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Does the Accelerated Reader program motivate fifth grade students to read beyond the classroom?

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DOES THE ACCELERATED READER PROGRAM MOTIVATE

FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS TO READ BEYOND THE CLASSROOM?

by
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ABSTRACT

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DOES THE ACCELERATED READER PROGRAM MOTIVATE FIFTH GRADE
STUDENTS TO READ BEYOND THE CLASSROOM?
2002/03
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Master of Arts in School and Public Librarianship

The purposes of this qualitative research were to (a) determine if the

Renaissance Accelerated Reader program provided motivation for fifth grade students

to read beyond the classroom; and (b) to determine if the Accelerated Reader program

acted as a catalyst to affect changes in students' reading behaviors as a result of

extrinsic rewards. Seventy-six students participated in the study between October

2002 and March 2003. Results showed that students were clearly motivated by

extrinsic rewards and preferred choosing to read books on the Accelerated Reader list

to those that did not have an accompanying A.R. quiz. Rewards, points and

recognition were the primary motivating factors that encouraged students to

participate in the Accelerated Reader program; however, there were some drawbacks

for poor or reluctant readers, and the success of the Accelerated Reader program as a

motivator for students to read may be a short-lived experience. Further research is

recommended to determine how students from the intermediate school, who

participated in the Accelerated Reader program, progress once they reach seventh and

eighth grade where the program is not in place.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Significance of the Topic

The Accelerated Reader is a popular supplemental reading program in elementary and middle schools throughout the United States. Also known as the Renaissance Accelerated Reader, it is a reading management program that assigns readability levels for each book title, provides computerized quiz questions to determine student comprehension, and assigns reward points earned dependent upon the reader's quiz score. Students and teachers receive immediate feedback upon completing the electronic quizzes in the form of a computer printout. Students may earn points which can be redeemed for recognition, prizes, and other incentives as they read books from the Accelerated Reader list and accrue points from taking and passing the corresponding electronic quizzes. The Intermediate School in Egg Harbor Township employs this program as a way to increase reading skills and independent reading of fourth, fifth, and six grade students.

There is more than one point of view regarding the benefits of this program, including whether or not students are actually motivated to read when their school and library media center supports and promotes the program. The results of numerous studies purport students show substantial improvement in attitudes and motivation to read (Clingan, 2001).

However, not everyone is a proponent of Accelerated Reader; there are library media specialists, teachers, and others interested who feel Accelerated Reader "...diminishes motivation, limits title choices, and discourages independent selection of books" (Carter 1996). While some research indicates students' reading is increased and there are more benefits than drawbacks from the Accelerated Reader program, other studies have endeavored to prove the same program may have a negative affect on students' motivation to read.

The significance of this topic lies in the premise that the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School Library is expected to support the Accelerated Reader supplemental reading program which is referred to as A.R. A portion of the library media center's budget is directed each year toward the purchase of fiction, non-fiction, and biographical print materials as well as A.R. computer quiz discs. It is an important area of study because the professional librarian must justify all purchases for the library media center and its patrons. Since a large portion of the budget is dedicated to supporting the A.R. program, a study of its effect on motivating students to read outside the classroom, and its ability to affect or change students' reading behaviors, is needed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if the Renaissance Accelerated Reader Program provides motivation for fifth grade male and female students to read beyond what is required in the classroom, as measured by changes in students' reading behaviors between October 2002 and March 2003.

Research Questions

1. Is the Accelerated Reader program a reading motivator for fifth grade students?

2. In what ways, if any, does Accelerated Reader influence or change students' reading behaviors?

Operational Definitions

Accelerated Reader program: Often referred to as A.R., it is a reading management program that assigns readability levels for each book title, provides computerized quiz questions to determine comprehension, and assigns points earned dependent upon the reader's quiz score.

Extrinsic rewards: Points, recognition, or prizes awarded to students in return for successfully completing quizzes.

Intrinsic rewards: Students own a sense of pride and accomplishment as a result of successfully completing quizzes.

Library media center: A large room within the Intermediate School, staffed by a professional librarian, that holds a collection of over 12,000 print materials including a large selection of fiction and non-fiction books designated A.R. Students visit the library media center at least twice a month.

Library media specialist: The professional librarian who has achieved certification in the field and is responsible for managing the school library, its collection, and programs.

Motivation: The student's own willingness and enthusiasm to read with or without extrinsic rewards.

Professional librarian: The school librarian, also referred to as the library media specialist who has had the appropriate training in a university setting and has certification in the field.

Quiz disc: Short quizzes on a computer disc comprised of multiple-choice questions that are loaded on the computers in the school. Every book designated an A.R. has a corresponding quiz.

Readability levels: The assigned level for books used in the A.R. program which are determined by the Accelerated Reader program or school reading specialist. Indicated by grade level and interest level as well as length of text, vocabulary, and difficulty of comprehension.

Supplemental reading: Library collection of fiction, non-fiction, and biography books designated Accelerated Reader choices, and accompanied by a data disc with electronic quizzes.

Assumptions

Not only did the fifth grade teachers participating in this study support the school's Accelerated Reader program, but the administration and other teachers in the Intermediate School supported and encouraged students to participate in this supplemental reading program as well. In addition, parents, teachers, and the school administrators supported this research on the A.R. program in the Intermediate School. All students participating in the study had access to Accelerated Reader book choices in the school library media center and in their individual classrooms. The library media center provided a variety of books in various genres and interest areas from the fiction

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and nonfiction collection. Classes participating in the study visited the library media center for book exchange once every two weeks for forty to forty five minutes with their teacher and classmates, and were permitted with teacher approval to visit the library individually between scheduled periods to exchange books. Students were expected to be direct and honest when responding to questions from surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. It was also assumed that students' reading behaviors can be measured, will vary, and that most students will opt to take the Accelerated Reader electronic quiz that corresponded to their book choices.

Limitations

The study was limited to three fifth grade classes in the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School in Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey. The sample and population in this study were the same, and the three fifth grade classes totaled seventy-six students. Students were limited to visiting the library with their classes once every two weeks unless given permission by their teacher to visit between scheduled visits. There were no before or after school opportunities for students to visit the library media center, and A.R. quizzes could be taken only in the students' classrooms or library media center when a computer was available. Another limitation was the period of time for conducting this research. Only changes in students' reading behaviors occurring during the six-month study were considered.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Accelerated Reader has become a popular supplemental reading program in the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School and recent literature indicates its popularity in other schools throughout the United States. Students are able to compete with one another for points and other forms of extrinsic rewards, and some track their own progress in reading comprehension as they move from lower to higher readability levels. A large portion of the fiction and non-fiction collection in the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School is designated A.R., and the many book vendors who solicit business from school librarians make it easy to continually augment this collection. More and more book companies are providing quiz discs to go along with their materials. Some companies, such as Follett, even offer entire catalogs of Accelerated Reader books and accompanying discs. In order to determine if a large investment in A.R. materials is warranted each year, it would be beneficial to know whether the program motivates Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School students' to read or is changing their reading behaviors in a positive way. A review of current and relevant literature provided both positive and negative viewpoints of the Accelerated Reader program.

Positive Impact

A review of current and relevant literature provided both positive and negative viewpoints of the Accelerated Reader program. In a study done by D. McKnight (1992) while working on her Ph.D. through Nova University, Accelerated Reader was

incorporated in a reading program to improve reading attitudes among fifth grade children at an intermediate school in Florida. Students targeted for the survey were referred to as "unmotivated and uninterested in reading, and TV occupied much of their out-of-school time." The Accelerated Reader program was chosen as the primary tool for improving students' attitudes and motivation to read, and success was measured by comparing a pre and post-TV watching survey to determine students' attitudes and reading behaviors before and after the research. Other assessments included students' daily logs, library circulation records, observation, and student questionnaires. McKnight reported that attitudes toward reading improved, and students did read more as evidenced by student enthusiasm for going to the school library and their excitement over the Accelerated Reader program. However, the final survey and questionnaire indicated little to no change in students' television viewing habits (McKnight, 1992).

In 1993, St. Brigid's School located in Bushwick, Brooklyn began the Accelerated Reader program to supplement its Language Arts curriculum. After five years, the program was deemed a success by Francine Guastello, the school's principal. Guastello used questionnaires to focus on the students and what the parents were observing about their reading habits. Four hundred and twelve parents (one parent per family) responded to the questionnaire and responses were recorded in percentages. According to Guastello, "Not only were our students being motivated to read but parents revealed that their attitudes toward reading and time engaged in reading had improved." Additionally, she reported, "that many homes were setting aside family reading time and parents were taking an active role in supporting the school's A.R. program" (p.2).

St. Brigid's school and families were so impressed with the positive results the A. R. Program had on students' reading habits that they began to hold fundraisers to purchase more books and discs. Guastello further reported that library circulation increased, and test scores and reading and writing scores improved.

Another research study titled, *Does It Produce Voracious Readers?* by Mary Shackelford Tise (1999), used responses to open-ended questions to determine how the Accelerated Reader program affected the attitudes of sixth, seven, and eighth grade students in New Castle County, Delaware. A two-page survey was administered to 480 students and Tice received 478 usable responses. Her findings showed that 68.9% of seventh graders and 89.4% of eighth graders listed specific things they liked about the Accelerated Reader program. Included in the responses were: It's on a computer and easier; gets you to read a wider selection of books; lets me know the grade level I am reading; makes me read more; everyone in class is reading and participating; you get to choose a book that you may like; discovered new types of books; gives me extra credit in reading class; and motivated to get points. However, Tice did conclude that her research revealed that today's youth were losing the habit of reading due to competition from other activities such as playing on the computer and video games.

An action research completed by Vollands, Topping, and Evans (1999) found significant improvement in middle school girls' reading attitudes after using the Accelerated Reader program even when less than fully implemented. Accelerated Reader was effective without extrinsic rewards or tangible enforcement, which elicited virtually no interest from the students. The above three scholars also conducted research outside of the United States with elementary students in Scotland and found the same results:

were more motivated by the individual performance feedback which is immediate in the Accelerated Reader program. They too, like their American counterparts, were less interested in concrete or tangible rewards. The research concluded the Accelerated Reader seemed to motivate many students to read more, and should be considered a reading motivation program (Vollands, Topping, Evans, 1999, p.197-211).

Another research report conducted by Louise Shewfelt Scott (1999) involved four classes of middle school students with learning disabilities, and a control group, which was made up of two classes that did not use Accelerated Reader. Students in the treatment group increased reading levels from a mean score of 2.81 to 3.50 on the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR). These students also improved attitudes by 13 percent on the Estes Reading Attitude Scale. Students in the control group decreased reading levels from 4.75 to 4.25 on the STAR test and improved attitudes by only 2.6 percent on the Estes instrument. Findings indicated that the Accelerated Reader program improved reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading of the participating students with learning disabilities. Scott concluded that her results indicated that Accelerated Reader improved attitudes toward reading of the participating students with learning disabilities (Scott, 1999, p. 4).

Like McKnight (1992), Lora Wilson (2001), principal of Picnic Point Elementary School in Edmonds, Washington, concluded students read more because of Accelerated Reader. In her research she claimed, "AR is a system designed to motivate students to read. It has been found that the top 5% of readers read 144 times more than the bottom 5%. The Accelerated Reader system encourages all readers to get more reading practice" (Wilson, 2002, p. 2).

A study of seventh and eighth grade students at Susan B. Anthony and Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle Schools in Manhattan, Kansas, was conducted over a nine week period to determine if there were improvements in attitudes after the implementation of the Accelerated Reader program. The reporting educator, Julie Clingan, a middle school reading teacher, surveyed six reading classes in grades six through eight. Students were surveyed prior to the commencement of the A.R. program and at the end of the nine-week period. Clingan graphed her results which showed prior to A.R. participation 28% of students found reading enjoyable as opposed to 46% who said they enjoyed reading after the nine weeks study. In addition, 39% of students said they found reading boring at the onset of the A.R. program, and after nine weeks only 14% claimed reading was boring (Clingan, 2001, p. 6-7).

Similarly, Julie Anderson, a high school librarian, wrote an article for *School Library Journal*, in which she described her initial lack of interest in the Accelerated Reader program, even after receiving a grant to make the necessary purchase. However, once she began collaborating with the special education teachers, and acquiring books to meet the students' limited skills, it was noted that students' reading comprehension was improving. More importantly, she reported that the students participating in the A.R. program became motivated to read more in as well as out of school. Anderson claimed, "The kids are very motivated by the quizzes and want to do well on them. Some even come to the library to check out books that aren't part of the A.R. program. They take their A.R. books to study hall and even spend part of their lunch period in the library" (Anderson, 2001, p.31).

Marcia Cousins (2001) found similar results at Ballard Elementary School in Niles, Michigan. She asserted, "The Accelerated Reader program makes reading fun. It uses the Game Theory to get children excited about books" (p.1). Brian Webber (2001), the teacher/librarian of Cedar Wood School in Everett, Washington reported his observations on fifth grade students who participated in the Accelerated Reader program.

We know that the incentive for reading in the A.R. program should be simply the joy of knowing you read a good book and passed a test, but this is sometimes not enough for some readers. This is where the point system comes into the program. For some, just the enjoyment of taking a test on the computer is enough motivation. However, the greatest results we see is our students' love of reading, knowledge that they have achieved success, and improved reading skills (Webber, 2001, p.1).

Dr. Debra Duvall, Ed.D. (2002) was the superintendent of the Mesa Public Schools in Mesa, Arizona. Dr. Duvall described a mini-study that took place in grades two through six at four of the Mesa schools with the Renaissance Accelerated Reader program. Duvall compared students' reading growth with that of four schools not participating in Accelerated Reader with similar demographics. Her study showed the schools participating in the Accelerated Reader program had greater gains at each grade level than the non-participating schools. Dr. Duvall's study was published by Renaissance Learning, which owns the Accelerated Reader Program, after the superintendent submitted her report to them. Duvall claimed that after numerous requests from staff requesting funds for Accelerated Reader and to attend training seminars, she decided to attend herself and immediately jumped on the bandwagon with great

enthusiasm. Duvall also noted an increase in library circulation in her findings. One Mesa elementary school principal reported library circulation increased three to four times since the A.R. program began (Duvall, 2002, p. 1-2)

Negative Impact

On the other hand, a summary of Peak and Dewalt's A. R. research (1993) expressed some serious concerns with the possible disadvantages of having an Accelerated Reader program where everyone in the school was expected to participate. One disturbing point they discussed was that, "Delayed readers might not want to be seen reading low readability books and they choose books that are too difficult for them." At the same time, Peak and Dewalt addressed the gifted students as well and state, "Gifted students might not enjoy the program at all, especially if they are already highly motivated and extremely competent reader" (Peak, Dewalt,1993,p.1).

Donna Rosenheck (1996) conducted a survey of fifth grade students in three Lee County Florida schools and found no relationship between the use of Accelerated Reader and frequency of library use. In addition, her study claimed there were no changes in attitudes toward reading and the media center. A two-page survey instrument was developed that included queries about the use of the media center, number of books checked out, enjoyment of reading, and favorite indoor activities. A total of 222 surveys were completed and the results tabulated. Rosenheck also used similar populations and sample groups with the same socioeconomic backgrounds. All three schools had comparable multi-cultural student populations and academic achievement status (Rosenheck, 1996, p. 1-2).

Like Rosenheck, Tise (1999) found through her survey that not all students were

motivated to read more when an Accelerated Reader program was present. Tice surveyed

sixth grade students in Florida, and the following is a list of comments from her survey:

- Have more book choices because the ones they have I don't like, therefore I'm

  forced to read books I don't like;

- Don't like the points; Not enough questions to score more points;

- We only get one shot at the test;

- Too many required points each marking period; and

- Not enough sports books; and they all seem like books for girls (Tise,1999, p. 6).

Although Tice's research looked at both the positive and negative sides of the

Accelerated Reader program, she did suggest further avenues of study, and hoped that the

opinions of the students would be taken into consideration by the library media specialist.

Bette Carter (1996) voiced a number of similar concerns in an article she wrote

for *School Library Journal.* Based on Carter's review of literature on Accelerated Reader

she concluded these programs "devalue reading, diminish motivation, limit title choice,

restrict materials selection and collection development, discourage independent selection

of books, and emphasize testing rather than needs" (Carter,1996, p. 22-23). Carter's

review of the literature published through ERIC also included a concession that

computerized reading management programs increased circulation in the library, which

corresponded with Superintendent Duvall's findings (Duvall, 2002, p. 1-2).

Additionally, an independent research study conducted by K. Chenoweth in

Michigan, found that although participating students had read more books with

Accelerated Reader, once the program was over they read no more than before. Students

read fewer books after participating in Accelerated Reader than beforehand. This corresponded with research done in 1999 by four colleagues from the University of Texas-Austin. In their conclusion, they reported if current motivation theories are correct the extrinsic reward system inherent in Accelerated Reader may be effective in the short term but may have long term negative effects on students' reading attitudes and even achievement (Chenoweth, 2001, p. 48-51).

Concurring with Chenowith's conclusions, Deborah Biggers (2001) wrote an article for *The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, in which she reviewed the outcomes of a variety of research and literature on the Accelerated Reader program. In the area of motivation, she explained how extrinsic motivators and tangible rewards can reduce the internal motivations to read. She concluded that there are enough studies to show that students become too dependent on the rewards and point system for their motivation, and that students would inevitably read less frequently once the rewards were discontinued. Biggers also criticized the Advantage Learning Systems which owns, licenses, and distributes the Accelerated Reader program. According to Advantage's own literature, Biggers claimed that they advised against praising students for effort when they do not achieve up to their standard, and referred to other research studies that discuss the importance of praise and positive feedback for the student who is working very hard and may become discouraged and avoid reading whenever possible (Biggers, 2001, p. 72-75).

Summary

It appears that there is a dichotomy concerning student motivation and the use of the Accelerated Reader program. After reviewing the relevant literature, which included

various types of studies and research, there seemed to be sufficient information to

connect the Accelerated Reader program with student motivation to read. Therefore, in

order to come up with definite answers to the research questions, a study using a sample

of the fifth grade population in the Egg Harbor Township School District was necessary

to draw conclusions regarding the success of the Accelerated Reader program in this

locale.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overall Research Design and Justification

Similar to the characteristics of naturalistic inquiry (Mellon 1990), this research was a qualitative study in an endeavor to answer the two research questions: Is the Accelerated Reader program a reading motivator for fifth grade students and in what ways, if any, does Accelerated Reader influence or change students' reading behaviors?

The study was initiated with students answering ten questions on a short written survey (Appendix A) about their reading habits and behaviors. In addition, at various times, students were interviewed individually as they explored the library, searched in the electronic card catalog, and retrieved their selections. Their responses to the interview questions were also logged for later analysis. In addition, small focus group discussions (Appendix B) took place and students' conversations with the researcher and their classmates were recorded. From the three forms of inquiry, it was expected that a variety of themes would be derived using codes that appeared and reappeared during interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. A qualitative approach was more suited to both the research questions and the sample student population being studied than a quantitative study since all of the data were extracted from observations and discussions.

The research was conducted in the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School during real time, expecting that students' behaviors would continually change and evolve throughout the period of time in which this study was conducted. Westbrook believed that the naturalistic paradigm has much to offer. According to Westbrook, "When defined as a research paradigm, rather than as a research method, naturalism is an approach that posits reality as holistic and continually changing" (1997, p. 144). Her philosophy about sampling in qualitative research was relevant to this study on Accelerated Reader; Westbrook asserted "identifying a representative sample is not even a consideration since the purpose of the research is to understand, not to generalize" (1997, p. 147).

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The overall purpose of this research was to determine how worthwhile the Accelerated Reader program was in its role of motivating students to read outside the classroom. Understanding the results of this study was expected to have a direct effect on the library media center's expenditures to support the Accelerated Reader program.

The Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School Library has an obligation to support the Accelerated Reader supplemental reading program. Since the professional librarian must make important budgeting decisions each year, and augmenting the Accelerated Reader collection and quiz discs is an expensive component of the budget, it was necessary to ensure that the investment in A.R. was justified. Therefore, the results of this study were used to assist in determining if the Renaissance Accelerated Reader program provided motivation for fifth grade students to read beyond what was required in the classroom.

The study answered two specific research questions: 1) Is the Accelerated Reader program a reading motivator for fifth grade students?

2) In what ways, if any, does Accelerated Reader influence or change students' reading behaviors?

Population and Environment

The Accelerated Reader program was implemented at the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School as a supplemental program under the supervision of the school's reading specialist over the past five years. The environment in which this qualitative research occurred was an Intermediate School comprised of nearly 1,500 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students from an ethnically diverse population. Approximately ninety percent speak English as a first language at home, while the other ten percent speak a combination of Spanish and Asian languages at home. The study group consisted of three heterogeneous fifth grade classes of combined academic abilities, totaling seventy-eight students.   All but two students returned signed permission slips allowing them to participate in the research, which brought the total number of participants to seventy-six. The Accelerated Reader program at the E.H.T. Intermediate School was not mandatory for students, although all teachers strongly recommended that students read books from the Accelerated Reader list and take the electronic quizzes that accompany each book.

All data collection techniques took place in the library media center where the climate was one that the students typically describe as friendly and inviting. It is a large well-lit room with a book collection of over ten-thousand titles, lots of visual stimulation, and a comfortable cozy area with pillows provided for the students' reading comfort. The setting was established so that students would be in a familiar area with the library

media specialist who is normally present and fully integrated in the students' classes during book exchange in the library. A rapport between the students and the library media specialist had been previously established and students were expected to behave naturally, thus, adding validity to the observation and interview processes (McMillan, 2000).

Variables

The dependent variable was the participation of the students in the three fifth grade classes who received permission from a parent or guardian. Intervening variables included students' attendance and school closings due to inclement weather. Independent variables included students' motivation to read, the number and types of books read, students' reading preferences, Accelerated Reader choices, assistance with book choices, and school reading requirements.

Instruments

Several instruments were used to collect data. Between October 8 and October 10, 2002, students from the three fifth grade classrooms participating in the study were given a brief questionnaire comprised of ten questions (Appendix A). These questions addressed students' reading behaviors and the Accelerated Reader program in the early part of the school year. Five months later, between March 10 and March 13, 2003, students answered the same ten survey questions (Appendix C) to measure any changes that occurred. Additional instruments included open-ended interview questions (Appendix D), focus group discussions (Appendix B), and class observation logs (Appendix E), with groups of six to eight students from each of the three classes participating in the research.

Data Collection

In order to begin this process, the first step was to submit a letter of request to the building principal in September 2002 (Appendix F). Once authorized to proceed with the study, in early October 2002, a letter of request was submitted to three fifth grade teachers asking permission to collect data from their students (Appendix G). After all three teachers agreed to allow their classes to be a part of the Accelerated Reader study, permission slips (Appendix H) were sent home to the parents and guardians of all students in the three classes. All seventy-eight permission slips were returned; two students from two different classes were denied permission to participate, leaving a total of seventy-six participants.

The Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School Library used a flexible schedule, therefore, it was possible to schedule each of the three participating fifth grade classes twice a month to ensure seeing students on a regular basis. In addition, having a flexible schedule to work with allowed the library media specialist to block off time in January, February, and March of 2003. This time was used to schedule and facilitate focus group discussions and additional class time in the library if necessary. Since inclement weather forced the school to close several days during January and February, rescheduling classes was necessary in order to observe and speak with all participating students.

Pre and Post Survey Questionnaires

The first survey questionnaire (Appendix A) was completed with the three participating 5th grade classes between October 7 and October 9, 2002. It was comprised of ten questions for students to identify their current reading behaviors and their participation in the Accelerated Reader program. This same questionnaire (Appendix C)

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was distributed to the same student population between March 19 and March 21, 2003. Differences and similarities in the responses were noted and documented to measure any changes in the students' reading habits and A.R. participation.

Interview Questions

The content of the four open-ended interview questions (Appendix D) were used during individual interviews to determine what students liked or did not like about the Accelerated Reader program. Students were given the opportunity to speak freely about the program, and the guided questions were designed to determine how the program motivated students to read outside the classroom, which was a primary research question. These interviews were conducted in the library media center during students' scheduled thirty-minute book exchange period between January 2003 and March 2003. While students explored the library making selections, they were asked questions through casual conversation or during assistance in retrieving their book selections. Their responses were recorded manually and later analyzed to identify reading habits and their attitudes about the Accelerated Reader program.

Focus Group Discussions

The eight focus group questions (Appendix B) also encouraged students to speak freely about the Accelerated Reader program. These questions delved into students' reading habits and determined whether or not they were affected by participation in the A.R. program. Students had the opportunity to think about, respond to, and discuss with one another, the pros and cons of the reading program in relation to extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, library visitation, reading habits, and concerns about Accelerated Reader. In addition, the focus group questions were intended to continue to extract information from

students to determine if their motivation to read outside the classroom was directly related to the Accelerated Reader program.

Focus group discussions with the fifth grade students were conducted in the library media center eleven times between January 2003 and March 2003. Each group discussion consisted of six to eight students from a single classroom and lasted approximately thirty minutes. Groups met with the library media specialist three times in January and four times in February and in March. Teachers agreed to send the small groups to the library media center during their normal reading and language arts time, and students were not penalized for any time lost in the classroom. It was up to the individual teachers' discretion as to who they sent for each meeting until all participating students from the three fifth grades had the opportunity to be involved in the round-table discussions. Focus groups answered eight semi-structured, open-ended questions about their experiences with the Accelerated Reader program. Questions were asked one at a time and students were encouraged to respond to one another by agreeing or disagreeing with each other's comments, and provide reasons and explanations for their answers. Focus group discussions were tape-recorded with the students' knowledge, and later transcribed to identify codes. The codes were key words or phrases that were repeated by students throughout the discussions, and allowed commonalities in their responses to be identified.

Observations

Observations of students and their process for choosing books took place during scheduled library visits. The observation process included watching students make their book selections either from the floor of the library or behind the circulation desk.

Pertinent information was entered on a log (Appendix E) to indicate how many books students checked out and of those titles, how many were Accelerated Reader titles.

Validity And Reliability

All instruments were pre-tested and revised as necessary to ensure reliability. The results of this study were valid for Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School only. The study was designed to be able to be replicated at the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School or any other school participating in the Accelerated Reader program.

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CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Procedures and Methods

A total of 76 fifth grade students received written permission from their parent/s or guardian in October 2002 to participate in the Accelerated Reader program study. Two identical surveys were given to the students; the first in October 2002 and the second in March 2003. Although 76 students had permission to participate in the A.R. study, not all were present during the October 2002 and March 2003 surveys. Due to scheduling issues, some students were absent from class to attend instrumental or gifted classes. The loss of one student between October and March was due to a classroom transfer. The surveys, open-ended interview questions, and focus group discussion questions, along with an observation log for each class, were used to draw a valid and useful conclusion to determine whether the Accelerated Reader program motivated students to read outside of the classroom, and if the program influenced students' reading behaviors. Careful attention was given to identifying repetitive phrases or codes as evidenced in interview and focus group responses. Data were categorized into themes that surfaced from the open-ended and focus group discussion questions. Using Microsoft Word, ten tables were created to display the results of the research.

The first survey completed by students in October 2002 and March 2003 was meant to determine their current reading behaviors and whether or not the Accelerated Reader program influenced students' motivation to read (Appendices A and C). The participating classes were identified as Class 1, with twenty-five students, Class 2, with twenty-six students, and Class 3, with a total of twenty-five students. The first five questions asked to students to identify their current reading behaviors.

Reading Behaviors

The first survey question asked students to choose from fiction, non-fiction, biography or a combination to determine which genre they preferred. Results were tallied and a table was created as can be seen in Table 1. In class 1, the October survey shows that out of twenty-three students present during the surveys, nine preferred reading fiction, eight preferred non-fiction, one student preferred reading biographies, and a total of five students enjoyed reading a combination of fiction, non-fiction, and biography. The March survey indicated fourteen students preferred reading fiction, one student preferred non-fiction, two preferred biographies, and seven students enjoyed a combination of the three. In class 2, a total of twenty-six students completed the surveys in October, indicating eleven students preferred fiction, six preferred non-fiction, while nine preferred a combination of fiction and non-fiction. No one from Class 2 preferred reading biographies. Twenty-four students from Class 2 took the March survey which indicated eight students preferred fiction, three preferred non-fiction, no one chose biographies, but a total of fifteen students preferred choosing books from fiction and non-fiction. Class 3, made up of twenty-five students, indicated a total of fourteen students preferred reading fiction, while five preferred non-fiction, and six students preferred a

students preferred choosing books from fiction and non-fiction. Class 3, made up of

twenty-five students, indicated a total of fourteen students preferred reading fiction,

while five preferred non-fiction, and six students preferred a combination of fiction

and non-fiction. No one from Class 3 chose biographies as a preference in the

October survey. The March survey indicated in Class 3 ten students preferred fiction,

four students preferred non-fiction, no one preferred biographies, and a total of eleven

students preferred a combination of fiction and non-fiction.

TABLE 1
READING PREFERENCES

October	Fiction	Non-fiction	Biography	Combination
Class 1	9	8	1	5
Class 2	11	6	0	9
Class 3	14	5	0	6
March	Fiction	Non-fiction	Biography	Combination
Class 1	14	1	2	7
Class 2	8	3	0	15
Class 3	10	4	0	11
Totals	Fiction	Non-fiction	Biography	Combination
October	34	19	1	20
March	32	8	2	33

The second question in the survey asked students to report how many fiction

books they had read in the last month. Results from this question were tallied and can

be seen in Table 2. In the October survey, Class 1 reported seven students read no

fiction books, seven students read between one and two books, six students read

between three and five books, and five students read five or more fiction titles. The

March survey indicated one person read zero fiction books, seven students read

between one and two books, eleven students read from three to five books and five

students read more than five. In October, of the twenty-six students in Class 2 there

In the March survey, the same students indicated no students in the zero range, fifteen students read one to two books, nine students read three to five books, and two students read more than five books the previous month. In Class 3, the October survey indicated four students reported reading no fiction books the previous month, while thirteen read between one and two books, seven students read between three and five books and no one read more than five titles. The March survey, taken by twenty-four students indicated one student read zero fiction books, seven students read between one and two books, eleven students were reading between three and five books, and five students had read more than five books in the last month.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF FICTION BOOKS READ IN THE LAST MONTH

October	0 Fiction Books	1-2 Fiction Books	3-5 Fiction Books	5+ Fiction Books
Class 1	7	7	6	5
Class 2	0	17	8	1
Class 3	4	13	7	0
March	0 Fiction Books	1-2 Fiction Books	3-5 Fiction Books	5+ Fiction Books
Class 1	1	7	11	5
Class 2	0	15	9	2
Class 3	1	7	11	5
Totals	0 Fiction Books	1-2 Fiction Books	3-5 Fiction Books	5+ Fiction Books
October	11	37	21	6
March	2	29	31	12

Question three asked the same number of students in each class how many non-fiction titles they read in the last month. Table 3 shows the tabulated results in a table. Class 1 had ten students who did not read one non-fiction book, twelve students who read between one and two books; three students who read between three and five books, and

Question three asked the same number of students in each class how many non-fiction titles they read in the last month. Table 3 shows the tabulated results in a table. Class 1 had ten students who did not read one non-fiction book, twelve students who read between one and two books; three students who read between three and five books, and no students read more than five. The March survey showed that in the same class, eight students read zero non-fiction titles, eight read one to two non-fiction titles, six students read between three and five titles, and three students read more than five non-fiction books. In Class 2, students who read zero non-fiction books totaled eight, students who read between one and two books totaled fifteen, two students read between three and five books, and one student read more than five non-fiction titles. In the March survey, six students read zero non-fiction titles, twelve students read between one and two books, six students read between three and five books, while one student read more than five non-fiction titles. In Class 3, two students read zero non-fiction books the previous month, while thirteen students read between one and two books, six students read between three and five books, and four students read more than five non-fiction books. In March, four students read zero non-fiction titles, twelve students read one to two non-fiction books, four students read between three and five books, and four students were reading more than five non-fiction titles.

TABLE 3
NUMBER OF NON-FICTION BOOKS READ IN THE LAST MONTH

October	0 Non-fiction	1-2 Non-fiction	3-5 Non-fiction	5+ Non-fiction
Class 1	10	12	3	0
Class 2	8	15	2	1
Class 3	2	13	6	4
March	0 Non-fiction	1-2 Non-fiction	3-5 Non-fiction	5+ Non-fiction
Class 1	8	8	6	3
Class 2	6	12	6	1
Class 3	4	12	4	4
Totals	0 Non-fiction	1-2 Non-fiction	3-5 Non-fiction	5+ Non-fiction
October	20	40	11	5
March	18	32	16	8

The fourth question in the survey asked students if they preferred reading aloud, reading quietly, or if they had no preference. The results of this question can be seen in Table 4. In Class 1, out of twenty-five students, three preferred reading aloud, eighteen preferred reading quietly, while four didn't care either way. When re-surveyed in March, Class 1 indicated two students preferred reading aloud, fifteen students preferred quiet reading, and eight didn't care. In Class 2, out of twenty-six students, two preferred reading aloud, fifteen preferred silent reading, while nine said they didn't care either way. By March, three students preferred reading aloud, eleven preferred quiet reading, and twelve didn't care. Class 3 reported that two students preferred reading aloud, ten preferred reading quietly, and thirteen students had no preference. The March survey for Class 3 showed five students preferred reading aloud, twelve preferred quiet reading, and seven had no preference.

TABLE 4
PREFERENCES OF READING BEHAVIORS

October	Aloud	Quietly	No Preference
Class 1	3	18	4
Class 2	2	15	9
Class 3	2	10	13
March	Aloud	Quietly	No Preference
Class 1	2	15	8
Class 2	3	11	12
Class 3	5	12	7
Totals	Aloud	Quietly	No Preference
October	7	43	26
March	10	38	27

Question five in the survey asked students how often they read silently at home. Results can be viewed in Table 5. In October, from Class 1, seven students read silently on a daily basis, five students read silently several times a week, eight students read silently once a week, and five students said they never read silently at home. The same survey in March, showed eight students were reading silently on a daily basis, seven were reading several times a week, six were reading silently at home once a week and four students were not reading at all. In Class 2 in October, five students read daily, seven students read several times a week, eight students read silently at home only once a week, while six students said they never read silently at home. In March, eight students from Class 2 were reading silently at home every day, ten were reading several times a week, five were reading once a week, three students were not reading at home at all. In October from Class 3, six students said they read silently at home every day, six students read several times a week, ten

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students read once a week, while three students said they never read silently at home.

The same class reported in March that nine students were reading silently at home.

TABLE 5
FREQUENCY OF SILENT READING AT HOME

October	Daily	Several Times a Week	Once a Week	Never
Class 1	7	5	8	5
Class 2	5	7	8	6
Class 3	6	6	10	3
March	Daily	Several Times a Week	Once a Week	Never
Class 1	8	7	6	4
Class 2	8	10	5	3
Class 3	9	10	5	0
Totals	Daily	Several Times a Week	Once a Week	Never
October	18	18	26	14
March	25	27	16	7

Library Visits and the Accelerated Reader Program

Questions six through ten asked students to respond to questions about their

visits to the library and the Accelerated Reader program. In questions six and seven,

students were asked on average, how many books they checked out of the library per

visit, and how many of those books were on the Accelerated Reader list.

Table 6 shows the total number of books checked out. In October, Class 1

reported nine students checked out three books, while the March survey reported

thirteen students were checking out three per vsit. Ten students checked out two

books in October and eleven students checked out two books per visit in March. Five

students checked out one book in October, while no students checked this category in

March. One student did not check out any books at all on both the October and March

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surveys. In Class 2, nine students checked out three books per visit in October as compared to twelve in March. Eight students checked out two books at a time in October, while nine students checked out two per visit in March. Eight students checked out one book in October, and five students checked out one book per visit in March. In both surveys, one student did not check out any books. In Class 3, five students checked out three books in October and seven students checked out three at a time in March. Nine students checked out two books per visit in October, and the number was the same for March. Eight students checked out one book per visit in October, and five checked out one book in March. In October, three students did not check out any books, while in March, all students in Class 3 were checking out books at every library visit.

TABLE 6
NUMBER OF BOOKS CHECKED OUT PER VISIT

October	Three Books	Two Books	One Book	No Books
Class 1	9	10	5	1
Class 2	9	8	8	1
Class 3	5	9	8	3
March	Three Books	Two Books	One Book	No Books
Class 1	13	11	0	1
Class 2	12	9	5	1
Class 3	7	9	5	0
Totals	Three Books	Two Books	One Book	No Books
October	23	27	21	5
March	32	29	10	2

Students were also asked how many of the books they checked out of the library media center were on the Accelerated Reader list with the results shown in

Table 7. In October 2002, twenty-three students were checking out the maximum

allowed number of books per visit. This number increased to thirty-two students five

months later in March 2003. In October's survey, five students said they did not

check out any books, and in March 2003 the number was reduced to two students not

checking out books from the library media center. The greatest increase was seen

from October to March in the number of students who were taking out an average of

one to two books per visit.

TABLE 7
BOOKS CHECKED OUT THAT WERE ON THE ACCELERATED READER
LIST

October	Three Books	Two Books	One Book	No Books
Class 1	7	7	4	0
Class 2	2	5	8	2
Class 3	3	5	10	0
March	Three Books	Two Books	One Book	No Books
Class 1	6	12	6	0
Class 2	4	8	12	2
Class 3	4	7	13	0
Totals	Three Books	Two Books	One Book	No Books
October	12	17	22	2
March	14	27	31	2

Question eight on the survey asked students if their teacher required them to

check out at least one book on the Accelerated Reader list. In Class 1, 14 students

said yes, while 11students said no. In March, all 25 students in Class 1 said their

teacher required them to choose at least one A.R. book. In October, from Class 2, 10

students said yes, while 16 answered no, and in March, 13 answered yes and

13 answered no. Four students in October from Class 3 answered yes and 21 students said

no, however, in March, 8 answered yes, and 16 answered no.

Question nine asked students who, if anyone, assisted them with their book

selection in the library. Table 8 shows the responses to this question. The greatest

change between October 2002 and March 2003 was in the reliance of students on one

another for assistance or advice in selecting books. Fewer students depended upon their

teachers or library staff.

TABLE 8
PEOPLE WHO ASSISTED STUDENTS WITH BOOK SELECTION

October	Library Staff	Teacher	Friends/Classmates	No One
Class 1	6	3	4	12
Class 2	8	1	6	11
Class 3	2	2	3	18
March	Library Staff	Teacher	Friends/Classmates	No One
Class 1	1	1	7	16
Class 2	3	1	8	14
Class 3	3	0	5	16
Totals	Library Staff	Teacher	Friends/Classmates	No One
October	16	6	13	41
March	4	2	20	30

The final question asked students if they visited the library on their own or

just with their class during scheduled visits. In October, from Class 1, fourteen

students said they came on their own and eleven students came only with their class,

as compared to March when seven students came on their own and eighteen came

with the class. From Class 2 in October, three students came on their own, and

twenty-three only visited with their class, as compared to March when five students came

on their own and the other twenty-one students came with their class. From

Class 3 in October, five students came on their own while the other twenty students came with their class. In March, eight students came on their own while the other seventeen came with the rest of their class.

Open-Ended Interview Questions

Students from all three fifth-grade classes participating in the research answered open-ended questions (see Appendix D) asked by the library media specialist during their regularly scheduled visits to the library for book exchange. Students were approached individually and asked the same four questions. Their answers were recorded in note form on a legal pad, and later were reviewed to find common themes and repetitive words and phrases. Through this process, certain codes emerged and conclusions were drawn about how the Accelerated Reader program motivates students to read. These responses are found in Table 9.

The first question, "What do you like about the Accelerated Reader Program" elicited five common responses: Sixty-six students agreed it is the "rewards," fifty-seven students said it was "easy," thirty-nine students believed it "improves their reading comprehension," sixty students said it "improves their classroom grade in reading," and seven students stated it was "fun."

When asked the second question, "If you could change one thing about the A.R. program, what would it be," forty-one students said, "be allowed to take the same book quiz each year," nineteen said, "fewer questions," twenty-two said "assign higher points for the tests," thirty-nine said "greater rewards," and twenty-two students said "provide graphics or picture prompts with the questions."

TABLE 9
OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What do you like about the A.R. program?	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Total
Rewards	20	24	24	66
Easy	16	18	23	57
Improves reading comprehension	13	13	13	39
Improves classroom grade in reading	21	22	17	60
Fun	1	3	3	7
If you could change one thing about A.R., what would it be?	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Total
Be allowed to take the same quiz each year	13	12	16	41
Fewer questions	4	8	7	19
Assign higher points	8	8	6	22
Greater rewards	15	14	10	39
Provide graphics and picture prompts with questions	5	7	10	22
Please explain how the A.R. program motivates you to read outside the classroom.	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Total
If I read at home, I can take more A.R. quizzes.	12	14	13	39
I like to read at home because I'll get higher A.R. quiz grades.	19	21	17	57
I want to get on the Wall of Fame.	10	12	12	34
I just like to read.	10	9	10	29
If the A.R. program ended tomorrow, how would your reading habits change?	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Total
Read less	7	5	9	21
Not at all	7	14	9	30
Read more	6	6	6	18
Stay the same	1	1	1	3

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When asked the third question, "Explain how the A.R. program motivates you to read outside the classroom," thirty-nine students said, "If I read at home, I can take more A.R. quizzes," fifty-seven students said, "I like to read at home because I'll get higher A.R. quiz grades," thirty-four students said, "I want to get on the Wall of Fame," and twenty-nine students said "I just like to read."

The fourth open-ended question asked students to explain how their reading habits would change if the A.R. program ended. Twenty-one students said, "I would read less," thirty students said, "I wouldn't read at all," eighteen students said they "would read more," and three students said, "reading habits would stay the same."

Focus Group Questions

A total of seventy-six students participated in focus group discussions (see Appendix B) in the library media center between January and March 2003. Focus groups met three times in January, four times in February, and four times in March. A total of eleven focus groups were held with six to eight students participating in each group. The "round-table" discussions lasted for thirty to thirty-five minutes each. The library media specialist moderated and facilitated the group discussions, keeping students on topic, and recorded their responses to the eight questions as well as their responses to one another on a tape recorder. All groups were asked the same eight questions. At the end of each day the focus groups met, the recordings were transcribed into notes and analyzed to find themes and repetitive words and phrases. Through the coding process, conclusions were drawn about the Accelerated Reader program acting as a motivator for fifth and six grade students. These conclusions are found in Table 10.

TABLE 10
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1) Why do you participate in the A.R. program?	Total
Helps improve reading grades	48
Points and recognition	51
Rewards	63
Mandatory participation	30
Feel good about self	10
2) Do you think the A.R. program makes you read more than you would if the school did not have it?	
Yes	36
No	30
3) Please describe anything about he A.R. program that discourages you from participating.	
Low A.R. quiz grade lowers reading average	51
Not all books are on the A.R. list	60
Can't retake the quiz if you score poorly	72
Low quiz grade can affect whole class	40
4) Are there books you would like to read but don't because they are not on the A.R. list?	
Yes	54
No	22
5) Do you enjoy reading more since you started participating the in A.R. program? In what ways?	
Enjoy points and recognition from doing well	48
Like getting better grades on classroom reading tests	23
Like having better reading comprehension	50
Great books on A.R. list	20
6) Does point recognition encourage or discourage you to read? Please explain.	
Points & recognition	66
Parent recognition	23
Rewards	50
Self satisfaction	30
Can bring down your grade	45
Lowers self esteem	24
Hard to finish longer books with more points	36
A.R. is a rip-off. There are not enough points.	48
7) Do you visit the library between class visits to check out additional books?	
Yes	32
No	44
8) Has participating in the A.R. program changed your television viewing habits? Explain.	
Less TV	28
No. Still watch favorite shows	51
Less TV because we have family reading time	16
More TV	6

When asked why students participated in the A.R. program, forty-eight students said, "It helped improve their reading grades," fifty-one students said, "for the points and recognitions," sixty-three students said, "for the rewards," and thirty students said, "they had to." Ten students commented, "it made them feel good about themselves."

Students were asked if the A.R. program motivated them to read more than they would if the school did not have this program. Thirty-six students answered, "yes," while thirty answered "no."

The third question asked students to discuss what it was about the A.R. program that discouraged them from participating. Fifty-one students remarked that "a low A.R. quiz grade can lower your classroom average in reading," sixty students said, "not all the books you want to read are on the A.R. list," seventy-two students complained that, "you can't retake the quiz if you score poorly," and forty students remarked that a low quiz grade can affect the whole class when you're competing for points."

When the students were asked if there were books in the library they would like to read, but do not because they are not on the A.R. list, fifty-four said "yes" and thirty students said "no."

In question five, students talked about how they enjoyed reading more since they started participating in the A.R. program. Forty-eight students said they "enjoy getting the points and recognition from doing well on the quizzes," twenty-three students said they "like getting better grades on their classroom reading tests,"

twenty students agreed, "the books on the A.R. list are great to read."

Students debated the sixth question, "How does point recognition encourage you or discourage to read?" Those who felt encouraged said the following: sixty-six students said it was "points and recognition," twenty-three said "parent recognition," fifty students said it was "the rewards," and thirty students agreed they felt "self-satisfaction." Students also described several discouraging factors in the A.R. program: forty-five students said, "It can bring down your grade if you don't accumulate enough points each marking period," twenty-four students agreed that "it lowers your self-esteem if you do poorly," thirty-six students agreed that "it's hard to finish some of the longer books that have a lot of points," and forty-eight students said, "A.R. can be a rip-off. Some books don't have enough points assigned to them."

One yes or no question was asked to each of the eleven groups. "Do you visit the library between class visits to check out additional books?" Thirty-two students said "yes," and forty-four students said, "no, the teacher doesn't let us."

The final question for the focus groups addressed their reading behaviors. They were asked, "How has participating in the Accelerated Reader program changed your television viewing habits?" Twenty-eight students said "yes, I watch less TV now," fifty-one students said, "no, I still watch all my favorite shows," sixteen students said, "less TV now because we have family reading time when I read out loud to everyone, and six students said, "I watch more TV now."

Observation Log

The three participating fifth grade classes each came to the library twice during the months of January, February, and March 2003 for a thirty-minute scheduled book exchange class. During this time, the library media specialist used an observation log while making notes about the students' selection process and final book choices (Appendix E). A check mark was placed on a blank line to keep track of the number of students observed in each class. Because this was an anonymous tool, it is likely that not all students were observed. The log showed the number of students observed, the number of books each observed student checked out, and how many of those books were A.R. titles. A.R. titles are easily recognized from the red A.R. label on the spines of the books. For each of the six classes observed, the majority of students checked out two or three books at a time, and two or three of these books were identified as A.R. titles.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The students who participated in this research indicated that the Accelerated Reader program at the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School motivated them to read outside of the classroom. It is apparent that the point system, rewards, and recognition that students receive as a result of scoring well on the A.R. quizzes, played a large part in their willingness to read independently. The focus-group discussions revealed that without an extrinsic rewards system in place, students' reading outside of the classroom would decline. Like Tise's (1999) research, this study provided evidence that the primary motivator in the Accelerated Reader program was the points and recognition they look forward to receiving. It was interesting to note that competition between students and among classes was not an issue; however, students did feel compelled to compete against themselves to increase their reading to obtain points and recognition.

Besides the points, rewards, and recognition, students indicated through open-ended interview questions and the focus-group discussions that they relied on the A.R. program to boost their classroom reading grades. Some felt as though participating in A.R. improved their comprehension, while others stated that the more points they accrued, the higher their reading average was at the end of a marking period.

Not all comments about the Accelerated Reader program were positive. The greatest concern students voiced was the limited choices in their book selections. This was obviously a concern for other students as well, as evidenced by Carter (1996) and Tise's (1999) research. Although the library had over 9,000 titles from which students could choose, there were fewer choices in the non-fiction area than fiction. Some students were greatly concerned about their reading grade declining if they did not earn enough points during a marking period. Several students brought up the point that if they did poorly on an A.R. quiz, it could affect the entire class average, which put a lot of pressure of them. Many students complained that they could not retake a quiz if they scored poorly, and some complained that there were not enough books on the A.R. list. Surprisingly, a number of students claimed that doing poorly on an A.R. quiz affected their self-esteem.

Additionally, the pre and post-study surveys made it clear that students' reading behaviors were influenced by the Accelerated Reader program. The results showed that students who initially stated they preferred one genre to another in October 2002, chose more of a variety of books by March 2003. Students who once preferred fiction over non-fiction, and vise versa in October, had expanded their book choices to include more of another genre by March.

Through the surveys, students were able to indicate changes in their reading habits in school as well as home. In response to a question about students' preference for reading silently or aloud in the classroom, the results indicated that more students preferred reading aloud than silently in October 2002, yet, in March 2003, more students were happy reading silently to themselves. Students seemed to become more

comfortable with silent independent reading as the Accelerated Reader program continued throughout the year.

By March 2003, students were checking out more books during their book exchange period, and most titles they selected were from the Accelerated Reader list. It was interesting to learn that most students from all three participating fifth grade classes, were unsure if their teachers required them to check out at least one A.R. title. Also, by the end of the study, more students were relying on a classmate or had become self-sufficient when choosing books to read as opposed to early October 2002, when more students relied on the advice of the library media specialist or teacher.

Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, the library media center at the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School should continue to support the Accelerated Reader program, and designate a portion of the yearly library budget to purchasing A.R. quizzes to go with the collection. In addition, more attention should be given to the non-fiction collection as well as popular books that are not currently available on the A.R. list.

One can infer that from this study of seventy-six fifth graders, that students are highly motivated to read outside of the classroom as a result of points, rewards, and recognition. To concur with Brian Webber (2001), sometimes just the joy of reading a book is not enough, and students have to set goals for themselves, which the A. R. program allowed students to do. However, a concern that evolved from this study, was that the benefits of the Accelerated Reader program may be short-lived,

since without the points and recognition system in place, students would not willingly participate in the reading program. Possibly, these same students would be even more motivated to read outside the classroom if more titles from all genres were included on the Accelerated Reader list. On the upside, students were reading considerably more five months into the school year than in October 2002, and it is obvious that the A.R. program provided the opportunity for all students to practice and improve their reading skills; this was also a conclusion for schools like St. Brigid's (Guastello, 2002) and Picnic Point (Wilson, 2001) as well.

An obvious drawback was that students were unable to retest if they did poorly. Since the A.R. is a packaged software program, there is nothing that can be done by the school to eliminate this concern. While this was a legitimate concern of the students, there was no evidence that it affected their motivation to read. What can be regarded as a negative aspect of the A.R. program in motivating students to read more, was that poor quiz grades can affect a student's report card. For the poor or reluctant reader, the A.R. program can be discouraging.

Recommendations and Further Study

There are several recommendations that evolved from the research and conclusions. Since fifth-grade students were immensely reliant upon extrinsic rewards as their primary motivation to read, it would be beneficial to include other forms of recognition, such as certificates or end-of-year rewards. In addition, more titles and a greater variety of genres should be included in the Intermediate School's Accelerated Reader list. Since the A.R. program seems to work in the short-term, it would be logical to recommend that this supplemental reading program be extended

into the Egg Harbor Township Middle School, which houses seventh and eighth grade students. Promoting a reading program throughout more of the students' school years would establish better reading habits and a personal incentive to continue reading which might include a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. It would be beneficial to conduct future research on the reading habits of middle school students who participated in the Accelerated Reader program during their elementary school years, and compare the results with those who did not. Such a study might produce the results needed to continue the program into seventh and eighth grade as well as receive the funds necessary each year to maintain A.R. in the elementary schools.

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1. **Check one or more**
   I prefer reading _____Fiction _____Nonfiction _____Biography

CHECK ONLY ONE FROM 2-10

2. How many fiction books did you read last month?
   _____0 books _____1-2 books _____3-5 books _____ more than 5

3. How many nonfiction books did you read last month?
   _____0 books _____1-2 books _____3-5 books _____more than 5

4. Do you prefer reading aloud in your class or reading quietly?
   _____aloud _____quietly _____don't care

5. How often do you read silently at home?
   _____daily _____several times a week _____once a week _____never

6. On average, how many books do you check out from the school library on each visit?
   _____3 _____2 _____1 _____0

7. How many choices are Accelerated Reader books?
   _____3 _____2 _____1 _____0

8. Does your teacher require you to check out at least one Accelerated Reader?
   _____yes _____no

9. Who helps you choose books to read?
   _____library staff _____teacher _____friends/classmates _____no one

10. Do you visit the library on your own or just with your class?
    _____on my own _____just with my class

Thank You

APPENDIX B
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) Why do you participate in the *Accelerated Reader* program?

2) Do you think the A.R. program makes you read more than you would if our school did not have it?

3) Please describe anything about the A.R. program that discourages you from participating.

4) Are there books you would like to read, but don't because they are not on the *Accelerated Reader* list? If so, explain.

5) Do you enjoy reading more since you started participating in the A.R. program?

6) Does point recognition encourage or discourage you to read? Please explain.

7) Do you visit the library between class visits to check out additional books?

8) Has participating in the *Accelerated Reader* program changed your television-viewing habits? Explain.

1. **Check one or more**
   I prefer reading _____Fiction _____Nonfiction _____Biography

CHECK ONLY ONE FROM 2-10

2. How many fiction books did you read last month?
   _____0 books _____1-2 books _____3-5 books _____ more than 5

3. How many nonfiction books did you read last month?
   _____0 books _____1-2 books _____3-5 books _____more than 5

4. Do you prefer reading aloud in your class or reading quietly?
   _____aloud _____quietly _____don't care

5. How often do you read silently at home?
   _____daily _____several times a week _____once a week _____never

6. On average, how many books do you check out from the school library on each visit?
   _____3 _____2 _____1 _____0

7. How many choices are Accelerated Reader books?
   _____3 _____2 _____1 _____0

8. Does your teacher require you to check out at least one Accelerated Reader?
   _____yes _____no

9. Who helps you choose books to read?
   _____library staff _____teacher _____friends/classmates _____no one

10. Do you visit the library on your own or just with your class?
    _____on my own _____just with my class

Thank You

APPENDIX D

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) What do you like about the *Accelerated Reader* program?

2) If you could change one thing about A.R., what would it be?

3) Please explain how the A.R. program motivates you to read outside the classroom.

4) If the A.R. program ended tomorrow, how would your reading habits change?

APPENDIX E
OBSERVATION LOG

Class_____
Date_____

Student	**# Books Checked Out**	**#A.R. Titles**
(check mark for each student observed)		
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

APPENDIX F
LETTER OF REQUEST TO PRINCIPAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Memo To: Mr. Carmen Infante, Principal

From: Mrs. Girard, Librarian

Re: *Accelerated Reader* Research

Date: September 20, 2002

As part of my senior thesis requirement at Rowan University, I will be conducting

research on the *Accelerated Reader* program and how it motivates fifth grade students to

read outside of the classroom. With your permission, I would like to ask three fifth grade

teachers to participate in my study: Ms. Hunt, Ms. Hinlicky, and Ms. Gross. I will be

requesting their cooperation to survey their students' reading behaviors and attitudes

toward the A.R. program. Before beginning this study, I will need written permission

from students' parents or guardians; therefore, I have typed a brief letter of explanation

and attached a permission slip at the bottom of the page. I will also be available to

answer any parental concerns on Back To School Night. Please let me know if this plan

is acceptable to you, and if you have any objections or would like to discuss my plans in

greater detail, please let me know as soon as possible. As always, thank you for your

ongoing support of our school's library media center.

Paula G.

Memo To: Ms. Hunt, Ms. Hinlicky, Ms. Gross

From: Mrs. Girard, Librarian

Re: *Accelerated Reader* Research

Date: September 18, 2002

As part of my senior thesis requirement at Rowan University, I will be conducting

research on the *Accelerated Reader* program and how it motivates fifth grade students to

read outside of the classroom. With your permission, I would like to use your fifth grade

students to participate in my study. I will need to survey your students' reading

behaviors and attitudes toward the A.R. program in October and again in March 2003.

I will also need to interview and observe students in the library during their scheduled

book exchange period, and conduct focus group discussions with small groups of

students which will begin sometime in late January or early February. Focus groups will

meet in the library for approximately thirty minutes for each group and will occur at your

convenience. If you would be willing to cooperate with me in this research project,

please let me know by tomorrow afternoon. I have letters of explanation and permission

slips ready to be sent home with your students. Thank you for your kind consideration in

this matter.

Paula G.

PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE A.R. STUDY

Mrs. Paula A. Girard, Library Media Specialist
Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School
25 Alder Avenue
Egg Harbor Township, N.J. 08234

September 20, 2002

Dear Parent or Guardian,

As part of my graduate school requirement, I will be conducting research this year on the Accelerated Reader program to determine its value in motivating students to read outside the classroom. Students participating in the study will be asked to respond to a brief questionnaire about their reading habits and attitudes toward the A.R. program in October and again in March. Additionally, these students will be observed in the library during their scheduled book exchange class, asked open-ended interview questions, and asked to participate in small focus group discussions. All participation is voluntary and students' grades will not be affected. All students will remain anonymous and there will be no written records identifying any child in the study. Your child's teacher has kindly agreed to participate, however, the study cannot begin without your written permission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 383-3366, extension #1490. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Paula A. Girard

PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

Student's
Name_____Teacher_____

_____

YES_____I GIVE MY CHILD PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE A.R.
STUDY

NO_____I DO NOT GIVE MY PERMISSION

PARENT/GUARDIAN
SIGNATURE   DATE