Independent Readers Increase Library Use

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JoAnne Patricia Harrell
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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the use of the Accelerated Reader program at Ellis Elementary School in Bekling, Michigan. The students were introduced to the program in January, 1999. The students were encouraged to use the program through the end of the school year, June, 1999.

The Accelerated Reader (AR) program is a reading program which uses the computer to test students on literature-based books from the library they have read independently. Students earn points for the tests that they pass based on the number right and the difficulty of the book. The computer keeps track, for the students and teachers, of the number of tests taken, points earned and grade level of the books. The students and teachers may view the students' reading log at any time.

At the beginning of the program, the students completed the S.T.A.R. Reading Test to obtain a grade-equivalent score. This score allowed them to locate books in the library at their own level. In the library, the AR books are coded with colored stickers according to the level of the book. At the end of the program, the students completed the S.T.A.R. Reading test again.

A comparison was made between two third grade classrooms. A significant difference was found between the number of tests taken by students in the classroom with a teacher who incorporated the AR program into the daily curriculum, than the teacher who asked students to use the AR program as something extra. During the six months of the study there was no significant difference between the mean grade-equivalent scores for these two classrooms.
CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM AND PROPOSAL

Statement of the Problem:

The problem to be investigated is to determine whether or not students will increase the number of books read independently that they borrow from the library. Students will participate in the Accelerated Reader™ program. They will read the school library materials independently. Will this increase in independent reading help the students improve their grade level reading score? The students will complete the STAR Reading™ test to obtain a grade equivalent score prior to the use of the program and at the completion of the program.

Rationale of the Study:

The more a child reads, the more capable the child is at reading. We know that a student who reads fluently will do well in reading, as well as in other subjects. We know those who spend their time reading independently become fluent, competent readers. However, current reports say that “only 29 percent of fourth graders read at or above the “proficiency” for their age group” (Lord, 1999, p. 54). Is this what we want for our nation? Would an increase of independent reading habits improve this statistic?

Recently the federal government has been working on bills that would allow states to spend federal dollars on reading reforms. What kind of reform is necessary? Recommendations have been made to provide more attention toward motivating students to read independently, rather than just focusing on teaching reading skills. “Personal, independent reading, either in school or out-of-school, is extremely important” (Fitzgibbons, 1997). The key question facing parents and teachers is how
to motivate youngsters, especially at-risk children, to become active engaged readers (McNinch, 1997).

The Seattle Times reported in the fall of 1998 all second-grade teachers sat down with their students to listen to them read. They were completing the first state-required test for children so young. This test focused on mainly reading accuracy and fluency. The goal was to identify students who were reading well below second-grade level in order to catch them up before the year was over (Shaw, 1998).

Some schools have found that the most effective reform can consist of some simple steps. Providing access to books by keeping the library open after school, in evenings and during summer, encouraging deeper involvement from the parents, and conducting preschool literacy programs are examples of easily implemented strategies for increasing independent reading.

The Accelerated Reader (AR), a computer-based reading and management program for students in grades kindergarten through twelve (Briggs & Clark, 1997), is designed to encourage independent reading. It makes the connection between home, school, library, and technology. This program is designed to supplement the regular classroom reading program. AR increases the amount of literature reading practice of students (Briggs & Clark, 1997). The Accelerated Reader covers more than 22,000 books and the company plans to add 8,000 titles by the end of the year (Electronic Education Report, 1999).

The Accelerated Reader has shown success in elementary and middle school settings. After six months of using AR, a group of students out--measured their counterparts in silent reading comprehension, oral reading fluency and comprehension. Comparing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills pass rates of AR schools to the
median pass rates of non-AR schools, the AR schools tended to score better in reading and writing (Briggs & Clark, 1997).

Because of the past success of this program, it has been implemented at Ellis Elementary School in Belding, Michigan. More specifically the teachers and staff at Ellis Elementary were in-serviced by an experienced reading teacher who explained the program. The school district provided the computer testing program, Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (S.T.A.R.) published by Advantage Learning Systems. The school district provided the Accelerated Reader(AR) program and the technology to the elementary school. Ellis Elementary provided in its library the books that correspond to the AR tests, labeled for easy accessibility by the students.

The classroom teacher and the reading teacher introduced the program to individual classrooms. Information regarding AR was sent home to the parents through the school office. Individual teachers updated parents through classroom newsletters as they used the program. Teachers provided time for the students to complete the S.T.A.R. Reading test at the beginning of the program. This test provided for the teacher, student and parent a diagnostic report with an instructional level, a grade equivalent, a percentile rank and an estimated Zone of Proximal Development for independent fiction reading.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a theoretical concept. This concept was developed by the Russian child-development psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky stated that a person acquiring language concepts will learn most effectively if the concepts are not too easy, yet not beyond the language learning capacity of that person. In independent literature-based reading a student's ZPD includes the range of books that will challenge a student without frustrating him/her (Institute for Academic Excellence, 1998).
When students know their estimated Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), they are able to go to the library to find a book that fits their range. The students read their books. They may read them more than once. When they are ready, the students complete AR testing on the computer, either in the classroom or the library. Then they are ready to find other books.

At the completion of each testing session, students receive a TOPS Report, which stands for Three Opportunities to Praise a Student. This report provides immediate feedback. It is an information link between tester, teacher, and parent. It is an opportunity for the student to receive praise from three different people. The report can provide negative feedback. If the student fails the test, it means the student did not have a positive experience with the book and the teacher may need to intervene.

For every book the students read, they are awarded points. The points are based on the difficulty of the book and the number of comprehension questions correct. The computer logs the books and points for each student. The students may view their reading logs at any time. Students' points will remain with them as they progress through the elementary school.

An Accelerated Reader Board was maintained throughout the year. The school set a goal for total points earned. The school kept track of how many total points were earned by the student body. A goal was set for the number of students to become Independent Readers. The total number of Independent Readers was displayed on the board. When a student reached ten points, they were awarded an Independent Reader Certificate, pencil and other prizes. The student's picture was taken and placed on the Accelerated Reader Board.
The school hosted a Family Reading Night to encourage parents to get involved in the Accelerated Reader program. The students brought their parents to the library, chose a book, read it to the parent and took the test in the computer laboratory before they left. Parents were able to view the student's reading logs and help add points to the goals. Parents were encouraged to take books home and listen to their children read to them.

Background of the Study:

Motivating students to read independently has been a problem for decades. It remains a current issue. In the state of California, governmental and educational leaders have made the reading curriculum a top priority after their 4th graders scored in last place on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Jonson, 1998). Children's motivation for literacy are multidimensional and complex. Teachers have long maintained that motivation is crucial if we are to set our students on the road toward becoming lifelong readers (Hertz & Swanson, 1998).

Many studies have found that student attitude towards reading can be a factor that influences how much a student reads. It has been found that attitudes are acquired through experience. Attitudes can be observed through behavior and may persist over time. Attitudes are learned responses which can be influenced by environmental factors such as school, home and peers (Fitzgibbons, 1997). A teacher's attitude regarding reading can affect the attitude of the students' regarding reading.

It has been found that the amount of time spent reading by children in the classroom is small. Most students don't read very much during their free time. Poor readers spend less time reading than good readers. For poor readers, most of the
reading time is spent practicing skills not reading (McNinch, Schaffer, Campell & Rakes, 1999). If students don’t read much, how are they going to get to be independent readers?

“Achieving independence in reading, the ultimate goal of any instructional reading program, begins at the emergent reader stage and evolves over time” states Forsyth and Roller in an article in the December 1997, The Reading Teacher, titled “Helping children become independent readers.” Independent reading practice in any classroom is dependent on the teacher. The teacher must actively promote independent reading. The teacher must plan for this as it does not happen automatically. To become proficient and accurate decoders, early readers must have time to practice independently. This will lead to fluid and automatic readers. Between second and fifth grade, those students who spent time reading independently had more academic growth (Jonson, 1998). Those who did not read often lost academic ground.

For motivation, effort, learning and attitudes to improve, students need to be interested in what is being taught and have access to materials that interest them (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Students need to have access to a varied collection of books, fiction and non-fiction in the classroom. Effective literacy teachers plan with the librarian for regular visits to the library. Children should plan for their library visit before arriving by thinking about the kind of books they want (Jonson, 1998).

Goal setting and self-monitoring are effective strategies to help motivate children. Goal setting directs the students to focus their attention, challenges them to think of ways to reach the goal and motivates them to meet the goal. Motivation is based on both internal and external factors. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational
strategies can be effective. For goal setting to more effective, students need to receive feedback from the teacher, parent, or be self-monitored. Goals that students set for themselves are often more effective than those mandated by the teacher. These strategies have the potential to change student behavior (Hertz & Swanson, 1998).

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the various influences on students by the Accelerated Reader program in use at Ellis Elementary School. More specifically, it would like to determine if students spent more time at independent reading through the use of the Accelerated Reader program. It would like to determine if students improved their grade equivalent score after using the program.

Since instituting this program in 1998-99 and continuing it in 1999-2000, we want to initiate an evaluation of the types of progress gained. This study will focus on the independent reading as measured by the number of books read and the number of points earned from January through June 1999. It will compare the grade equivalent obtained prior to the program with the grade equivalent at the end of the program.

Goals and Objectives:

One of the goals of this study is to measure the increase in the number of books that were read independently by the students of Ellis Elementary School during the period from January 1999 through June 1999. In order to show students are reading more books, the number of books circulated through the library was monitored. The program began in January and continued through June 1999. The number of books checked out during the eight weeks prior to the study will be compared to the first eight weeks of the study.
The next goal of the study will be to determine the relationship of teacher involvement with student performance. To illustrate this point two third grade classes will be compared. In one classroom the teacher incorporated Accelerated Reader into the daily reading curriculum. In the other classroom the teacher let the students use the program independently. The total number of tests taken by the students for each classroom will be compared.

The third goal of the study is to evaluate if students increase in independent reading will affect their grade level score. To accomplish this, the two third grade classes will be compared again. The comparison will be the mean grade equivalent on the pretest of the S.T.A.R. Reading test from each classroom and the mean grade equivalent on the posttest of the S.T.A.R. Reading test from each classroom.

Key Terms

Accelerated Reader: a computer-based reading and management program developed and distributed by Advantage Learning Systems.

Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (S.T.A.R.): a computer-based reading test and database.

Zone of Poximal Development ZPD: the range of book readability levels that will result in optimal growth in reading ability. It is a range of books that will challenge a student without causing frustration or loss of motivation. This concept was developed by Lev Vygotsky.
Limitations of the Study:

The threats to the internal validity to this design are addressed below.

a) History—The students are coming from different home environments and support. The teachers using the program may not implement it to the full extent.

b) Maturation—Maturation will be somewhat of a threat when studying reading achievement by recognizing individual development. An end of the year, June 1999, S.T.A.R. testing may help to see growth.

c) Testing—Using the same S.T.A.R. testing will decrease the amount of error. However, students under any testing situation may not perform their best at that given time.

d) Instrumentation—Just obtaining the number of books circulated does not prove they have been read. However, the number of points will give some validity to the number of books read.

e) Sample—The sample used all students in the grades 2,3,4 of 1998-1999 school year. The student body consists of many at-risk students. This factor will not be examined in this study.

f) Mortality—Students may move from the district thus not being able to complete the September 1999 S.T.A.R. testing session.

g) Selection—This study is unique to the student body at Ellis Elementary School, Belding Area Schools, Belding, Michigan thus results may be unique and may not be repeatable elsewhere.

Summary

This study will ask, if a school uses the Accelerated Reader program can there be an increase in the number of library books read independently by elementary students? Would these students become better independent readers?
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In order to address the problem of increasing student independent reading of literature-based books through the use of Accelerated Reader, we need to look at the literature regarding students as independent readers. Student attitude, motivation, support from home and school, and accessibility to books are factors that contribute to students' independent reading habits. Literature regarding the Accelerated Reader program needs to be reviewed.

Attitude Toward Reading

Students' attitudes towards reading include both cognitive and affective aspects, such as feelings toward reading, readiness for reading, and evaluative beliefs about reading. Attitude is influenced by beliefs about what will happen when a student engages in reading. Dissatisfying results will negatively effect the students' attitude, while positive experiences result in positive attitudes. Many researchers agree that motivation is related to attitude and several of them have identified powerful motivators in home, school and peer environments (Fitzgibbons, 1997).

To help improve some students' attitudes towards reading a Saturday Reading Club was offered to early elementary students in an urban school. Trained university volunteers were used in the literature based project. The results of the study were very positive. The objectives of heightening awareness about the pleasures of reading and promoting the value of literacy at home were achieved. Kindergarten students showed an increase in their liking of books, storytime and receiving books as presents.
Increases were seen in the choice of reading books as a favored personal and school activity among all grade levels. The results suggest that literature based programs can have a positive effect on attitudes toward literacy in young children (Romatowski, Trepanier-Street & Peterson, 1993).

Students relate that they loved to read when they were young, but school made them hate it. Enthusiastic readers remained enthusiastic about their out-of-school reading, but hated what they had to do for school. The problem seems to be with what students are expected to read in the classroom and what they themselves would choose to read. If children were allowed more choices in what they read they would read more and learn more. If reading attitudes are to remain positive, it is important to have time for free reading as part of the school day. Allowing students choices about what they read (Virgil, 1994).

Motivation to Read

Motivation to become a better reader is a goal all teachers have for students. Sometimes the teacher must implement programs to help motivate the students. Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic.

Intrinsic motivation is the desire to do something for its own sake. It is the pleasure we get in doing something well. Extrinsic motivation is an incentive that is not part of the activity. It is motivation that comes from outside. Intrinsic motivation is desirable and should be encouraged. However, we cannot assume that all children will be motivated by a natural love of reading. We must provide the desire through rewards.
Some believe that if you reward a behavior like reading, the behavior will be extinguished as soon as the reward is removed. Others believe that tangible rewards can communicate to students the value that school places on literacy and provide immediate reinforcement of their success (Institute for Academic Excellence, 1997).

For struggling readers the focus of instruction should be to repair any damage in self-concepts through motivating successful experiences. Struggling readers should not be separated from their peers. They should not be given below-grade level basal readers or easy books. These students need opportunities to read independently from appropriately challenging material. The books should interest these students. When students have a high interest in what they read, they can go beyond the expected reading level (Worthy, 1996). An extrinsic reward may help interest struggling readers.

Home Environment

Children's home environments are the site of children's earliest language learning and are a significant factor in language development. Teachers know that parents can make the difference in the opportunities for students to learn reading (Morningstar, 1999). A typical middle-class child enters first grade with approximately 1,000 hours of being read to, while the corresponding child from a low-income family averages just 25 hours, effecting the child's long-term success in schooling (Neuman, 1999).

Research has been substantiating what literate families have done naturally and intuitively. They have been sharing books with children for their delight and enjoyment. These families did not focus on teaching reading. Yet their children have
become avid readers. The most significant factor of good readers in second grade and fifth grade was whether they had been read to before coming to school (Huck, 1992).

The structure of a written story is not learned through oral conversation. Story structure is learned through actual read aloud experiences. Children who have not been read to have not experienced the complexity, style and structure of literature. Children who come to school with only the oral language of the home, may find written text foreign and unpredictable (Cole, 1998).

There has been an increase in the interest and awareness of the family as the early educator. Many programs are beginning that will broaden access to education and to enhance family skills in reading, writing and communication (Neuman, Caperelli & Kee, 1998). Even if parents are not good at reading, they could provide a link to the love of literacy through library use. Educators can build on the diverse family experiences that link love to literacy (Genisio, 1999).

The term literacy refers to all activities linked to reading and the handling of books. Here are accounts of how three families linked the library with love of literacy. “The house is not air conditioned. We live only a couple of blocks away. The children get the limit of books. They like coming in here to check out books. The library is free. We come here a lot because we want our kids to love it,” say Mike and Noreen.

Jacob, a single father with three boys states, “They go to the kid section. I look over the magazines. They do their thing. I do mine. My kids got what they need to have about reading, and we come here to this wonderful library. The rest will be up to the school.”
"I think reading is important, but I don't do a lot of it. I think that when my kids are in the library they know that this is the place they are going to read. We come in to get our books and kill time. I'm not working, and I am glad because I get to spend the day with the boys. So we make this a part of our routine," relates a young single mother.

Each family was pleased with their link to literacy, even though they were not readers at home. Though the parents did not carry out the traditional book sharing at home, they made provisions to compensate for this (Genisio, 1999).

**Classroom Reading Environment**

If we could hear stories of great readers, our teaching methods would change. Great readers would probably not tell stories of making shoe-box dioramas of beloved novels or writing new endings to published stories. Great readers would tell about weaving reading together with people and passions of their lives. Reading is a big thing we do with our whole lives (Calkins, 1997).

When students enter school, it is up to the teacher to decide the amount of time spent on reading in the classroom. The amount of time for reading instruction is a critical variable in the ultimate achievement of reading. The amount of time for actual reading is critical, too. Teachers say they want to spend a substantial amount of classroom time on reading instruction, with most of that time spent on direct reading of text. However, actual teacher practice does not parallel with perception. Teachers are failing to meet their own recommendations (McNinch, Schaffer, Cambell, & Rakes, 1999).
When teachers focus their attention on finding students reading levels, they tend to focus too much attention on the errors that students make. Making mistakes becomes the measure of performance. Concentrating on errors is inherently negative. Mistakes become too important.

When the classroom atmosphere encourages self-selection, usual reading level performances become less meaningful. When a student is allowed to choose the material because of the interest in the subject, students can go beyond their expected reading level (Hunt, 1997).

To help students make gains in reading it will be necessary to increase the volume of children’s playful, stimulating experiences with good books. Listening and responding to stories is the basic means by which children come to understand the functions and structure of written language. Therefore it is necessary for teachers to flood the early elementary classroom with high-interest illustrated storybooks. It will be necessary to ensure that children interact with books frequently and productively (Neuman, 1999).

Independent Reading

The ultimate goal of any instructional reading program is achieving independence in reading. Promoting students’ control of reading relies on conscious and systematic instructional decisions. Here are four basic goals for reading instruction. Choose good books. Use good strategies. Make reading make sense. Read a lot.
Each of these simple goals supports a belief about how students become independent readers. Making reading make sense helps students self-monitor their progress. Good reading strategies help students gain flexibility and control for getting meaning from the text. Students can take control of the responsibility for their own reading when taught how to choose good books. Reading a lot will help students gain fluency. Children who gain control of their reading processes learn to enjoy reading and have it become a part of their lives (Forsyth & Roller, 1998).

For independent reading to be successful we must strongly believe in its worth. If independent reading is to be a major part of the instructional program, first we must develop positive feelings about it. A major factor in creating favorable attitudes is the principal's leadership. Rather than fall to the mandates of national standards as the driving force of instruction, teachers should find a balance that would support lifelong literacy through independent reading (Sanacore, 1994).

Independent reading time is not just 15 minutes of sustained silent reading. It is an integral part of teaching where the teacher is not a passive observer. The teacher can help students select books, model reading strategies and give feedback on student progress. To make independent reading time worthwhile, a teacher needs to make it a key part of every day. The teacher needs to provide opportunities for all levels and styles of readers in the classroom. The students must have some way to respond to their reading orally, in writings or drawings. The teacher needs to be sure students know good strategies and how they should practice them during independent reading. The teacher should spend some of the time at the end of independent reading time to discuss strategies that the students practiced. Let the students share what they learned about themselves as a reader. For example, ask students what strategies they used
while reading. This will provide students the opportunity to become better readers (Tabersk, 1998).

**Accelerated Reader**

**Motivation.** Accelerated Reader program can motivate students in two ways. The first way is the goal setting strategy. When students begin the program, they can decide for themselves how many books they plan to read and how many points they plan to earn. This goal setting gives the students a purpose as learners. When students design goals for themselves, their reading becomes more intentional as they learn about themselves in the process (Hertz & Swanson, 1998).

The other way to motivate the students is by offering them a variety of books at varying levels from which to read. Students need to be interested in what they are reading and have access to the materials that interest them (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999).

**Rewards.** The points the students earn for taking Accelerated Reader tests are not extrinsic rewards. AR points are simply a quantitative measure of reading practice. They provide students and teachers with feedback information about reading performance. Points serve as a crucial part of goal setting and monitoring student progress. They can be used as the basis of a reading incentive system. Each teacher or school can decide how to use the points based on the students need for extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic rewards are by no means essential to reading motivation but they can be a powerful tool, especially for students who need a jump start to discover the love of books (Institute for Academic Excellence, 1997).
Moyer and Perez found that their students gained in reading comprehension and confidence in their skills by being rewarded for taking AR tests. Slowly the students started to gain confidence in their reading ability. The extrinsic rewards became secondary to the more intrinsic reward of seeing their scores on the computer screen (Moyer & Perez, 1999).

**Teacher Support.** Teachers who are committed to helping students become lifelong readers can adjust their programs to motivate students to read for pleasure both in school and at home. They can provide time for students to interact socially with others as they share books. They can give attention to independent reading time, and provide a variety of books (Hertz & Swanson, 1998). More time is spent in the classroom at practicing reading skills rather than reading. Poor readers spend less time reading in free time than good readers (McNinch, Schaffer, Campbell, & Rakes, 1999).

AR can help with these areas. This program is designed to supplement the regular classroom reading program. AR increases the amount of literature reading practice of students (Briggs & Clark, 1997). Since AR is used in conjunction with the library the students are able to check out books to read at school or at home. Students may go to the library at any time to exchange the books they have read. The program offers approximately 30,000 titles (Electronic Education Report, 1999). With this number of books available, there should be something for every reader.

**Test Feedback.** Everytime a student takes a test he/she can receive immediate feedback and praise. The student receives a TOPS report. This report states the name of the book, the points earned and the percentage correct. The person administering the test can praise the child. The teacher can use this report to praise the child. The student can take the report home and receive praise from his/her parents.
Family Involvement. The family can support the student in a few ways. One way is to be sure to listen to the child read his/her book at home before the test is taken. Another way of showing support is to look at the TOPS report and praise the child for his/her efforts. A third way to support the use of the AR program is to attend the Family Reading Night.

The goal of the Family Reading Night is to bring families together away from work and worries and to have fun reading with each other. In many families, the importance of reading gets lost in busy schedules. These evenings provide opportunities for families to attend a regular reading event that is worthwhile. It can be as simply as having the school library open one night a week. Families can drop in to choose a book, read together and take the test. The key to these nights is that a child comes with a parent or responsible adult (Paul, 1996).

Individualizing the Program. The Accelerated Reader program uses the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD); the point between unchallenging and frustratingly difficult text, the point at which maximum growth occurs. It is the zone in which the child is both challenged and presented new vocabulary, but also in which there are enough context clues that the child can construct meaning without being frustrated. Reading teachers and library staff can encourage students to read at their level or slightly above. Students become conscious of reading levels and can generally make wise choices (Hamilton, 1997).

The Accelerated Reader program gives students the ability to be an individual learner. Students keep track of the books they have read in a folder. Students can look in the folder and know immediately how they are doing in reading. Students are
proud of themselves as they walk out of the library with a new book that they have chosen themselves. This confidence lets us know the student will continue to read in the future (Burr, & Tatarian, 1997).

AR assesses reading comprehension, tracks performance and provides reports for teachers and students. By providing timely, accurate information, this task-level system allows teachers to adjust instruction and address the individual needs of the student.

Two essential kinds of feedback information provided by AR help teachers guide students to effective reading practice. The reading level assigned to each book on the AR list provides an approximation of the challenge presented by the text. The percent correct that a student achieves on an AR book test is a measure of how well the student comprehended the book. This immediate feedback can foster metacognitive development for the students. The student's motivation is enhanced by increased self-control and mastery (Institute for Academic Excellence, 1997). More academic growth will occur for students in second through fifth grade, if they spend more time reading independently (Jonson, 1998).

**Testing Design.** The AR tests that students complete when finished reading a book look simple, a series of multiple-choice questions on the content of the book. However, it is an assessment tool that is carefully designed to meet multiple criteria. It provides efficient, unbiased assessment of comprehension, it motivates students to practice reading and it gives teachers good information about the reading behaviors of students (Institute for Academic Excellence, 1998).
AR quiz questions focus on a book's key facts and events. They include questions about important features of story grammar or text structure. They measure inferential thinking skills and assess literal comprehension. The purpose of the quiz is to answer the question, "Has the student read the book?" The multiple-choice question format aligns well with the purpose of this assessment (Institute for Academic Excellence, 1998). Although the tests are not difficult, they are thorough. A student cannot pass a test without having actually read the book. With electronic testing, the teacher does not need to deal with book reports to know the student has read the book (Hamilton, 1997).

Program Success. The Accelerated Reader has been successful with individual students. One student became an avid reader. The student had not read much in the past, but discovered she could earn coupons for soft drinks, pizzas, video games, and music compact discs. She began to read avidly for the prizes. Then she discovered she liked reading. This girl became the top reader that year (Hamilton, 1997).

The Accelerated Reader has proven to be effective in other areas of the curriculum. The data strongly suggest a connection between AR ownership and higher achievement on standardized test scores. In every grade-subject pair, the AR schools showed a higher average adjusted mean scale score than the non-AR schools. The odds of this occurring by chance are somewhat less than one in one billion (Paul, 1997).

Summary

The problem of helping students become independent readers has several factors. Student attitude, motivation, support from home and school, and accessibility
to books, some of the factors that contribute to students' independent reading habits, are addressed through the use of the Accelerated Reader program. Therefore, Accelerated Reader program could help students increase their independent reading habits.
CHAPTER THREE: THESIS DESCRIPTION

At Ellis Elementary School in Belding, Michigan, we want all of our students to become independent life-long readers who enjoy reading. To facilitate this we adopted the Accelerated Reader program and the S.T.A.R. Reading test. After one semester of using the programs, we want to find out if there has been any change in students’ independent reading habits and if different strategies for implementation of the programs have made any difference in student reading.

Do students spend enough time reading independently? Would introducing a reading incentive program effect the number of books read by students? Can this program increase the number of books students check out from the library? How will teacher involvement affect student performance? Will students become independent readers? These are questions we wished to answer. It is believed that introducing and implementing the Accelerated Reader Program and the S.T.A.R. Reading Test at Ellis Elementary School will increase the number of library books read independently by the students.

This chapter presents the data collected from the study completed at Ellis Elementary School. It will describe the students who were involved in the study. It will look at the number of books circulated through the library during the study period. Results will show that the Accelerated Reader Program has made a difference in the number of library books read independently by students by looking at the number of tests passed.

Sample Demographics and Methodology

This study took place at Ellis Elementary School. It has a population of 311 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The students in second through fifth
grade are involved in the Accelerated Reader program. Convenience sampling will be used to select the students, as I am one of the second grade teachers at the school. The students were grouped by grade level and teacher.

This study will examine the performance of the students in two third grade classrooms. One classroom (A) used the program on a regular basis with high teacher involvement, as compared to the other classroom (B) that worked on Accelerated Reader through independent use by the students with low teacher involvement.

This study will use a t score (p<0.001) to compare the number of Accelerated Reader tests passed in classroom A to the number of tests passed in classroom B. The average number of points earned by a student in each classroom will be compared using a t score (p<0.001). The number of points is an indication of the number of books read combined with the percentage correct on each test.

The students grade equivalent from the S.T.A.R. reading test will be examined through the use of a t score (p<0.05). A pretest–posttest research design will be used to compare these two groups. S.T.A.R. is a computerized reading test. It obtains a grade equivalent score through the use of multiple choice fill in the blank sentences. The students complete the test independently.

Components

At the beginning of the study, all students started with zero tests taken and zero points earned. Students accumulated points throughout the study period by passing AR tests. Students were allowed to complete AR tests at their own rate. Some students completed a test each day. Other students took one each week. The AR tests had 5-10 questions. Students who earned 60% or more passed the test.
Points were awarded to the student based on the level of the book and the percent correct on the test.

**Instrumentation.** The students at Ellis Elementary School completed the S.T.A.R. reading test in January, 1999 as the pretest for the study. The students complete this computerized reading test to get a grade equivalent score and a zone of proximal development (ZPD) score. These scores help students chose AR books at their independent reading level. The students again completed the S.T.A.R. reading test in June, 1999 as the posttest for the study.

During the six months of the study January to June, the students were introduced to the Accelerated Reader program by their teacher and the school’s reading teacher. The school administration left it up to the individual teacher as to how he/she would implement the program. The school librarian was available in the library to help students choose books at their ZPD level. She was available to help students use the computers to complete the Accelerated Reader tests. The books in the library were marked with colored stickers to match the ZPD level of the books. Six computers were made available in the library for testing and printing the TOPS reports. Computers were available in each classroom for student testing and reporting.

**Data Collection.** Since the Accelerated Reader Program and the S.T.A.R. reading test are computerized it made the collection of the data rather simple. Each of these programs has a report format that can be used with all the students or you may select which students to include in the report. To access data from the Accelerated Reader Program it was necessary to obtain the administrative security disk from the reading teacher at the school. This disk allows access to all student information, when inserted into the classroom computer. S.T.A.R. data can be accessed at classroom
computers for one or all students. A S.T.A.R. Summary Report can be printed for selected students.

Results

At the completion of the Accelerated Reader Program, a student summary report was printed for the students in the two third grade classrooms. The summary reports include tests passed, test pass percentage, average percent right, points earned, points possible, average reading level and a rank compared to all other students on the report. The report includes the total number of students selected and the average points earned per student.

The two third grade classes were compared (See Table 1). In the classroom (A) with high teacher involvement, the sixteen students earned an average of 32.1 points throughout the study period. This class passed 770 tests with an average test pass rate of 94.7% with the average correct being 87.1%. These students earned 514 points of the possible 631 points. The average reading level for the books was 3.2 grade equivalent.

Table 1

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Accelerated Reader Student Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The classroom (B) with voluntary use of Accelerated Reader had seventeen students who earned an average of 0.6 points per student (See Table 1). This class passed 21 tests taken with 100% passing rate. The average correct on the tests was...
86.9%. These students earned 10.2 points of the possible 11.5 available. The average reading level was 3.1 grade equivalent.

Using the t-score (p<0.001) to compare the average number of tests passed in classroom A to the number of tests passed in classroom B, it was found that there was a significant difference in the number of books read per student with 99% accuracy (See Table 2). Using the t-score (p<0.001) to compare the average number of points earned per student, it was found that there was a significant difference in the number of points earned with a 99% confidence level (See Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Average Number of AR Test Passed and Points Earned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.001, 30*, a significant difference was found

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This information answers the question regarding the importance of teacher involvement in the program. The classroom (A) with a teacher who promoted the program, provided time in the classroom for independent reading and access to the library at any time, read more library books independently than the other classroom (B).

When comparing the grade equivalent obtained through the S.T.A.R. reading tests, it was found that there was no significant difference in either the pretest or the posttest (See Table 3). The pretest score for class A was 3.1 and the posttest for class A was 3.7. There was a gain of 0.6 for this class. The pretest score for class B was 2.9 and the posttest for class B was 3.4. There was a gain of 0.5 for class B.
Table 3

S.T.A.R. Reading Test Average Grade Equivalent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

p<0.05, no significant difference was found

Although this may not be significant for a short term study of six months in the long run it will be a benefit to the students. It will take a longer period of time for students to make a significant jump in their reading grade equivalent with or without a reading incentive program.

Table 4

Library Circulation of Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th># of Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period Used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to AR</td>
<td>2903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During AR</td>
<td>3575</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

672 increase 19%

During the eight weeks prior to the introduction of Accelerated Reader, there were a total of 2,903 books checked out of the library. During the first eight weeks of the study, there were a total of 3,575 books checked out of the library. This is an increase of 672 books or a 19% increase (See Table 4). That would be an increase of 2 books per student in the total student body (That is including kindergarten and first grade who were not in AR) in the eight weeks time. Though the number is small, any
increase in library circulation is a benefit to the students. This increase in book circulation is a positive sign that students are using the library more often. With an extended period of time there should be a larger increase. It will be interesting to see the comparison for a whole year after using the Accelerated Reader Program.

These results show that students are beginning to read independently more often than before the Accelerated Reader Program was introduced. We hope that through another school year and more involvement from all teachers we will have a larger number of books read by all students, especially if we believe independent reading increases knowledge.

Dissemination and Recommendations

The information that has been gathered through this study will be shared with the school improvement team at Ellis Elementary School. This team can use the results in their quest for accreditation by the North Central Association. The school can use the information to ask for further funding of the program. The purchase of more books that fit the tests already purchased could be done, as well as the purchasing of more tests for books already owned.

Since the other two elementary schools in the district are beginning to use the Accelerated Reader program, this information can be shared with their staffs. It will help to get all teachers involved at the beginning of the program. Therefore, all students may benefit from the material that is available for them to improve their independent reading skills.

As was stated earlier, the ultimate goal of any instructional reading program is achieving independence in reading. The Accelerated Reader Program helps students become independent readers. Independent reading increases fluency and competency in
students' reading. We would like to change the statistic reported by Lord in the article See Jack read. See Jack read better. We want more than 29 percent of fourth graders reading at or above their grade level (Lord, 1999, p.54).

From the information gathered in the study of the Accelerated Reader Program at Ellis Elementary School, I conclude that this reading incentive program increases the number of library books read independently by the students. A follow-up study could be conducted after another year's use of the program. It is suggested that all teachers become involved in the promotion of the program. It is suggested that all teachers make available these resources to all students. It is suggested that all students take part in the Accelerated Reader Program to become independent readers.
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November 30, 1999

Independent Readers Increase Their Library Use

Ed Sieracki
Advantage Learning Systems, Inc.
P.O. Box 8036
Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54495-8036

Dear Mr. Sieracki,

I am currently enrolled in the Grand Valley State University, Advanced Studies in Education Program, and am required to write a thesis for the completion of my Master's in Education. My thesis is titled "Independent Readers Increase Their Library Use." One component of my study includes research regarding the Accelerated Reader program and the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (S.T.A.R.). Another component of the study is the evaluation of the use of these programs by students and staff at Ellis Elementary School in Belding, Michigan. May I receive permission to use these registered copyright titles in my thesis?

Your signature at the bottom portion of this letter confirms your ownership of these titles. Please advise me if you wish a specific copyright notice to be included on each page. My thesis will be cataloged in the GVSU library and available to other students and colleges for circulation. A copy of my thesis will be sent to your company upon completion.

Sincerely,

JoAnne Harrell
13093 Seven Mile Road
Belding, MI 48809
Fax: 616/691-7273

Permission is granted by: [Redacted]
Title: [Redacted]
Date: 11/30/99
October 8, 1999

Dear Mr. Emerson:

I am currently enrolled in the Grand Valley State University, Advanced Studies in Education Program, and am required to write a thesis for the completion of my Master’s in Education. My thesis is entitled “Independent Readers Increase Their Library Use.” One component of my study is the evaluation of the implementation of the Accelerated Reader and S.T.A.R. programs at Ellis Elementary School. May I receive permission to include information regarding the use of these programs at Ellis Elementary in my thesis?

Your signature at the bottom portion of this letter confirms your ownership of the above items. My thesis will be cataloged in the GVSU library and available to other students and colleges for circulation. A copy of my thesis can be sent to your office upon request.

Sincerely,

JoAnne Harrell
13093 Seven Mile Road
Belding, MI 48809
Fax: 616/691-7273

Permission is granted by:

Mr. Bert Emerson
Superintendent
Belding Area Schools
321 Wilson Street
Belding, MI 48809

Date: November 2, 1999

Title: Superintendent of Schools
ABSTRACT:
This paper examines the use of the Accelerated Reader program at Ellis Elementary School. The Accelerated Reader program makes the connection between home, school, library and technology. The study found an increase in the number of books read independently by the students. Especially the students in a classroom in which the program was integrated into the curriculum.