



ISSN -PRINT-2231-3613/DNLN2455-8729
International Educational Journal

UGC APPROVAL NO. - 42652

CHETANA

Received on 28th April 2018, Revised on 8th May 2018; Accepted 16th May 2018

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Accelerated Reading and Math. Programs

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Key words: *frustrated, Accelerated Reading, reading skills etc.*

Introduction

Accelerated reading program is a program that helps in managing and monitoring children's reading skills. Accelerated Reading Program was first developed three decades ago by the Renaissance Company. One third of schools in America are now members of the program. There are thousands of books that are AR books. If any students want to find a book an AR book to read, they can always go to AR book section and easily get it.

Children when choose a book to read, it encourages them to read the material they are interested in. Then they can read the book and take a comprehensive test on the material they read. The test results helps a teacher to determine if the student has understood the story he/she has read. A.R. helps the children and teacher as well to set goals. The teacher is able to direct students' learning. When children choose their own reading material it keeps their interest in reading. Teachers, librarians and mentors help children choose an appropriate reading level book if they don't find the book of their interest.

Advantages of AR

AR reading helps teachers to differentiate teaching at the click of a button. It makes easier for the teacher to keep students in reading. Since children pick their own books to read, they naturally get interested in at their own reading level. It also helps in getting ready for the appropriate testing on the material. It reduces a lot of paper work for a teacher. It helps in wasting time on the part of teachers that usually they have to in grouping children in reading skill levels.

In order to help children to succeed better, teachers, mentors, volunteers let the children read a book. But they ask questions as a child reads. This helps children understand the text better and children usually don't get frustrated. Besides, children perform better at comprehensive tests if they are asked to answer the questions during reading. In case if a child does not do well on a test, the teacher needs to ask more probing questions during reading time.

Zone of Proximal Development

A child should read books that are in his or her Z.P.D. level (Zone of Proximal Development). ZPD is the range of books level that will challenge a child without causing frustration or loss of interest and motivation. A child will receive a ZPD range after taking a STAR Reading test. STAR is a standardized test to determine reading level. It's important for children to read within their ZPDs. If a child reads a book that is below their ZPD level, they are not really improving their reading skills. If they read a book that is higher than their ZPD level, they might be able to read but comprehension will be hard and children may not be able to have proper comprehension of the material they read. Their ZPD level should be adjusted based on the needs of a child. Usually nonfiction books are harder to comprehend. A child should not read nonfiction books that are on the higher side of their reading level of his/ her Z.P.D. In order to succeed, a child should read a book more than once to really comprehend it. Chapter books need a lot of discipline to read. If a child decides to read a chapter book, he or she is supposed to read a chapter every day. Not reading a chapter book every day will reduce comprehension skill.

Reading Levels of Children

Reading levels are determined by the grades children are in. For example First grade students will have a reading level of 1.0 this means first grade and 0 month, to 1.9 that means first grade and nine months into first grade. Consequently second grade will have books' level 2.0 to 2.9. Advanced children will have a higher reading level than the grade they are in. For example a second grade student could have a 4.5 reading level. That does not mean that a second grader who is reading at 4th grade five months level, could go to the fourth grade. It simple means that if a child is in fourth grade, fifth month he/she takes the same test as the second grader will perform as well as the second grader.

Higher level books require higher thinking skills. It has more difficult vocabulary and critical thinking skills. Lower level books have easier question and vocabulary. To be a

successful reader a child should read for 20 minutes every day. A child should have 90 % accuracy in order to gain understanding of what he or she is reading.

Parents' Role

Parents should be a role model for children to be successful readers. Parents should visit local libraries with their children on regular bases. Parents should also visit or buy books for their children's interest from book stores. Parents can create a home library for their children. If children have books at home, they are encouraged to read. Parents should discuss books with children and read with them to check and help their understanding. Ordering magazines to read, is also a good idea for raising the interest of readers. Children look forward to receiving magazines every month. At school teachers should set aside "story time" for children. No matter what the age of a child is, children are always interested in listen to stories. Teachers should ask questions during story time. These are some ways to help raise a good reader.

Advantages of AR

Accelerated Reader, helps children to become successful readers. Children choose the books he/she wants to read. Teachers or librarians make sure that the book is at the right level. After completing the book, the child should do well on the AR Reading Practice Quiz. When children succeed in the test, they are encouraged to read more. Eventually their Z.P.D. level increases. However, sometimes parents do not agree with their children reading certain books due to language content or beliefs. Parents have a say in what books children could read or not read. There is an ample choice of books to read. There are a lot of choices that children will not run out of choices to read from. There are thousands of books to read and take tests from. With AR reading there are a lot of choices that a child can choose from. His or her reading levels are adjusted according to their reading skills. Children are not tested against other children who have higher reading level or lower reading level. Children's ZPD level is established as they take a STAR test. So every child has their own reading level. They don't compete with other children, but it is their own goal that they try to get to. Local libraries usually have a list of AR books a school has. So children can always check out a book of their reading interest and take an AR test at their school or classroom. Children cannot take an AR test at home. AR test can just be taken at school.

STAR Reading

STAR Reading is a computerized reading assessment. Children are given comprehensive test which continually adjust to a child's responses. If the child's response is correct, the difficulty level is increased. If the child misses a question, the difficulty level is reduced. The test uses multiple-choice questions. The test is timed. Children have to read and answer the questions within a reasonable time. If a child is not able to answer the question in reasonable time then also the difficulty level of the test reduces. STAR tests are given three times, beginning, middle and end, of a school year to check the progress of reading skills. A feedback of children's learning report is generated by computer. The report shows growth or loss of growth by plus and minus signs.

Mentors & Pals

In schools there are mentors, pals (pals are students from upper grades or high school that come to help the younger students in reading, math or any other subject a child might need help in) , or volunteers that help children read one on one bases or individually. Children are allowed to read aloud. This process helps a teacher, pal, volunteer to hear how a child is reading and where they need help. Questions are asked as the children read aloud. This process helps children think and understand the story better.

Teacher also has a reading log for the children. Reading log helps children keep a track of which books they have read. The reading log keeps a track of titles of the books they have read, their parents or teacher's signature indicating that the child did read the book at home or in class. It keeps a track of what percentage answers they got correct.

Teachers usually have leveled books in the classroom, which children can read. Books are kept in small baskets indicating the level of books. Teachers also have D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read) time dedicated to silent reading for twenty minutes in their class schedule. Children can independently read and take an AR test. Test takes 5 to 10 minutes. Children acquire the result write after they read. It helps them to gain confidence in their reading skills. Sometimes there is one on one reading time if the teacher wants to monitor oral reading fluency. Sometimes there is small group reading time. Sometimes there is coral reading where a group of students read together. They can then take an AR test on the book they read. For children who are advanced readers are usually given a chapter book to read comprehend and take an AR test. These children obtain a higher score for reading higher level of books.

AR Books & Math Test

AR books can be found in school libraries, classroom libraries and also local public libraries. Children can check out the books that they are interested in, read and take an AR test. In addition to monitoring reading progress AR has math tests too. Children can take math test. Children have to apply critical thinking skills in order to complete the test. Just like reading test the math test detects children's math skills and manages to give the children easier or harder math problems. Accelerated Math tests use the data generated by the test results to group students in the right level hence reducing time spent grouping students. Children get the right level of math problems so they don't struggle and lose interest in math. Children have lot of ways to improve on their math skills. They can work on the enrichment activities that are usually provided by a teacher. Children can work on math skills on "Sum Dog" which is a computer program that teaches math skills. In addition to that there are other computerized math games that children can work on to enhance their math skills.

Children who improve their reading and math skills tend to do better at school. Students have a goal for AR points that are set after taking the STAR test. The goals are set three times in the year. Students try to accomplish those goals throughout the school year. They feel successful and want to learn. Thus, they are successful in higher studies too and tend to go to college.

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