader as a helpful tool in the classroom for motivation and comprehension, and is also beneficial to them as educators. Other teachers are more skeptical of the benefits of the Accelerated Reader. This section discusses recommendations for teachers and teacher educators.

### *For Teachers*

Since the AR program is generally designed for younger readers, teachers may also want to consider using AR for lower-leveled readers, and English Language Learners. By doing so, teachers could individualize the learning for struggling readers as well as for ELL readers. The Accelerated Reader program asks students basic questions that are text specific and the questions proceed in chronological order. For those who are just learning to read, the Accelerated Reader program motivates them to read many different books in a short time span which puts beginning readers into the habit of reading often.

### *For Teacher Educators*

Since Accelerated Reader is used primarily in grades one through five, it would benefit pre-service and in-service teachers if teacher educators discussed the advantages and disadvantages of AR. Making an AR program available for viewing may help pre-service and in-service teachers become more familiar with the program.

AR is a nationally-recognized program; therefore, all teacher education programs should explore the components of the program as well as read the literature related to the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the AR program.

### *For Further Study*

Teachers and students have been using the Accelerated Reader program in their classroom since 1988. Technology has grown since the late 1980s and there are many new and exciting learning methods for motivation and comprehension that may be beneficial to teachers in the classroom. These new technologies might enhance the benefits of AR, so once the AR quizzes are converted to new technologies, and then studies could be conducted to examine various formats for the quizzes using a variety of technologies.

AR has the capability of allowing teachers to generate tests for books that are not included in the package. Studies that explore differences between teacher-made tests and AR-generated tests might yield interesting results for assessing reading performance.

Studies that explore a variety of motivational strategies might be necessary to determine if AR is as successful at motivating students as other strategies. Since one of the reported goals of AR is to motivate students, it may be helpful to compare it to other motivational techniques to determine its relative effectiveness.

### *Summary*

According to this study, teachers' perceptions of the Accelerated Reader program are mostly positive. It is a program that the younger students seem to enjoy and the teachers believe that this program motivates their students and helps them with their basic comprehension skills. Teachers believe that AR benefits them as teachers as it provides an alternative method to helping with comprehension and motivation. Accelerated Reader will continue to be used in the classroom as long as teachers believe it is helping their students.

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APPENDIX A  
LETTER OF CONSENT

Bowling Green State University  
School of Teaching and Learning  
527 Education Building  
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403

Dear Educator:

I am a Master's student in the Department of Education at Bowling Green State University conducting research under the supervision of Cindy Hendricks. I am researching teachers' practices and perceptions towards the Accelerated Reader program in grades 1-5 in the Lucas County school system. Since you are in the teaching field, your opinions are important to this study.

There are two phases to this project. In the first phase, I have randomly selected elementary schools in the Lucas County area and have sent each teacher an enclosed questionnaire. Completion of the questionnaire would take approximately five minutes of your time. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, if you choose to not complete the survey this will not affect any grades or class standing with BGSU. If you would like to write additional comments on the questionnaire, please feel free to do so.

In the second phase of the study, I would like to conduct follow-up interviews with those who are willing from the group that has filled out the questionnaire. Participation in the interview would again be completely voluntary. Your involvement in the first phase of the study does not obligate you to participate in the second part. You may withdraw at any time. All information that you provide through your participation in the study will be kept confidential, any possible quotes used in the study will be anonymous. Once completed, feedback will be given to teachers so that they may use the program more effectively in their classrooms. If you would be willing to answer a few interview questions, please complete the form at the bottom so that I may contact you. The interview will take only fifteen minutes and would be over the phone at your convenience.

I would appreciate if you would return the completed questionnaire in the self-addressed, stamped envelope by September 19, 2008. Completion of this survey constitutes your consent to participate. If after receiving this letter, you have any questions about this study, or would like additional information, please contact my Chair, Dr. Cindy Hendricks at 419-372-7336 or email at [cindyg@bgsu.edu](mailto:cindyg@bgsu.edu) or you may contact me at [jnkfrancis@buckeye-express.com](mailto:jnkfrancis@buckeye-express.com). You may also contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board with any Concerns about participant rights at 419-372-7716.

Sincerely,

Karen Francis

Yes, I would be willing to help you with your interview. You may contact me at the phone or email that I have listed below:

Name and contact source: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B.  
SURVEY TO TEACHERS

- 1.) How many years have you used the Accelerated Reader program in your classroom?
  - A. 1-3 years
  - B. 4-6 years
  - C. 7-10 years
- 2.) Whom do you share the students' scores with (Circle all those that apply)
  - A. Parents
  - B. Administration
  - C. Other teachers
- 3.) How often is the Accelerated Reader program used in your classroom?
  - A. 3-5 times a week
  - B. 1-2 times a week
  - C. 3 times a month or less
- 4.) Do you feel the Accelerated Reader program helps students with comprehension?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
- 5.) Do you think the rewards that are offered to students motivate them to want to read the Accelerated Reader books?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
- 6.) Does your Administration follow-up on your AR results?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
- 7.) Are the books used in the program current and do the students like them?
  - A. Books are current and students like them.
  - B. Books are current and students do not like them.
  - C. Books are not current.
- 8.) Do you administer the AR program or do the students do it by themselves?
  - A. Students take quizzes on their own.
  - B. Students usually need help from another student or teacher.
- 9.) Do you feel the AR program is beneficial to you as a teacher?
  - A. Agree strongly
  - B. Somewhat agree
  - C. Disagree
- 10.) Instead of the AR program, what would you recommend instead for comprehension?
  - A. STAR program
  - B. DRA
  - C. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions for teachers who have used the AR program

1. Do you believe that your students have developed an intrinsic love for reading by using the Accelerate Reader program? Why or why not?
2. Have your students showed an improvement in their critical thinking skills through their reading? How?
3. Has the AR program helped you obtain reliable and objective information about your students' reading levels? Why or why not?
4. Has the AR program helped your students master the standards they need to succeed on the standardized tests? Why or why not?
5. Do you believe that the AR program has improved classroom management such as higher attendance, less discipline problems, or improved attitudes towards reading and school? What has improved or what has not improved?
6. Has the AR program kept your students challenged? Are they performing at their maximum? Why or why not?



APPENDIX D.

DATA RESULTS OF SURVEY

- 1.) How many years have you used the Accelerated Reader program in your classroom?
  - A. 1-3 years 30%
  - B. 4-6 years 35%
  - C. 7-10 years 35%
- 2.) Whom do you share the students' scores with (Circle all those that apply)
  - A. Parents 77%
  - B. Administration 18%
  - C. Other teachers 36%
- 3.) How often is the Accelerated Reader program used in your classroom?
  - A. 3-5 times a week 68%
  - B. 1-2 times a week 27%
  - C. 3 times a month or less 5%
- 4.) Do you feel the Accelerated Reader program helps students with comprehension?
  - A. Yes 77%
  - B. No 23%
- 5.) Do you think the rewards that are offered to students motivate them to want to read the Accelerated Reader books?
  - A. Yes 63%
  - B. No 37%
- 6.) Does your Administration follow-up on your AR results?
  - A. Yes 45%
  - B. No 55%
- 7.) Are the books used in the program current and do the students like them?
  - A. Books are current and students like them. 99%
  - B. Books are current and students do not like them. 0%
  - C. Books are not current. 1%
- 8.) Do you administer the AR program or do the students do it by themselves?
  - A. Students take quizzes on their own. 5%
  - B. Students usually need help from another student or teacher. 45%
- 9.) Do you feel the AR program is beneficial to you as a teacher?
  - A. Agree strongly 77%
  - B. Somewhat agree 23%
  - C. Disagree 0%
- 10.) Instead of the AR program, what would you recommend instead for comprehension?
  - A. STAR program 36%
  - B. DRA 68%
  - C. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ 14%

APPENDIX E.

INTERVIEW ANSWERS SUBJECT 1

Interview questions for teachers who have used the AR program

1. Do you believe that your students have developed an intrinsic love for reading by using the Accelerate Reader program? Why or why not?

No, I do not. Since I teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I felt that the kids needed more of a motivation to read. My age group is so involved with other outside activities that reading was being put on the back burner. The AR program seems to provide a motivation to read. In rare instances does it develop that intrinsic love for reading.

2. Have your students showed an improvement in their critical thinking skills through their reading? How?

No, since the AR program is based on the lowest level of reading—the knowledge (fact) level--the problem-solving and critical thinking skills do not improve by using it.

3. Has the AR program helped you obtain reliable and objective information about your students' reading levels? Why or why not?

Yes, I do think I can get a grasp of that, especially with the Star Test that accompanies the program. As I work with small groups who are reading an AR book, I can tell if they are comprehending it or not, and can advance them to a higher level book, or back them off to a lower level book.

4. Has the AR program helped your students master the standards they need to succeed on the standardized tests? Why or why not?

No, I don't think so. It is used only as a supplement to our wide variety of reading strategies in the classroom.

5. Do you believe that the AR program has improved classroom management such as higher attendance, less discipline problems, or improved attitudes towards reading and school? What has improved or what has not improved?

I would say in a small number of cases, kids enjoy reading and taking the tests. In the vast majority, it really has not changed any attitudes toward school. Again, it is only a small piece of the larger pie.

6. Has the AR program kept your students challenged? Are they performing at their maximum? Why or why not?

The challenging part for kids has been to achieve their reading goal each quarter. They set a goal for points based on their independent reading range. The “reward” in the past has been a popcorn party in the classroom during lunch at the end of each quarter. The successes increase as the year goes on, but if a child doesn't like to read or doesn't take

the time to read, they normally don't make their reading goals. I think the only way you can get a child to perform at his or her maximum is to utilize literature circles in the classroom, where the child is responsible for discussion and the structure of the group, with the teacher monitoring.

APPENDIX F.

INTERVIEW ANSWERS SUBJECT 2

### Interview questions for teachers who have used the AR program

1. Do you believe that your students have developed an intrinsic love for reading by using the Accelerate Reader program? Why or why not?

I certainly think it helps. At our level, it is sometimes hard for parents to find books that are "just right" books for their children. By sending home AR books, children discover that they are able to read a story and understand it well enough to be successful on a quiz. Our children love taking the quizzes and receiving the little rewards that we give them. All of that encourages them to read, which in turn, helps to develop that love of reading.

2. Have your students showed an improvement in their critical thinking skills through their reading? How?

I don't think so. Most of the questions at our level do not require critical thinking.

3. Has the AR program helped you obtain reliable and objective information about your students' reading levels? Why or why not?

Yes and no. I select books for them during the first quarter and I choose books that I know are appropriate for them. For some of the kids, I am not certain who is reading the book at home--the parents or the child. The questions are general comprehension questions--no higher level thinking. So I know who has a general understanding of the book. The more I think about it, I don't think I get really reliable info about the reading levels. At least, nothing that would be new information for me.

4. Has the AR program helped your students master the standards they need to succeed on the standardized tests? Why or why not?

I know our children have been very successful on the standardized tests. I think the AR would help in looking for specific detail questions in a reading passage. I don't think it helps with questions that ask for more than a definitive answer.

5. Do you believe that the AR program has improved classroom management such as higher attendance, less discipline problems, or improved attitudes towards reading and school? What has improved or what has not improved?

I think it helps with improved attitudes towards reading and school. This is a program that has our children excited. They feel great success when they receive a little reward or take a quiz with 10 questions (We usually have 5). I recognize the students in my newsletter as they reach a goal of 25, 50, 75, or 100 books. It is great for one's self-esteem and encourages the students to read at home each night.

6. Has the AR program kept your students challenged? Are they performing at their maximum? Why or why not?

They are challenged. They want to continue to receive rewards and move on to reading more challenging books. It encourages them to read each night and I think AR is the only way that many children would do that. Each year I find the probably 3/4 of the class really strives to reach the goal of 100 books. The remaining 1/4 don't seem to care.



APPENDIX G.  
INTERVIEW ANSWERS SUBJECT 3

Interview questions for teachers who have used the AR program

1. Do you believe that your students have developed an intrinsic love for reading by using the Accelerate Reader program? Why or why not?

No. I think AR is a motivational technique used to provide students with a reason to read. They set goals and try to achieve their goals through reading. They may or may not have an intrinsic love of reading prior to the program.

2. Have your students showed an improvement in their critical thinking skills through their reading? How?

Yes my students' critical thinking skills are improving. The more they read, the more ideas they have to compare and share. They read in their guided reading groups, at home, and they read AR books too. They can relate one story to another. They see how characters have similar personalities. They see similar themes in the stories too.

3. Has the AR program helped you obtain reliable and objective information about your students' reading levels? Why or why not?

I find the lower reading levels (prek-1) to be inconsistent. Levels can be graded too high or too low. When students read books leveled near the end of first grade or higher, the levels seem more on target. I pay attention to the students' scores on the AR quizzes. If they don't pass a quiz, they can take the book home and reread or I give them an easier book to read. Number of quizzes taken and percentage correct is helpful information. I look at the average book levels to see if students are reading books that are too easy for them. But I don't put a lot of weight on reading levels.

4. Has the AR program helped your students master the standards they need to succeed on the standardized tests? Why or why not?

AR quizzes give students valuable experience with multiple choice questions. They eventually read the questions themselves and choose the answers. They learn to read for information so they can choose the correct answers.

5. Do you believe that the AR program has improved classroom management such as higher attendance, less discipline problems, or improved attitudes towards reading and school? What has improved or what has not improved?

Students are motivated to read books so they can achieve their goals. They choose their own books to take home. They may read books independently or with partners. They have a purpose for reading.

6. Has the AR program kept your students challenged? Are they performing at their maximum? Why or why not?

Students have a wide range of fiction and nonfiction AR books to choose from. They tend to pick books that are harder to read versus easier. They always have something to do when their work is complete.