

Agony or Ecstasy: A Mixed Methods Study of the Accelerated Reader Program and Students'
Attitudes Toward Reading

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my former, current, and future students, for my literacy work has been and will continue to be motivated by these inspiring individuals.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my former, current, and future teachers, for on their shoulders I have stood and will continue to stand in my lifelong quest for continued literacy knowledge.

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Abstract

The impetus for this study was to determine how Accelerated Reader influences the reading attitudes of fourth grade students of varied reading proficiencies who had been exposed to Accelerated Reader since kindergarten. Interested in students' attitudes and motivation toward reading, I examined fourth grade students' reading motivation among two award winning Blue Ribbon Schools in East Tennessee, one of which used Accelerated Reader as the pathway to literacy success while the other did not. Comparisons between the two schools were made in order to determine if there were differences in students' attitudes and motivation toward reading. This explanatory mixed methods study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data were generated through the Motivation to Read Profile-Revised survey and semi-structured individual interviews. The quantitative results indicated that in relation to the overall MRP-R survey, there were no statistically significant differences between students who participate in Accelerated Reader and those who do not. There was not a statistical difference between the AR school and the school without AR regarding survey questions aligned to self-concept. There was a significant difference found on the subcategory of value of reading among the two schools. The AR school produced higher scores on the survey questions aligned to value of reading.

After the initial quantitative analysis was conducted, interview questions were formulated to delve more deeply into these findings. When incorporating Explanatory Sequential Models, the qualitative phase follows the quantitative analysis to more fully elucidate the narrative behind the numbers generated. The results obtained from these differing methods of research produced findings that were sometimes contradictory. These contradictions were discovered through the

semi-structured interview questions that were intended to further explicate the quantitative findings.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Schools and educators across the nation share a united goal...to improve academic achievement while at the same time, assist students in developing a lifelong interest in reading. Schools and researchers across the field find reading motivation a topic deemed worthy of focus and attention. Students who perceive independent reading as an enjoyable and valuable activity seem to soar and experience ecstasy, while students who view recreational reading as a chore or daunting task, often struggle and experience agony.

In an attempt to increase reading motivation, many schools offer extrinsic rewards such as public recognition, parties, stickers, and prizes. Though external rewards can motivate students, educators long for students to develop intrinsic motivation for reading. Students who possess an intrinsic desire for reading are more apt to maintain positive attitudes towards reading that lasts a lifetime. According to Cameron and Pierce (1997), programs based on points and external rewards will not lead to the long-term goal of internal motivation that is desired.

In the era of accountability brought forth by No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), schools find themselves searching for programs to increase reading achievement and motivation (Biggers, 2001). In conjunction with enhanced advertising methods, word of mouth, as well as a long history of use across the nation, an online reading program, Accelerated Reader (AR) owned and operated by Renaissance Learning, integrates technology and manages the independent reading of students. In addition to being the most widely used independent reading management system on the market, the AR program touts its key focus is to motivate

students to read while simultaneously improving reading achievement (Renaissance Learning, 2014). Sometimes serving as a supplement to existing literacy instruction, the AR program caters to the independent portion of instruction where students self-select and read books based on their instructional level, earn points for successful completion of short literal level comprehension quizzes, and are given immediate feedback based on their performance.

There remains a current debate whether AR holds up to its promise, to motivate students to read. It was found that while AR did in fact increase the amount of time that students spent reading, survey results indicate that AR did not promote intrinsic reading motivation for middle school students (Huang, 2012). Some have argued that the competitive nature of AR is likely to cause task avoidance and reduce the intrinsic desire to read (Everhart, 2005).

There exists much research that suggests easy access to books, time to read, reading engagement, and student choice are components of an independent reading program that will increase students' reading achievement and motivation (Miller, 2014). However, some studies that reveal negative perceptions of AR include issues regarding limited supply of books, improper implementation, limited choice, and limits on quizzes available (Huang, 2012). Some feel that teachers approve of Accelerated Reader due to the fact that it supports wide reading practices. However, there is also evidence that supports the idea that by providing easy access to books on interesting topics within the appropriate reading levels alone is enough to motivate readers and increase reading achievement (Miller, 2013). It has been noted that providing extrinsic rewards combined with an overreliance on testing can have demotivating effects on students over time, and especially after they leave the classroom (Gallagher, 2007).

On the contrary, there exists several research studies claiming that Accelerated Reader does improve academic achievement as well as reading motivation. In a quasi-experimental

action research project study conducted by Vollands, Topping, and Evans (1999), the researchers reviewed the formative effects on reading achievement and motivation in two schools serving low socioeconomic, disadvantaged populations. The results revealed that AR, did in fact, yield gains in reading achievement and motivated girls to read more recreationally.

Though a substantial amount of research exists on Accelerated Reader, the literature surrounding students' perceptions of AR in relation to both reading achievement and motivation is lacking. Additionally, there is a gap in the research exploring students' perceptions of AR across varied reading abilities. Until more research is conducted, the question of whether AR promotes reading achievement and positive attitudes toward reading will continue to be debated.

Purpose

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to determine whether Accelerated Reader influences the reading attitudes of fourth-grade students of varied reading abilities. This research was conducted to fill a void in the current literature by examining the perceptions of the AR program through the eyes of fourth-grade students of varied academic proficiencies. By employing both quantitative and qualitative data methods, more substantial conclusions were made concerning whether AR promotes positive reading attitudes among students of diverse academic proficiencies. By bringing life to the voices of such students, commonalities and trends regarding such perceptions were revealed and captured.

At this present time, our nation is at the crossroads of new educational horizons. Recent educational policies and updated accountability measures have schools seeking practices and technology-based programs that can enable all students, regardless of achievement status, to become ready for the academic challenges of the 21st century (Oppenheimer, 2004). Across the

nation, many states have just recently adopted Common Core State Standards or close variations that are based on these standards. Concurrently, students across the nation are expected to master a more rigorous set of literacy standards than those in the past. Additionally, these standards outline technology skills that students across the nation should acquire to satisfy the everyday life and career demands of the 21st century. Currently, many schools across the nation continue to use the AR program to promote literacy achievement, integrate technology skills, and promote positive attitudes toward reading through the use of tangible rewards; however usually without evidence of success.

During this age of accountability, two Title I elementary schools in two separate school districts in East Tennessee have developed varied paths to academic success. At Fairfax Elementary (School A), opportunities abound for students to self-select reading materials from the extensive classroom libraries that exist in each classroom. Students take AR quizzes on each book they read. The AR online program is used to track the independent reading of students. Additionally, Mountain Ridge (School B) has also been recognized for high achievement. Though they place an emphasis on literacy, they do not use the AR program. In order to inform future pedagogical practices, one must determine the differences in reading attitudes of fourth-grade students of diverse reading abilities who do and do not use AR. This study determined if reading attitudes of fourth-grade students who have been entrenched in the AR program reflect agony or ecstasy. By creating a mixed-method study, one will be able to report the differences in attitudes toward reading between fourth-grade students who do and do not use the AR program.

Research Questions

1. Are there differences in attitudes toward reading between fourth-grade students who use the AR program and those who do not? (QUANT)
2. How do high-, average-, and low-achieving fourth grade students, including those with disabilities who use the Accelerated Reader program describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading? (QUAL)
3. How do high-, average-, and low-achieving fourth grade students, including those with disabilities who do not use the Accelerated Reader program, describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading? (QUAL)

In this proposed study, students' reading achievement was defined as the results of the STAR reading assessment published by Renaissance Learning. The STAR reading assessment is an online-based adaptive test that consists of 34 questions per assessment. Renaissance Learning touts that the brief assessment provides a valid and reliable means to assess reading skills across grades K-12. STAR is designed to be used as a screener as well as a progress monitoring tool. Teachers, principals, and district level administrators can generate a multitude of reports on reading growth at the student, class, school, and districtwide level. For the purposes of this research, all fourth-grade students in the study were assessed using the STAR reading assessment at the beginning of the second quarter of the present school year.

Educators across the field are united in the belief that student motivation is an important concept that plays a pivotal role in literacy learning. Because motivation underlies and initiates behavior, student attitudes toward reading are key, for it is a factor that impacts reading

performance (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Gambrell (1996) claimed, “Motivation often makes the difference between learning that is superficial and shallow and learning that is deep and internalized. Because of the powerful influence that motivation plays in literacy learning, teachers are more interested than ever before in understanding the relationships that exists between motivation and achievement and in learning how to help all students achieve” (p. 15). According to Fitzgibbons (2004) reading interests, attitudes, and behaviors are important factors that contribute to the complexity of reading motivation. According to Webster (2015), attitude is defined as the way one feels or thinks about something. Attitudes toward reading are important, because they can affect how one values or is motivated to read. Additionally, students’ attitudes and motivation will be defined as students’ self-concept as readers and their value of reading determined by the Motivation to Read Profile-Revised and semi-structured individual interviews (Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research study, the following terms and definitions are necessary.

1. *Accelerated Reader (AR)* – computer program that helps teachers and librarians manage and monitor children’s independent reading practice.
2. *Blue Ribbon School* – A national award presented by the federal government based on schools’ academic excellence or their ability to close achievement gaps among student subgroups.
3. *Classroom Library* – A collection of books that is housed in a classroom and organized by a particular method, while consisting of an array of genres and covering a diverse range of topics and interests.

4. *Independent Reading* – the time that is provided for students to read independently in self-selected texts.
5. *Independent Reading Level* – the level at which a reader can read at 99% accuracy or above.
6. *Novel study* – a teacher-selected fictional chapter book and sometimes additional supporting texts selected for students to read, analyze, and connect to other literacy areas.
7. *STAR Reading* – A standardized and adaptive assessment produced by Renaissance Learning used to determine the reading level of students. The assessment program uses the cloze method and comprehension of short reading passages to determine students' reading achievement.
8. *Time in Text* – The amount of time spent reading literary materials.
9. *Title I* – Part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA), provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high percentages of children from low-income families to assist children in meeting challenging state academic standards.
10. *Title I School of Distinction* – A national award recognizing Title I schools that have exceptional achievement for at least two consecutive years, and close the achievement gap among disadvantaged populations.
11. *Zone of Proximal Development* – The distance between texts that one can read independently and texts that one can read with assistance.
12. *Zone of Actual Development* – The appropriate zone or level in which a one can read texts at an independent level.

Significance of the Study

The AR program continues to be the program of choice used across the nation to boost test scores and motivation to read. Schools incorporating the AR program allocate significant amounts of dollars generated from varied funding sources – anywhere from federal Title I to PTA organizations (Carter, 1996). Though many studies have explored the program's effects on achievement or motivation, only a few exist that have examined both achievement and motivation among settings known for high achievement in relation to the at-risk populations they serve. There is also a void in the literature regarding AR's impact on students across varied proficiency ranges, including those with disabilities. In order to fill a void in the literature, an examination of the AR program in relation to achievement and motivation across two schools that are successful despite the low socioeconomic population they serve is warranted.

Assumptions

In this research study, it was assumed that the participants have been accurately identified by the STAR reading assessment. Participants ranked at the 80th percentile or above on the STAR reading assessment were defined as high-performing. Students scoring between the 50th and 79th percentiles were classified as average achieving students. Low-achieving students were defined as those fourth-grade students who scored at the 49th percentile or below on the STAR reading assessment, while fourth-grade students with learning disabilities were those with an IEP. It was also assumed that participants classified as individuals with disabilities have been correctly identified to receive special education services due to learning disabilities.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation study was divided into five chapters. Chapter one presents an introduction to the AR program, conflicting views and opinions regarding AR, the research questions guiding the study, and highlights key terms associated with the study. Chapter two provides the theoretical framework surrounding the study and summarizes the literature regarding the interrelatedness of motivation and engagement. The literature review is organized around seven primary elements related to the AR program: (a) theoretical framework; (b) interrelatedness of motivation and engagement; (c) historical and political contexts surrounding AR; (d) background of the AR program (e) guiding principles of AR; (f) research on AR and reading achievement; and (g) research on AR in relation to attitudes, perceptions, and motivation. In Chapter three, the methodology for the study will be discussed. Chapter four presents both the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the various data, and chapter five offers a discussion of the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter examined Renaissance Learning's Accelerated Reader (AR) program, and synthesizes research regarding AR's impact on students' reading achievement, perceptions, and attitudes regarding reading. Since the program's inception thirty years ago, there have been mounting levels of research aimed at determining the program's impacts on student readers. This literature review is organized around seven primary elements related to the AR Program: (a) theoretical framework; (b) interrelatedness of motivation and engagement; (c) historical and political contexts surrounding AR; (d) background of the AR program; (e) guiding principles of AR; (f) research on AR and reading achievement; and (g) research on AR in relation to attitudes, perceptions, and motivation.

Theoretical Framework

There is a vast amount of research to support the key role that motivation plays in learning to read. Theorists and researchers have presented numerous ideas to explain reading motivation. Though they pose diverse perspectives, they are not totally isolated ideas, but are interrelated concepts that support and expand on one another. The concepts of self-efficacy, value-expectancy theory, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation will form the theoretical framework for this research study. As a compass for educational practice, this framework will also include research focused on classroom practices that nurture students' reading development and foster reading motivation.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Many researchers interested in motivation draw special attention to the construct of self-efficacy, self-concept, or beliefs about one's ability (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy in the area of reading relates to one's beliefs about their competence as a reader, on reading activities such as reading a book, or successfully completing literacy tasks (Scott, 1996). Self-efficacy in relation to reading has been found to positively correlate with the amount of time students spend reading for both academic and recreational purposes (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). People like things they do well, thus a student who feels confident in their ability to read and comprehend text are more likely to engage in the activity often. In contrast, students who struggle may doubt their abilities, are less confident, may engage in reading less often, and may ultimately continue with a decline in achievement.

At all ages, one's confidence and self-concept are precursors to success (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Regardless of grade level, the lowest achievers feel inadequate against their high achieving peers. The sense of incompetence that consumes such students can hinder them from exerting the effort needed to advance and succeed. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) claimed, "Resilience is pervasive for achievers, and discouragement is the hallmark of low achievers across the grade span of K to 12" (p.21).

Value Expectancy Theory

An influencing factor in reading motivation is the expected outcome, or value, of a reading task. Students will be motivated to work hard if they believe the outcome is of value to them. Value-expectancy theory consists of two primary components of motivation that work in

unison (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Value refers to the degree which one places on an outcome of an action, while expectancy is related to an individual's perception of whether he or she will achieve the desired outcome (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Evidence claims that students who perceive reading as a valuable activity and who find relevant reasons for reading will read more strategically, and place more effort in the overall reading experience (Ames & Archer, 1988). A dedicated reader persists and pushes forward because he or she believes that the activity is important and worthwhile. In contrast, students will not be motivated if they find little or no value in the activity (Nilsen, 2009).

Value-expectancy theory places emphasis on the importance of positive self-perceptions regarding competence, especially for students who struggle to complete reading activities or have developed negative attitudes about reading. If students are to value reading, it is imperative that students master the necessary skills and concepts along the literacy continuum in order to develop positive perceptions of reading. To motivate students who have experienced repeated failure, teachers must create classroom contexts where students not only feel safe to take risks, but also assist students to make the connection between effort and success (Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland, 2003).

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation is the driving force behind performance. Ryan and Deci (2000) described two types of motivation that can assist in initiating behavior. Intrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is initiated by internal needs. For instance, a student who reads a book simply because he or she enjoys the activity for its own sake is considered intrinsically motivated. In contrast, extrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is influenced by external factors. An example of external

motivation would be when students read books in the interest of receiving a tangible reward. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play a critical role in one's decisions about what activities to do, the time spent doing them, and the amount of effort expended while doing them (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). When readers are motivated, engagement will be fostered, and more positive attitudes toward reading will be experienced (Gambrell, 2011).

Intrinsic motivation is based on two components that are parallel to engagement in an act or activity: competence and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Competence is defined as one's capability to successfully do the task under consideration, while self-determination is the concept that an individual has some level of control over the particular task. Ryan and Deci (2000) found that students who were self-determined and intrinsically motivated had higher achievement, and reported more positive attitudes regarding classroom experiences than peers who were motivated by external factors. Self-determination learning is a goal that supports the three innate human needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).

An additional factor in intrinsic motivation is the social setting and subsequent relationships formed with others while an activity takes place. Autonomy refers to one's freedom to initiate and be independent to determine one's actions. According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), a social setting that encourages choice and responsibility is more likely to result in students who are intrinsically motivated. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) revealed that social contexts that increase opportunities for satisfying one's needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy will also foster self-determination. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) posited that all three elements, competence, relatedness, and autonomy must be present to develop intrinsic motivation.

The results are not clear on the role that extrinsic incentives play on motivation.

However, Kohn (1999) reported that when external rewards are given to individuals for participating in an act or activity that they already find motivating, individuals tend to decrease the amount of time they spend doing the activity once the external rewards are withdrawn.

Researchers (Gambrell, 1996; Oldfather; 1993; Turner, 1995) suggested that teachers should enlist in the following practices to promote motivational contexts for reading: provide students with easy access to a wide range of interesting reading materials, designate adequate time for students self-select and read books, allocate time to socially interact with others about books, and provide opportunities for students to read a balance of high-success and appropriately challenging texts. Additionally, Malloy and Codling (1997) offer the following suggestions for fostering students' skill development in reading: establish a classroom environment and culture that emphasizes genuine learning rather than performance goals or competition, ensure that students develop the necessary reading skills to develop competence, communicate the value of reading for pleasure and building of knowledge, and seek feedback from students regarding their perceptions and views of classroom literacy activities, tasks, and materials. Additional researchers have studied classroom contexts that support reading motivation. This work in the field (e.g., Gambrell, Codling, & Palmer 1996) shows the value in seeking feedback from students regarding what does or does not motivate them to read. For example, student feedback about motivation can provide a compass by which to gauge specific factors that create autonomy as well as classroom contexts for reading motivation.

Several theories have been presented that have contributed to the understanding of how to create classroom contexts that enhance positive attitudes and motivation toward reading. It appears that some of the findings across the motivation field may be in conflict with some practices related to AR. For instance, theorists who support intrinsic motivation theory disagree

with external rewards given for reading performance. Practices surrounding AR, such as earning points for performance, could be counterintuitive to models supported by motivation theorists. Students who participate in the AR program expect to be successful, for they read books at their instructional level. Though students read self-selected texts within their appropriate ability ranges, points are not earned unless students successfully pass the AR quizzes at certain proficiency levels. According to self-efficacy theory, students could experience a decrease in self-efficacy due to low performance on AR tasks and quizzes. It is clear that the suggestions outlined by motivation theorists are not completely analogous to the practices that surround the Accelerated Reader program. Whether AR can live up to its claim— to motivate readers remains an issue to be determined.

Interrelatedness of Reading Motivation and Engagement

Great readers, in addition to possessing the necessary skills to read well, are motivated in the reading process because they find it fun, fulfilling, and interesting. Teachers consider motivated readers to be students who are competent and confident, for they perceive themselves as successful literacy learners that engage in and value the learning process. Motivated readers not only have the ability to interact with and extract meaning from texts, but are also dedicated to the reading experience because they simply enjoy it. When readers are motivated, the result will be engagement and more positive attitudes toward reading (Guthrie, 2013). Research suggests that motivated readers tend to read often and attain higher levels of achievement in reading (Irvin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007). In other words, motivated readers exhibit both the “will and skill” to read (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010).

However, not all students are joyful or motivated readers. While motivated readers have the ability to read and do so often, struggling students lack the necessary skills to read well, and become more reluctant readers who are less likely to engage in wide reading practices. Currently, research confirms significant differences in the amount of in-school and out-of-school reading among proficient and struggling readers. Allington (2012) reported that struggling readers read far less in school than their typical developing peers, and thus continue to fall further behind. In contrast, higher-achieving literates read approximately three times as much per week as lower-achieving students. Stanovich (1986) reported that such disparity in children's reading growth and development results in the "Matthew Effect", a term originated from the biblical perspective where advantages lead to more advantages, and disadvantages lead to further, cumulative disadvantages.

In a longitudinal study conducted by Juel (1988), struggling fourth-grade readers reported that their hatred toward reading was due to failed reading experiences. According to Ganske, Monroe, and Strickland (2003), "Students who experience repeated difficulty with reading may become apathetic, anxious, or even negative when faced with reading tasks" (p.124). To determine students' attitudes toward reading, Juel reported that when students were asked whether they would rather clean their rooms or read, 5% of proficient readers responded that they would rather clean, while 40% of poor readers said they preferred to clean their rooms.

Reading motivation and engagement are interconnected elements that represent the goal of literacy improvement for all students. The concept of motivation and engagement are often used interchangeably. Gambrell (2011) defines motivation to read as "the likelihood of engaging in reading or choosing to read" (p. 1). Guthrie and Klauda (2014) define reading motivation as the "beliefs, values, and goals related to reading, while reading engagement is defined as time,

effort, and persistence demonstrated in reading activities” (p. 390). Reading engagement is a crucial lever that leads a reader to continued practice and perseverance. Motivation is the foundation upon which engagement is built. For educators hoping to positively impact the affective orientations to literacy, it serves as a critical point of entry. Engagement, and its relatedness to motivation is a necessary element that cannot be ignored, for over time, it is the means by which student outcomes are influenced. Guthrie, Wigfield, and You (2012) posited that engagement with reading is directly related to achievement because it involves opportunities for continued practice. It is through confident practice that students can enhance the skills necessary for continued literacy growth and development. When low achieving students lack motivation, engagement is nonexistent. Without the opportunity to become engaged, struggling students have minimal opportunities to strengthen their literacy proficiencies, and their ability to learn will decrease (Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie, 2000).

Accelerated Reader Program

Historical and Political Contexts Surrounding Accelerated Reader

According to Thompson, Madhuri, and Taylor (2008), educators across the nation have longed for the magic bullet that transforms struggling and reluctant students into high-performing and motivated readers. This preoccupation has been debated throughout time, and still continues today (Chall, 1967; Goodman, 1992). The first wave of AR users began in the late 1990s, just prior to the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In 2001, the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act promised to bring hope to the nation by ensuring that updated mandates would enable all students to be ready for the academic demands of the future. Along

with NCLB came tremendous pressure for schools to increase the standardized achievement scores of students across diverse groups. To satisfy the law's demands, many school districts across the nation sought the assistance of popular supplemental programs, vowing to have the solutions to raise reading achievement (Linn, 2005).

In 2007, with the economy on the decline, along with the reading performances of students remaining stagnant on National Assessment of Educational Progress, the *Nations Report Card* (NAEP), President Barack Obama put forth the \$4.3 billion Race to the Top initiative as a way to boost the economy while simultaneously improving achievement and preparing students for college and career paths. With Obama's Race to the Top (RTT) initiative, large-scale competitive grants were awarded to states willing to embrace new educational ideologies in the areas of advanced technologies and data systems, Common Core State Standards, innovative assessments, and teacher evaluations. Just as George W. Bush's NCLB brought high-stakes standardized testing to the forefront, Barack Obama's RTT agenda further promoted high-stakes testing as a way to hold schools accountable for teaching more rigorous standards aimed at college and workplace readiness. Though President Barack Obama and policy makers were hopeful that RTT would strengthen America's educational system with improved, rigorous standards coupled with new and improved standardized testing initiatives, waves of discontent flooded the nation as parents, citizens, and lawmakers began to question governmental interference with policies that had historically been left up to the individual states. With media coverage highlighting the controversies surrounding Common Core State State Standards, Barak Obama came under intense political pressure to update the NCLB Act (Layton, 2015).

2015 marked the demise of NCLB, and Barak Obama's Every Student Succeeds Act was signed into law. This new law eliminates much governmental control and returns many aspects

of educational decision making to the individual states. Though the nation at this time is hopeful that ESSA's timely arrival will bring solutions to flawed policies of the past, educators are still bound to the restraints brought forth by the age of accountability. At the present, media coverage highlighting the shortcomings associated with the testing regime is at an all time high. To demonstrate resistance to the testing regime, parents across various states have initiated an opt out movement that has sent shockwaves throughout the nation, leaving many questioning the impact of standardized assessments on students (Education Week, 2015).

In the midst of the controversies surrounding past and current laws and policies that have plagued our schools and failed to positively impact our national achievement status, one thing has remained constant throughout the last thirty years: AR continues to be the reading management system of choice used by many schools across the nation to improve academic achievement and reading motivation. At this present time, AR still continues to be a debatable topic across the educational and research communities. More research should be conducted to seek the viewpoints of those who are impacted by AR the most—the students.

Background on the Accelerated Reader Program

Accelerated Reader, created in 1984 by Judith Paul, was developed to encourage her own children to read more books. With her husband Terry as her business partner, they merged their technological talents and desire to motivate children to read, and a business was born. By 1986, the Paul's began selling AR to schools from the basement of their home in Wisconsin (Stefl-Mabry, 2005). Today, Renaissance Learning has emerged globally, catering to educational consumers seeking programs in literacy and math. In addition to Accelerated Reader, Renaissance Learning offers additional literacy programs and assessments including: STAR

Reading, STAR Early Literacy, and Accelerated Reader 360, all of which claim to be research-proven tools to accelerated learning. The difference between the traditional Accelerated Reader used currently in many schools and Accelerated Reader 360 is that latter contains leveled web-based articles, free from ads and visual distractions, that teachers can assign to students electronically, thus eliminating the need for photocopying (Renaissance Report, 2015).

Although its owners and operators have changed over time throughout the thirty years of the AR's existence, it continues to thrive, providing educators across the nation with a one-stop shop solution for accelerating and motivating student learning. Renaissance Learning, Inc., formerly owned and operated by Advantage Learning Systems is the parent company of Accelerated Reader. Though the program still uses the parent name of Renaissance Learning, Inc., it was purchased by Hellman & Friedman in 2014 (Renaissance Learning, 2016). The company boasts that their computerized learning program offers solutions to schools and districts seeking computerized instructional systems to track independent reading practices, and thus, improve achievement for students in grades K-12. AR claims that their software allows teachers to track students' individual progress, thus allowing them more time to focus on individual needs. In our present age of data-driven decision-making and ongoing quest to manage instructional time wisely, the ease and quantifiable nature of AR is appealing to many schools and districts. Additionally, as schools seek to prepare students for the academic and technological demands of the 21st century, Renaissance Learning claims that students who use AR are nearly twice as likely to be College and Career Ready (Renaissance Learning, 2016).

For the many schools searching for quick fixes to transform struggling and reluctant readers into high-performing and motivated students, AR seems like a logical solution if one has confidence in the research supporting Accelerated Reader. Many schools have been quick to

implement AR, despite the fact that only one longitudinal experimental study exists providing evidence that AR improves reading achievement (Peak & Dewalt, 1994).

Due to sophisticated advertising techniques, AR is used in more than 60 countries worldwide, and approximately 37,000 schools across the U.S., making it the most widely-used reading management system in the country. (Renaissance Learning, 2016).

Guiding Principles of the Accelerated Reader Program

According to the program's suggestions for best practices, AR is not meant to replace, but instead to supplement or to enhance an existing core reading program. In accordance with Accelerated Reader, the AR program is framed around the following guiding principles: students must have sufficient time to practice reading; students should read books matched to their individual reading level; students should have easy access to books they choose matched to individual interests; students demonstrate comprehension by taking short quizzes on a computer or mobile device after they read each book; students receive individual assistance from a knowledgeable teacher; and students set goals and receive feedback.

Students Must Have Sufficient Time to Practice Reading

It only makes sense that to be good at something, sufficient practice would be required (Allington, 2012). Therefore, it should not be any surprise that to become a good reader, one would require much practice also. AR recommends that students have at least 35 minutes of in-school reading practice per day to increase their reading development (Renaissance Learning, 2016). The principle of providing substantial time to practice reading is a component of AR that is strongly supported by the literature. Though Allington (2012) posited that there is no evidence

to date that prescribes precisely the amount of reading that students need to perform at high levels of reading proficiencies, Krashen (2003) purported that students who were provided more reading time in school performed as well or better than students who were not allocated additional recreational reading time. Such students demonstrated higher academic achievement than comparisons. Additionally, reading volume among high and low-achieving students has been well documented. Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) claim higher-achieving students on average read three times as much in school as their lower-achieving peers (p.7).

Though reading volume is central to the development of reading proficiencies, typical commercial core reading programs tend to provide material to engage students in only 15 minutes of reading each day (Allington, 2012). With the remaining 75 minutes allocated to completing workbook pages and answering lower-level comprehension questions, many students receive very little time to engage in reading (Allington, 2012). Cunningham (2005) reminds us that as early as 1977, Richard Allington pleaded, “If they don’t read much, how they ever gonna get good” (p.1). Reading volume is defined as the time students spend reading in addition to the number of words they consume as they read (Allington, 2012). This combination impacts all aspects of students’ cognitive abilities, ranging from vocabulary development as well as knowledge of the world (Cunningham & Zibulsky, 2013). In one of the most extensive studies of independent reading, Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) connected reading growth to the time students spent reading voluntarily outside of school. They found that independent time spent reading was the best predictor of reading achievement. In this study, the researchers determined that fifth-grade students who read at least forty minutes per day scored in the 90th percentile on standardized tests. Simply put, those who read more than an hour outside of school outperform their lower achieving peers. Additionally, in a classic study conducted on teacher

effect, it was determined that the volume of reading done by students during the school day was a key element in distinguishing more and less effective teachers (Pressley et al, 2001).

Students Should Read Books Aligned to Their Individual Levels

A foundational assumption of the AR program is that students will benefit from high amounts of success reading. The AR program touts its key to success is enabling students to read trade books that are a just right-level, that is neither too difficult, nor too easy, for optimal learning to occur. According to the AR program, reading books that are too hard creates frustration, while reading books that are too easy leads to boredom (Renaissance Learning, 2016). The component of AR that relates to reading level is consistent with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory. Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who claimed that the child, with the assistance of a more knowledgeable adult, gradually develops the ability to master tasks independently. He referred to the difference between what a child is able to do independently and what he or she can do with guidance from an adult as the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The AR program uses Vygotsky's term ZPD to indicate book levels as the instructional range in which a student can read and understand text. The goal of the AR program is for students to be able to independently read and select books within appropriate ZPD levels, so they can read experience success, and thus, accelerate learning.

AR refers to a book level as the difficulty of a given text. Teachers tend to rely on book levels when selecting appropriate texts to read aloud for kids to read or read aloud and to assist students in selecting appropriately challenging books for independent reading (Renaissance Learning, 2016). AR determines book levels using a readability formula called the Advantage-TASA Open Standard Reading Formula (ATOS). For each text, the ATOS statistical formula

measures text difficulty in the context of book reading. The formula analyzes the average length of sentences, word length, and grade-level vocabulary, and book length. The level of the book is reported by grade. For instance, a book level of 3.5 means that the text would be appropriate for a student whose reading skills are equivalent to an average third-grade student within the fifth month of school. Reading Renaissance claims that the ATOS formula is a valid and reliable measure of text complexity, as outlined by the Common Core State Standards (Renaissance Learning, 2016).

Renaissance Learning (2014) created a report regarding their ATOS readability formula. The company maintains that their readability formula is an accurate form of leveling that is superior to other readability formulas due to the fact that the company gathered a panel of experts to develop the formula. Though they provide no clear evidence for such claims, an advertisement states, “The refinements made to ATOS improve upon an already reliable and valid readability measure, making it that much more precise when measuring text that runs the gamut of lengths, from one sentence to a full book. Because of the rich and voluminous data collected over the past 13 years with the ATOS formula, Renaissance Learning has a wealth of information on which to analyze how students respond to words and text” (p. 3).

In order to obtain a reading level in the AR program, students are administered the STAR Reading test via computer. An individual reading level is determined as the highest reading level at which a student can correctly answer 80% of the tested items. It is a nationally norm-referenced test of general reading achievement that is used for grades 1-12. This computer adaptive assessment allows for adjustments in difficulty based on individual student responses. The idea surrounding adaptive assessments is to avoid the common pitfalls of the one-size-fits-all aspects of many standardized assessments. Testing time is typically minimized, scoring is

computerized, and teachers receive results in a timely manner as compared to other types of traditional assessments. The STAR assessment uses a combination of the cloze method and reading passages in order to determine students' appropriate reading levels. It typically takes students approximately ten minutes to complete the assessment, and reports are available upon completion. According to Renaissance Learning Renaissance Learning (2016), STAR is one of the leading and most widely used reading assessment for K-12 schools on the market. Its fast, valid, and reliable data solutions make it a viable option for many (Renaissance Learning, 2016). According to Waterman and Sargent (2003) researchers for the Buros, Center for Testing, the STAR reading assessment is a valid and reliable assessment. Reliability estimates have been computed for each grade level, and has received values ranging from .89 to .92. Content validity of the STAR reading assessment has been confirmed through the item development process. Construct validity is supported through correlations between the STAR reading test performance and student scores from various standardized assessments in the norming sample. The reported correlations were between .60 and .90, which suggests commonality among the measured constructs.

Students Should Have Easy Access to Interesting Books

The concept of providing easy access to interesting books is not a new phenomenon, but it continues to be at the forefront of topics worthy of attention (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; Krashen, 2014; Miller, 2014). In too many classrooms today, access to books outside of core reading programs is often nonexistent, and too often students are not interested in the reading material that they are required to read. Turner and colleagues (1999) studied sixth-grade students' access to reading materials in three large middle schools and found that students

enjoyed reading scary books and cartoons along with books and magazines about popular culture and sports. The results showed that the majority of students obtained their preferred reading materials from home and stores rather than from school or classroom libraries. The study revealed that when availability of high-interest books and magazines among high and low-income students were sought, classrooms ranked last as a place to search for such texts. Research claims one method to boost reading achievement is to surround students with high-quality, interesting books (Krashen, 2011a). A print-rich classroom filled with trade books on a multitude of topics and genres provide students with an easy and unique opportunity to self-select reading materials based on interest (Gambrell, 2011; Krashen, 2014).

Ivey and Johnston, (2013) found that low-scoring eighth-grade readers, when given access to interesting young adult literature dealing with issues that mattered to them, read enthusiastically and used many of the strategic reading behaviors that most teachers teach explicitly. It was found that eighth grade students independently created strategies when they encountered text with challenging content. It was found that even though teachers can explicitly teach reading strategies, students are more likely to use strategic practices when they are engaged with the text they are reading and when they socially interact with peers.

It has been found that interest is a motivational factor correlated to engagement, and that influences reading behavior and learning (Fitzgibbons, 2004). Overall, when background variables such as past achievement and socio-economic status are controlled for, it is interest that predicts topic knowledge, vocabulary, and text comprehension (Renk-Jalongo, 2007). In a study designed to control for the effects of choice and interest on learning, attitudes, and reader engagement, Flowerday and colleagues (2004) found that interest alone was a more powerful predictor than choice. Therefore, it is evident that interest in what one reads increases

engagement. Naceur and Schiefele (2005) found that when students were faced with challenging texts, they demonstrated more persistence when they were interested in the topic presented.

Overall, educators have a profound impact on interest, for the teacher is a primary vehicle for which facilitation of interest can be developed. In research conducted by Edmunds and Bauserman (2006), students reported that their teachers, parents, book availability, and their identities as readers influenced their reading interests. Therefore, not only should teachers use effective strategies to elicit reading interest, but they should also teach students how to select interesting texts that are readable and appropriate for students' reading development (Clark & Phythian-Sence, 2008).

Students Should Self-Select Independent Reading Materials

A factor related closely to interest is choice (Allington, 2012). One of the most widespread recommendations for improving reading motivation is providing students with choice. Attitudes and involvement in reading can be positively enhanced by providing students with the ability to self-select independent reading materials. When students are given choice about their reading, they are more likely to meet the opportunity with enthusiasm, at least temporarily (Guthrie, 2015). Though ranked second to interest, Ryan and Deci (2000) found choice to be directly linked to improved achievement, engagement, intrinsic motivation, persistence, and more positive attitudes toward reading. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) suggests that when students are given autonomy and genuine choice, effort and commitment to reading also increases.

AR's suggestion for classroom libraries to be well stocked to provide abundant choice and pique the interests of all students is a concept supported by the literature. According to

Neuman (1999) classroom libraries should contain a minimum of 300 titles. In addition to the concept of book quantity, Neuman (1999) notes the importance of book quality. She states, “To spark children’s interest and enthusiasm about reading, books must catch children’s attention, captivate their imaginations, and make them want to return to their pages again and again” (p.4). It is recommended that classroom libraries be filled with new books containing bright, attractive covers, for old, tattered books from garage sales will not maintain students’ enthusiasm about books (Neuman, 1999).

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) recommend classroom libraries contain 300-600 books, depending on the grade level. They suggest that teachers should expect first grade students to read approximately 100 books during the school year, while older children reading longer chapter books should read between 50-75 books for the year. Depending on the grade levels and student reading levels indicated by STAR, AR suggests that between school-wide and classroom libraries, ten books per child are recommended (Renaissance Learning, 2016). In alignment with Fountas and Pinnell’s suggestions, AR suggests the number of books required per student decreases as the grade equivalent increases since length of books grows as students get older.

Though AR does not allude to the quantity of books needed within varied genres, however, they highly recommend that informational text be included in independent reading. For instance, their web-based advertisement states, “AR quizzes are available for nearly 170,000 books, about half of which, are nonfiction titles” (Renaissance Learning, 2015, p. 6).

According to Neuman (1999), students need exposure to a wide range of topics and genres, especially books that reflect the multiculturalism within our society. It is recommended that classroom libraries include traditional stories, fantasies, realistic fiction, historical fiction, biographies and autobiographies, and informational texts.

Creating extensive classroom libraries where high and low achievers, as well as second-language learners, and economically disadvantaged students can self-select independent reading materials is a vehicle by which students' reading achievement, engagement and motivation can be increased. Additionally, in a typical fourth-grade classroom, one might expect reading levels of students to range from second to sixth grade or higher.

Students Set Goals, Earn Points by Taking Comprehension Quizzes, And Receive Rewards

AR measures reading practice with points earned from short multiple-choice quizzes after they complete a book. Renaissance Learning recommends that students take quizzes within 24 hours of finishing a book so the contents of the text will be easily recalled. To assess the comprehension of each book read, students complete quizzes containing 5, 10, or 20 multiple-choice questions. Currently, there are over 110,000 quizzes available to be used on either a desktop computer or a mobile device (Renaissance Learning, 2016). To avoid problems associated with young students not being able to read the quiz, audio recordings of the quizzes are available at an additional cost to assist emergent or struggling readers. After the student completes the quiz, AR points are awarded based on text difficulty and the student's performance on the quiz. If a student reads a book that has been assigned a point value of ten, and scores 100 percent on the quiz, the student will earn full points; however, if a student earns 80 percent on comprehension, the student will earn 80% of the total possible points. To obtain any points at all, students must score at least 60% on the quiz. Renaissance Learning suggests that teachers set a minimum comprehension quiz goal of 85% for each quiz taken. Books are assigned points based on a formula. The formula for determining a book's point value is calculated based on the number of words in a book and the book's level of difficulty according

the Flesch-Kincaid readability scale (Chall & Dale, 1995). The formula for assigning points to books is as follows:

$$\text{AR points} = \frac{(10 + \text{book level})}{10 \times (\text{words in book}/10,000)}$$

A common complaint surrounding the multiple-choice quiz items created by AR is that the questions tend to assess basic knowledge and recall aspects of the texts, and questions that assesses higher order thinking skills are a rarity (Groce & Groce, 2005). Biggers (2001) posits that in relation to assessment and comprehension, students should be provided with multiple opportunities to revisit texts, as well as possibilities for written responses and extension activities related to texts read. Since teachers use performance on the AR quizzes as the primary tool to gauge students' comprehension abilities, it is possible that critical-thinking and higher-order literacy activities are absent from the overall literacy program (Groce & Groce, 2005). Additionally, Carter (1996), notes that it is important for children to engage in critical thinking skills and activities that require students to evaluate and synthesize information derived from texts. In a study of quiz questions created by AR, Groce and Groce (2005) found that after analyzing 960 questions from AR quizzes, 71% were aligned to Bloom's *Knowledge* and *Comprehension Levels*, both of which are the two lowest levels of comprehension that calls for only basic recall of facts, details, and main ideas. An additional critic of AR quizzes claims that it is important to note that technology should not be expected to replace methods that allow teachers to observe oral reading behaviors and foster interactions concerning students' independent reading experiences. Biggers (2001) reports that an additional downside of AR is that the only thing students have to do to demonstrate comprehension or move to the next reading level is score highly on AR quizzes. Ultimately, students should have an array of

options, in addition to tests and quizzes, for demonstrating reading comprehension.

It is common for schools to promote extrinsic motivation by rewarding students who earn a certain amount of AR points. Some typical rewards range from pizza and ice-cream parties, field trips, to principals dressing up like a hotdog and allowing students to cover them with condiments such as mustard and ketchup. As adults, we do not reward children for being active on the playground, building with blocks, or sitting on the laps of adults to listen to a great story. There is a simple reason as to why adults do not have to offer tangible rewards for engagement in such activities: they are in and of themselves— fun. The disadvantage to providing students with external rewards in exchange for points and prizes is that it sends a message to students that reading in and of itself must be an unpleasant or dreadful activity. Some feel that requiring students to take quizzes on every book read is based too much on behavioristic approaches; students in such classrooms learn to read only when rewards are in place (Chenoweth, 2001). Because AR points are used as a means to meet reading goals that are typically set by teachers each quarterly grading period, some students meet such goals and receive rewards, while others do not. It has been found that in some schools and classrooms, students are punished for not reaching their point goals. Groce and Groce (2005) describe an event where they observed students at the end of the grading period having to sit alone in silence at recess simply because they had not reached their AR goal. Educators must question practices that utilize rewards and punishments as methods of control, for such methods have not been found to foster intrinsic motivation for reading.

The practices of asserting punishments for not reading and receiving external rewards in exchange for goals set and mastered for reading is not the only complaint of common practices surrounding AR. The issue regarding competition has raised some debate as well. Clearly, the

competitive nature that can be sparked from AR is in contrast with those that advocate for cooperation. Even AR warns schools about the potential hazards associated with accumulating points (Renaissance Learning, 2014):

“In sports and other competitions, a player wins by earning more points than anybody else. Sometimes schools approach AR in the same way and recognize students who earn the most points. We discourage this practice. When schools focus primarily on points, students tend to choose inappropriate books and less skilled readers are handicapped. To try to earn more points, some students take quizzes without reading books, and they share answers. All students lose sight of the primary goal, which is to read interesting books at the level of difficulty that is right for each of them as individuals.” (p. 5)

According to Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipelewski (2003), students are not likely to develop a lifelong love of reading from programs that enlist the use of points or incentive programs.

Spaulding (1992) purports that students learn more in classrooms that promote intrinsic motivation, because they become deeply engaged in an activity for the purpose of enjoying the activity itself. Additionally, advocates of self-determination theory posit that intrinsic motivation occurs as the result of an individual perspective that one can accomplish a goal.

Students and Teachers Are Provided with Immediate Feedback Regarding Performance

Upon completion of AR quizzes, students receive immediate feedback regarding their performance. After every quiz, students can view charts and visuals indicating how they are progressing toward their quarterly grading period reading goals. When students take quizzes, images of book jackets serve as a reference to books students have previously read. According to Renaissance Learning, this immediate feedback and visual record keeping reinforces effort and

motivates students (Renaissance Learning, 2016). Not only is feedback offered to students, but it is available to parents as well. Recently, Renaissance Learning's advanced technologies have made it an option for parents to receive notifications by email when children complete an AR quiz. Additionally, teachers can generate reports that provide a detailed analysis of performance based on individual students, groups, or entire classrooms. Such reports will provide teachers with the percentage of fiction and nonfiction books that have been read, points earned, and how they have scored on quizzes. According to the company, due to the STAR software's ability to synthesize large amounts of data coupled with the plentiful data options available, teachers have the necessary information at their fingertips to make instructional decisions and plan lessons directly tied to the literacy needs of individual students, groups of students, or the entire classrooms (Renaissance Learning, 2014).

Students' Independent Reading Must Be Guided by a Knowledgeable Teacher

Renaissance Learning highly recommends professional training prior to the implementation of the AR program. According to the company's advertisements, schools that invest additional funds for expert training are more apt to reap academic benefits. In order to provide schools with differentiated training options, various types of training formats are offered. For a fee of \$799, teachers can receive on-site training; however, for those preferring a web-based experience, teachers can take online courses and receive access to professional development information around the clock for the price of \$1899. Schools searching for an affordable route for professional training may opt for a one-hour webinar. For instance, Renaissance Learning charges \$150 per hour for a single group of up to twenty individuals.

Sanders & Topping (2006), received a grant from Accelerated Reader to conduct a study with 80,000 students from Tennessee in grades three through six. Their findings showed that the standardized test scores of these students were higher on TCAP in classrooms where teachers had received formal training from Renaissance Learning (Chenoweth, 2001).

We have known throughout time that a main problem is due to educators seeking quick fixes to age-old problems. Even in the age of advanced technologies, teachers must know how to use such advances as a means to strengthen rather than replace instruction. Oppenheimer (2004) warns schools that they should be aware of false promises associated with technology. Though technological advances have been known to provide teachers with more tools to present information to students and more avenues to collect information about students, it has not yet been found that computers alone make good teachers for students. Renaissance Learning may be able to provide expensive training to help teachers use their product with more expertise, but perhaps conceivably, the educational community should improve teachers' expertise as providers of instruction rather than experts of reading management programs.

Studies of Accelerated Reader

Reading Achievement

There are numerous research studies on AR; however, the evidence on AR in relation to reading achievement is mixed. One of the most recent studies to date on AR's impact on reading growth was conducted by Foster and Foster, (2016). This correlational study employed a quantitative, non-randomized study to evaluate the effectiveness of AR on improving student reading performance in an accredited school in the Caribbean that utilized American textbooks

and awarded American diplomas. The diverse student population contained 26 varied nationalities, and was also made up of a large number English Language Learners.

Approximately 100 students in Grades 2-8 were selected to participate in the three-year study to determine how much reading growth within one year was attributable to the AR program, how much reading student time students gained throughout the instructional day absent from the AR program, how much time spent with AR is required for students to gain an additional year of literacy growth, and how much time is needed to close the existing achievement gap between the school under study and the United States average.

This study included pre- and post-scores from the STAR Reading test, as well as post analysis of data generated of AR points that were collected over a three-year period for each individual student. Among the 100 students who were selected for the study, none were identified by race, income level, or special needs. The AR points accumulated for each student throughout the year were correlated with the growth scores on the STAR test. A positive correlation was found between the amount of independent AR reading done and the reading growth on the standardized assessment. It was also found that among the students in Grades 2-8, students in Grade 8 read four times as much as their lower-grade peers. The data indicated that on average, the school as a whole earned 20 AR points per grade level. To analyze the data, researchers felt that the hours that students spent reading AR books and testing was a variable that was unmeasurable due to the fact that students read for other purposes in school other than AR. Since AR works on the points-per-grade method, and their point system is linear in nature and aligned to the goal-setting formula, researchers determined that rather than focusing on hours spent reading, points earned per grade would suffice as a variable.

It was determined that for every 20 AR points earned, students would grow at least one year. Additionally, using regression as well as AR's published goal setting chart, the authors concluded that each time a student spends 83 hours reading AR books, they would expect to grow a minimum of one year. The researchers estimated that the students in the school as a whole would need to add an hour and ten minutes of reading outside of the school day each year, including summers for the next three years to close the existing 0.8 gap that remains between this school's and U.S. average peers. Therefore, it is assumed that students in this school who fail to read additionally outside of school will fall further behind their average U.S. peers. The authors concluded that it is imperative that teachers allocate sufficient time to independent reading, for if students are not afforded the time to read in school, they may not read at home either. Currently, time allocated to voluntary reading in schools is insufficient. Surprisingly, it has been noted that 10 minutes of daily voluntary reading is an above average amount of voluntary reading time provided to students in schools throughout the United States.

Nunnery, Ross, and McDonald (2006) conducted a quantitative, randomized field study to determine the effects of AR on student achievement in reading. The purpose of the study was to present findings to prove or disprove AR's effect on reading achievement. The researchers sought to determine AR's impact on reading achievement for at-risk students in Grades 3-6, and examined how implementation impacted student reading growth for students with learning disabilities. In the sample that included 978 students, 83% of the students were eligible for free or reduced-lunch price, and 90% were African American. A total of 44 teachers across nine city schools participated in the study. For each grade level, teachers were assigned to a control or treatment group.

Teachers who volunteered for the study were randomly assigned to either continue with their regular literacy instruction, while the others were instructed to incorporate AR into the curriculum. Teachers selected for the treatment received formal training from Reading Renaissance once per month to ensure proper implementation, required students to read 90 minutes per day, and set goals for students to read a minimum of 25 books per quarter. Though students in the treatment group were expected to take AR quizzes and follow particular guidelines set forth by the researchers, no extrinsic incentives were given throughout the length of the study.

Teachers in the control group participated in reading instruction that also consisted of a 60-minute reading block that consisted of whole-group, small-group, and independent reading activities. Though the students did not participate in AR, each student within the control group also set a goal to read a minimum of 25 books.

Participants in both control and treatment groups used the same core reading program adopted by the district for whole-group instruction, set reading goals, incorporated whole-group, small-group, and independent reading, and were administered the STAR Reading test at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Descriptive statistics and mean scores from the STAR Reading test were analyzed. Results indicated that the most positive effect sizes were found among third-grade students who participated in AR. Though both third- and fourth-grade students who participated in AR had higher standardized mean differences among pre- and post-standardized assessment results, fifth- and sixth-grade students demonstrated little reading growth when compared to other students across both control and treatment groups. The researchers note that due to this finding, AR may be better suited for lower-grade students. Though data for the students classified as learning disabled were not presented, Nunnery *et al.*

(2006) reported that students with learning disabilities, as well as those in treatment classrooms with teachers who received professional development training from Reading Renaissance, demonstrated more reading growth than control groups. Though the results of this study provide generalizability for the African American and at-risk populations, results do not generalize to higher socioeconomic groups.

Johnson and Howard (2003) designed a study to determine the effectiveness of the AR program in relation to reading achievement and vocabulary development. The study took place in seven schools within an inner-city school district serving high poverty students. There was a total of 755 students in Grades 3-6 who participated in the study. Data were generated using pretest and posttest scores of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test.

For the analysis, groups were separated into three groups based on the number of AR points accrued. High AR users consisted of students who read more than ten books per year and earned 75 or more points. Average AR users were classified as those students who read between three and five books per year, and earned between 21-74 points. Low level AR participants were those who read less than three books per year, and earned fewer than 21 AR points.

Johnson and Howard (2003) reported that though all three groups showed growth, the high participation group had the largest gains as evidenced from the pre- and posttest scores on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test. The high participation group made 2.24 years' growth within one year's time, while the average users grew 1.52 years' growth. The group classified as low users of AR made only a 0.73 years gain. This study determined that students who read more obtained higher standardized achievement gains in the area of reading comprehension and vocabulary development. At first glance, it appears that there is a positive correlation between

usage and achievement; however, no raw or manipulated data were included, making it a challenge to draw firm conclusions.

Throughout the literature, it has been found that most studies of AR in relation to reading achievement have been conducted in schools enrolling high-poverty students with higher percentages of ethnic diversities. Most recently, a randomized controlled study conducted by Shannon, Styers, Wilkerson, and Perry (2015) examined the effectiveness of AR on middle-class students. The study consisted of 344 students in Grades 1-4, and 19 teachers across three schools in a Midwestern city within the United States. Among the participating students, 52% were male, and 48% were female. Among the subgroup populations, approximately 3% were African American, 11% were Hispanic, 66% were Caucasian, and 13% were Asian, while 7% were classified as other ethnic groups outside of the specified options. Within this study, less than 1% were identified as students with disabilities, less than 1% were eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch, and less than 1% were labeled as English Language Learners.

The results of this study attempted to fill a void in the literature by researching how AR impacts the achievement of students outside of traditional subgroup populations. In an alignment to the Nunnery *et al.* study (2006), this study also sought to determine the reading performance of students who participated in AR during one school year, as well as those who received traditional reading instruction without the supplemental program during one school year, so as to determine the effects on implementation practices. Students in both treatment and control groups within Grades 1- 4 received the same amount of instructional time for reading and language arts. The treatment students participating in AR averaged more than 30 minutes per day in self-selected reading, while it is unclear how much time students within the control groups participated in self-selected reading during the course of the study.

To compare STAR Reading scores, a multilevel modeling analysis was used to compare gains of both treatment and control students. Pretest STAR scores were used as a covariate to account for group differences in baseline reading differences. This study that sought to examine the effects on middle-class students using the AR program found that the treatment groups in Grades 1-4 that participated in the AR program yielded statistically higher reading gains than students in the control groups. In this study, the researchers found that the AR program was used as intended for the study. To determine if the program was used with complete fidelity, the participants used an online self-reporting tool to report their implementation practices. In order to increase the reliability of the online self-reporting tool, the researchers corroborated the on-line reports with multiple on-site visits with AR usage reports.

Though this study provides insight on the possible effects that AR has on student groups typically found in non-Title I schools, Krashen (2015) claimed that this study failed to establish true comparison groups. For instance, the study purported that students among the control groups in Grades 1-4 received traditional literacy instruction along with independent reading. However, it is unclear how much instructional time was allocated for these students to engage in self-selected reading practices. The study is clear that the treatment students in Grades 1-4 were allocated more than 30 minutes each day to read self-selected texts. According to Krashen (2015), if the treatment groups were provided more time to read choice books, it is no surprise that the treatment group outperformed the control group in this particular study.

Many studies seeking to determine the effectiveness of the AR program in relation to reading achievement tend to study elementary students and use Renaissance Learning's STAR assessment to determine reading growth. In a longitudinal study conducted by Peak and Dewalt (1994), a quasi-experimental design study was used to explore the relationships between reading

scores on the STAR and California Achievement Test (CAT) of 50 ninth-grade students in North Carolina who had participated in AR since third grade. Two schools were selected for the study that were similar in curricular requirements and type of standardized assessment used to determine reading growth. The primary difference between the two schools was that one used the AR program, and other did not. The researchers noted that the ninth-grade students within the school incorporating AR, had experience with the program since fourth grade. Using a randomized sampling technique, 50 ninth-grade students enrolled in college preparatory English classes were selected from each school to participate in the study. To determine a mean scale score, researchers generated past third-, sixth-, and eighth grade CAT scores from all 50 students participating in the study. It was determined that the 25 students who had participated in AR for five consecutive years had an average yearly achievement gain of 15.3, which was nearly twice as high as compared to the control group's average gain of only a 5.5 from sixth to eighth grade. It was also found that the students who participated in AR spent significantly more time reading than did students who did not participate in AR. The study posited that the supplemental use of the AR program could positively affect standardized reading scores of adolescent-age students.

Pappas, Skinner, and Skinner (2010) conducted a quantitative study to evaluate the effects of an incentive system based upon the number of AR quizzes passed and the book levels that the students read. The number of AR quizzes completed and passed served as the dependent variable under investigation. The researchers selected to incorporate a powerful reinforcement within the current AR program of fourth-grade students to determine its effect on diverse readers. The approach implemented was termed an interdependent group-oriented behavior approach, which is a type of reinforcement provided to a group to initiate desired behavior. A group works together to earn a reward for the positive behavior, thus, peer pressure is used as a

means by which to elicit the desired behavior. Some negative characteristics of an interdependent-group oriented approach include the possibilities that students may blame another for not receiving the group reward, and students may work to eliminate the group reward. In this study, an inner-city school within the Southeast region of the United States participated in AR, but the authors were not specific as to how long the program had been implemented. The grade level selected for the study was fourth grade, and 32 students participated. Among the 32 participants, 17 were male, 15 were female, 8 were black, while 24 were white. The students were allocated 30 minutes per day to engage in silent reading. Additional time for reading AR books and taking quizzes took place as students completed daily instructional tasks.

In the baseline phase of the study, each student was given individually a reward each time they scored 60% or higher on an AR quiz. Based on the mean that was determined for AR quiz scores, students were classified into three academic groups: high, middle, and low. During the intervention phase, individual rewards were given for each AR book passed, but the class was subjected to an interdependent group-oriented reward that was contingent upon a specific guideline. At the end of one week, the total number of quizzes that the class had earned was compared to a randomly drawn number. If the whole class quiz total exceeded the number that was drawn, the class as a whole earned a reward. Rewards given were extra free time, popcorn and ice cream parties, and board games.

To determine differences among the three groups, the researchers used an (3 groups x 2 phases) analyses of variances. Initially, the researchers looked at the number of AR quizzes passed in high, middle, and low readers across both the baseline and intervention phases of the study. Then, the book levels read by the three varied groups were studied across both phases. Last, differences were examined for significance. The data revealed that the high group passed

more AR quizzes than the low group. There were no significant differences found among the high and middle groups, nor the middle and low groups. In regard to achievement gains, the low group made the largest gains in book levels. Pappas *et al.* (2010) claimed that allowing students to self-select reading materials in conjunction with rewards could promote reading improvement of low readers. This study provides evidence that wide reading practices combined with choice can promote reading gains among low-achieving students; however, it would have been beneficial to have determined such effects regarding students with disabilities. This study did not provide statistical information if any of participating students were classified as having disabilities or health impairments.

While researching studies surrounding the topic of AR, Keith Topping's name appeared frequently in the literature. A professor from the University of Dundee, Scotland, he has researched and published several articles on the effects of Accelerated Reader on academic achievement (e.g., Topping & Paul, 1999; Topping *et al.*, 2007a, 2007b,). While Topping typically presents positive views of the AR program, other researchers find his views questionable since he partnered with Terrance Paul, co-owner and creator of the AR program to publish studies on AR (Biggers, 2001).

A large-scale study conducted by Topping and Paul (1999) sought to investigate the effects on reading ability and in-school reading practice. The study included 659,214 students across the United States in Grades K-12. The researchers concluded that achievement in schools that had implemented AR for four or more years had higher reading achievement. Additionally, a positive relationship was found among students' reading level and amount of time spent reading. A key finding presented by Topping and Paul (1999) was the low amount of time allocated to independent reading across schools. This finding is not a new phenomenon, for in a

recent blog post submitted by Krashen (2014), he affirms that many schools today are not providing children with easy access to interesting books. He states, “A major reason children of poverty have low reading test scores is because they have little access to books. When we provide easy access, they read about as well as children from more affluent families” (Krashen, 2014, para. 13).

Vollands, Topping, and Evans, (1999) conducted a quasi-experimental study that took place over a six- month period in two high-poverty elementary schools in Scotland. The first school included two sixth-grade classrooms. There were twenty-seven students assigned to a treatment (AR) classroom, and twelve students were assigned to control classrooms (non-AR). The students assigned to the treatment group participated in AR for six months, and were provided with rewards for points accrued. Students began with fifteen minutes allocated to independent reading, but after the fifth week of the study, the treatment students were granted thirty minutes of reading time each day. In the treatment classroom, students often took AR quizzes on books that the teacher read aloud in class. Students assigned to the control group also experienced traditional reading instruction and were given up to thirty minutes each day to read independently; however, rather than taking AR quizzes, the control students submitted written responses to the teacher after reading each individual book (Vollands *et al.* 1999).

The second school in the study conducted by Vollands *et al.* (1999), consisted of twenty-six fifth-grade, and twenty-four sixth grade students. The sixth-grade class participated in AR, and did not receive rewards for points earned. The fifth-grade students did not participate in AR, but were higher achieving readers than their older sixth grade peers. This control group also experienced traditional classroom reading instruction that included group oral reading experiences along with fifteen minutes of daily independent silent reading. Rather than taking

AR quizzes, the control group was assigned workbook pages, comprehension quizzes created by the teacher, and traditional homework assignments based on stories read in class.

According to statistical analysis, Vollands *et al.* (1999) concluded that the sixth-grade students who participated in AR showed higher increases on the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability Assessment than fifth grade students assigned to the control group. Though Vollands *et al.* (1999) present evidence that the AR program can have positive effects on reading achievement, they also claim that the scarcity of texts in each classroom was a factor that could have potentially affected the results for both treatment and control groups.

When researching and reporting on AR's impact on reading achievement, there appears to an array of studies touting its effectiveness. However, research conflicting with the supposition of AR's effectiveness also exists. For example, Mathis (1996) did not find AR to have a profound effect on 30 sixth-grade students' reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test even though they had been immersed in AR. Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipielewski's study (2003) found there was no significant difference between the amount of reading done by middle school students who had and had not participated in the AR program.

Attitudes, Perceptions, and Motivation

Several research studies point to the positive attributes of the AR program. Despite these positive findings, the use of AR has been found, in some cases, to have an adverse effect on students' affective literacy orientations.

In a qualitative study by Smith and Westberg (2011), researchers conducted focus group interviews with students in grades 3-8 to determine their perceptions and attitudes regarding AR. This study encompassed five schools within three school districts. Eight to ten students were

selected to participate in the focus group interviews. In the schools across the three districts, the AR program was used in diverse ways. The first school district had a daily 45-minute class that was reserved strictly for AR use. Students set goals, read AR books, and took quizzes. Participants received grades for AR points accumulated. When goals were met, students could use their time to study. The second school district restricted the AR program to the media center, where it was supervised by library staff. Since the program was disconnected from the classrooms, there was little to no integration to classroom instruction. In the third school district, students set quarterly reading goals, but very little time was allocated to independent reading in class. Most of the independent reading was required for homework, with occasional opportunities to take AR quizzes while in class. All of the districts that participated in the study were similar in that each set reading goals and provided students with rewards for points earned.

Smith and Westberg (2011) concluded that students felt too much time was allocated to the AR program, and that quiz requirements took time away from the time they could have spent reading. Some students reported they would rather read than take quizzes or earn prizes. Some students revealed that testing pressures associated with AR caused them to rush through their reading that cheating was highly prevalent among classmates in an attempt to earn AR points, and that teachers should monitor the testing process more closely. A few students expressed concern regarding AR test questions, stating that some quiz questions were irrelevant to stories. It was revealed that many disliked the competitive nature of AR. Overall, students among focus groups expressed negative views of the AR program.

Schmidt (2008) authored a study titled “Really Reading: What Does Accelerated Reader Teach Adults and Children?” Her goal was to determine fourth-grade students’, teachers’, and parents’ views of the AR program. She selected two schools in the study. One setting was a

school where she formerly taught (setting A), and the second setting was a school located in the Midwest (B). The schools were similar in the fact that they both implemented AR, and served rural communities. Schmidt selected a school where she had previously been employed because she was privy to the teachers and students. It was at this particular school that ten years earlier, she served on the committee that recommended that the AR program be implemented. Data was collected from setting A in the form of parent and student interest surveys along with many observational notes from time spent teaching with AR. At setting B, data were generated from interviews conducted with teachers about how the AR program was implemented and instructional routines surrounding the program. A critical discourse analysis was used to dissect the language that parents and students used surrounding AR, as well as how teachers and students had internalized specific language patterns surrounding books and reading. According to Schmidt (2008), AR refers to the work of Vygotsky's as being a key foundational piece of the AR program. For instance, Vygotsky's ZPD (zone of proximal development) refers to things students can do with the help of a more knowledgeable teacher. However, AR defines the ZPD as the level that is suitable for a student to read books independently. The idea of having students select books at the instructional level for independent reading is in direct conflict with other experts in the literacy field (Allington, 2014). When reading independently, it has been found that students should not be reading books within the ZPD for such levels require the assistance of a more knowledgeable person, making such texts too challenging for students to read independently. Schmidt (2008) makes the argument that when students read books independently, they should read books read within a ZAD (zone of actual development) that do not require the assistance of an adult. During the course of this study, the following criticisms of the AR program were observed and noted (Schmidt, 2008):

1. Independent reading was used as a means to manage behavior or “conditioning” students for school work.
2. AR books were selected over non-AR books because of the point values tied to independent reading.
3. The environment supported extrinsic motivation rather than intrinsic within both schools.
4. Some teachers revealed that the extrinsic rewards motivated struggling readers, and few thought AR was promoting a genuine love of reading among students.
5. AR encouraged much competition among readers.
6. Rereading texts was nonexistent.
7. School reading became number-driven to students, and the concept of earning a vast amount of AR points became the primary purpose for reading.
8. Teacher, student, and parent “talk” surrounding books and reading related to progress and quiz totals. None of the individuals mentioned intrinsic qualities of reading.

In a mixed-method study Thompson, Madhuri, and Taylor (2008) conducted a study in a low-achieving high school in California. The purpose of this study was to report students’ perceptions of the AR program in a school destined to cultivate a school culture surrounding literacy. There were a total of eight different focus groups that included all high school grade levels, academic tracks, and equal representations of gender. Thompson *et. al* (2008) reported several negative perceptions of students regarding AR. High school students disliked taking AR quizzes to earn points, and they found tying grades to AR quizzes demotivating. Additionally, the students felt the amount of time allocated to AR was too consuming. A primary finding of

this study was that students felt that book selections were scarce, which made it challenging to find interesting and engaging texts.

Nancy Everhart (2005) conducted a mixed-method study in three schools across the United Kingdom. The length of the study was not reported, but the settings included one school in England and two schools in Scotland. The purpose of the study was to determine the effects that AR had on reading motivation, extent of reading, and the varying degrees of implementation. The England site served elementary students, and students on free and reduced lunch was 8%. This school had participated in AR for nine years, and had high levels of AR implementation as well as a solid school culture based on literacy. There were fifty elementary students involved in the study from this school site. There were no school-wide libraries; therefore, teachers were in charge of overseeing the management of the AR program. The books were housed in classrooms and hallways. Each individual class library contained approximately five hundred titles. This particular school setting was much different from the other two schools in the study, for this school did not incorporate the use of extrinsic rewards other than the principal giving each student a sticker to wear on his or her shirt when the individual's reading goal was met. Students spent forty minutes each day reading and taking AR quizzes. It is unclear which particular grade levels were included in the study at this school or if the book collections were synchronized to those that only included AR quizzes or if some non-AR books were also included.

The elementary school in Scotland represented a setting with a mid-level implementation of AR, though they were in their fifth year of implementation when the study took place. They had 35% of students receiving free or reduced lunch, and forty students from this school site participated in the study. Though this Scottish elementary school participated in AR, there was

no school-wide “literacy culture” that had been established. The school had a school-wide library that housed books, but no librarian to manage or oversee the daily operations. This particular school, like the one in England, had teachers who were administrators overseeing the AR program. The grade levels at this Scottish school that participated in the study were fifth and sixth grades. Each classroom contained approximately two hundred low-level AR book titles, and the students took great ownership in meeting their reading goals. Students were not allocated specific time to read during class daily, and most of their independent reading was done at home for homework. Though prizes are not common in Scotland, this school had adapted the “Americanized” act of providing extrinsic rewards such as pens and highlighters.

The second school in Scotland was a high school that consisted of ninth- and tenth-grade students who used AR. It was a low-level implementation school, for AR had only been used for one year when the study was conducted. The student population receiving free and reduced lunch was 24%. Students were not provided time to read self-selected AR books during the school day, so most of their required reading had to be done from home. Students were required to read one AR book every two weeks, and the librarian was in charge of AR book circulation. The librarian expressed concerns of being responsible for the assessment portion of the program, and expressed that students often cheated to earn AR points. A highly structured reward system was in place in an attempt to motivate students to read (Everhart, 2005).

Data was generated by Guthrie’s Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ), teacher interviews, student focus groups, observation, and collection of artifacts. Everhart (2005) hypothesized that motivated students would read more books and earn more points. The results concluded that there was no particular motivation style as determined by the MRQ survey, and no correlation existed between number of books read and AR points earned. Everhart (2005)

hypothesized that the lack of correlation could have been caused by students reading low-level books with low point values, some students could have read books that did not have AR quizzes, and perhaps some students failed quizzes. The researchers determined that the level of AR implementation did not impact the total number of books that students read. In relation to reading motivation, the findings concluded that boys were motivated by prizes, praise, and recognition, while girls were motivated by collaboration, or the social aspect surrounding reading. In terms of gender, girls were more motivated to read than boys. However, it was noted that 66% of the students sampled did in fact like the AR program (Everhart, 2005).

In a qualitative dissertation, White (2005) sought to analyze perceptions of AR among students, teachers, parents, and principals in a small, school district in northwest Ohio. The study focused on students in Grades 4, 5, and 6. There were a total of 20 students, 14 teachers, and five principals from each elementary school in the district. Three of the five elementary schools in the study currently used AR, while the fourth school had recently implemented the program, and the fifth school had opted to not use AR. The study revealed mixed perceptions and attitudes regarding the reading management program. Overall, principals felt positive about AR, and all expressed that AR provided motivation and promoted students' desire to read. Some additional positive views of AR among principals included: AR provided a way to incorporate more trade books in classrooms, and AR provided an organizational approach to assist students in reading at appropriate reading levels. Principals also shared negative views of AR as well. For instance, some shared the belief that AR questions on quizzes were low-level and weak, and that students tended to neglect other varied text types and genres such as magazines, poetry, and non-AR books in an attempt to accumulate points. Though most principals revealed positive perceptions

of the program, one stated that schools in the district were using AR as a “quick fix”, and that AR was not aligned to high standards (White, 2005).

Many teachers’ views of AR were aligned to the principals’, for many revealed that AR provided students with vast opportunities for choice, provided a structure for students to easily locate and read books at appropriate levels, and created accountability measures for independent reading. Though only two teachers felt that AR was motivational for students, over half felt that the extrinsic rewards given in exchange for points inhibited students from developing an intrinsic desire for life-long reading. Some negative views expressed by teachers included: several children who read longer chapter books struggled to score as high on quizzes than those who read shorter, easier books, and some students passed AR books despite only scanning the books. Some teachers felt that AR began as a supplemental component, but turned into a mandated “philosophy of teaching,” while other teachers who were initially skeptical, later saw the benefits of the AR program.

According to White (2005), the students’ views were quite diverse as compared to the opinions of the principals’ and teachers’. Some of the students’ positive views regarding AR included the classroom environments that the teachers had created that promoted motivating atmospheres. For instance, all students commented that soft chairs, beanbags, and couches on which to sit while reading were enjoyable. Seating was not assigned, and students had autonomy on where they read books. Many students expressed that they liked rewards and incentives even though they did not motivate them to read. According to the students, they did not like the competitive nature surrounding the AR program, and they expressed negative perceptions surrounding the lack of flexibility regarding reading levels. Students often wanted to read books outside their ZPD, but were not permitted to do so. They also revealed that quizzes that

accompanied lengthy books were more challenging, and that rewards and incentives could be earned more easily by reading shorter books.

Attitudes, Perceptions, Motivation, and Achievement

Huang (2012) conducted a mixed-method study and examined the effectiveness of AR in relation to reading achievement and motivation among sixth- through eighth-grade students in a suburban middle school in the US. The total population consisted of 211 students of the 387 students who qualified for the study. All of the 211 students took the AR survey that was created by Huang. Through careful analysis, Huang found that 70 percent of the students reported that AR had no impact on their reading levels. The survey results also indicated that AR did not support students' motivation to read. Some feedback from students included: they did not enjoy limited book selection, taking AR quizzes, or the competition that was created among classmates. The study also revealed that far fewer conversations around books centered primarily on passing AR quizzes. Huang (2012) also concluded that the AR program did not have a positive impact on student achievement.

Chapter Summary

The review of the literature provided evidence that intrinsic motivation plays a vital role as students develop into literate individuals. It is unlikely that struggling students will become better readers without increasing students' motivation and attitudes toward the reading process. Although the owners and operators of AR claim that the program will in fact positively improve reading attitudes, it is questionable whether AR holds up to their claim. The literature review provided evidence that the literacy field continues to be undecided as to whether the AR program

creates motivated readers. Currently, no studies have explored AR's impact on students with disabilities. This study attempted to fill a void in the literature by determining the differences in attitudes and reading motivation among fourth-grade students across varied achievement categories, including those with disabilities who do and do not participate in AR. As a result of this study, educators across the field may be able to use the information from this study to determine whether or not the AR program should be used in classrooms as a means to motivate readers.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

This purpose of this chapter is to address the methods that were used to complete this study. The methodology includes the research design, research sites, participant selection process, data collection procedures, and the analysis plan for the qualitative and quantitative portions of the data that were collected. The methodology for this study was selected to address the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in attitudes toward reading between fourth-grade students who use the AR program and those who do not? (QUANT)
2. How do high-, average-, and low-achieving fourth-grade students, including those with disabilities who use the Accelerated Reader program describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading? (QUAL)
3. How do high-, average-, and low-achieving fourth-grade students, including those with disabilities who do not use the Accelerated Reader program describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading? (QUAL)

Research Design

A mixed methods study was employed to provide an extensive and in-depth study of fourth-grade students' attitudes regarding reading among students that do and do not use the Accelerated Reader program. According to Creswell (2015), mixed methods is defined as a research method that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data types, merges the data sets, and incorporates the combined strengths of both forms of data to reach an understanding of the essential questions under investigation. Rather than using isolated methods to qualitative or

quantitative designs, employing both methodological types will utilize a triangulation of techniques, which will strengthen the study (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989).

Research guided by mixed methods involves the assimilation of qualitative and quantitative method philosophies, designs, strategies, and interpretations. (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009).

Mixed methods is a major research paradigm that adheres to the philosophical beliefs of pragmatism, which assumes that researchers should use a method or combinations of methods that serve best for real world situations. In summary, whatever method can be used to best answer the questions under investigation should be employed, regardless of philosophical assumptions (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009).

There are several strengths and weaknesses associated with mixed method designs. Researchers can provide stronger evidence for reaching conclusions through the principle of triangulation, because it allows for the convergence and corroboration of findings. The core premise of triangulation as a design strategy is that all methods have inherent biases and limitations, so the use of only one method to assess a given phenomenon could inevitably yield biased and limited results (Greene, *et al.* 1989). Additionally, mixed methods can be used to increase the generalizability of the results. If the results are generalizable, and the voices of students are incorporated, the combined results may have a more profound affect on decision-making. Though several strengths of the mixed method design are evident, some weaknesses are also noted. Some weaknesses include: the amount of time that is demanded of the rigorous process; the knowledge level required of the researcher to understand both method types; and a strong skill set necessary to integrate both data types (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

In order to adhere to the procedures of mixed method research designs, an explanatory sequential approach was used. The procedures of this mixed methods approach had two distinct phases of data collection and analysis. In the first phase, the quantitative data were collected and analyzed. The quantitative data provided a primary data set, and the results from the qualitative data in the second phase informed and further explained the numerical statistics revealed. This mixed methods study was classified as emergent, rather than fixed, because following the collection and analysis from the first, quantitative data phase, questions for the individual semi-structured interviews were formulated to provide voice and further explain the quantitative results (Creswell, 2015). In research surrounding literacy topics, it is appropriate for synergy to occur across methodologies if possible. It is with urgency that we must embrace mixed methods, for the use of isolated methods can limit the breadth and scope of particular studies (Duke & Mallette, 2011).

While still in the early stages, the emergence of mixed methods in literacy research is gaining momentum (Calfee & Sperling, 2010). For instance, a mixed method explanatory research design was employed to investigate the effectiveness of the AR program on middle schools' students' achievement and motivation. The combined survey and interview data results revealed AR neither improved achievement scores nor promoted reading motivation for middle school students (Huang, 2012). The quantitative and qualitative data were generated and analyzed in two distinct phases. An Explanatory-Sequential Model, as shown below in Figure 3.1 guided this mixed method study.

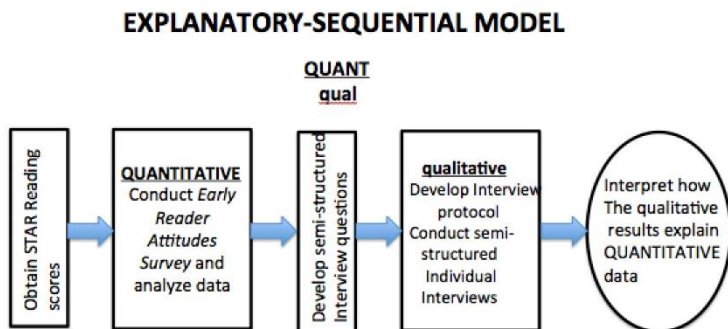


Figure 3.1 Explanatory Sequential Model adapted from Creswell, (2015).

Research Sites

The proposed research study took place in two schools within two separate school districts within an eastern region in Tennessee. In order to protect the identity of the research sites, pseudonyms have been used to reference the names of the two schools selected for the study. Fairfax Elementary (School A) is a Title I school located in an urban area in northeast Tennessee. This school is considered a turn-around school, having earned Blue Ribbon status in 2009, and was awarded National Title I Distinguished School in 2010. Though Fairfax Elementary has existed for forty years, the new facility was built on its original site in 2010. Fairfax Elementary serves a racially and economically diverse population consisting of 566 Pre-K through fourth-grade students. The breakdown of the population is as follows: 63.2% Economically Disadvantaged; 15% Disabilities; 71% Caucasian; 17.5% Black, 8.6% Hispanic; and 2.2% Asian. The school's leadership team consists of one principal and one part-time assistant principal. There are 26 regular, classroom teachers and nine additional special area teachers serving Fairfax's diverse, Title I population of Pre-K through fourth-grade students.

Mountain Ridge Elementary (School B) is a rural school in the most northeastern area of Tennessee. This high achieving school was awarded Blue Ribbon status in 2008. Mountain

Ridge serves 450 students across Pre-K through sixth grades. The school profile is as follows: 67% Economically Disadvantaged; 16% Disabilities; 97.3% Caucasian; 2.5% Hispanic; and 2% Native American/Alaskan. The school has one full-time principal and an assistant principal. There are 24 teachers and nine special area teachers serving the grade levels that consist of students within Pre-K through sixth grades.

Sampling Procedures

Criterion sampling was employed at both Fairfax Elementary and Mountain Ridge Elementary Schools. Criterion sampling is a type of purposeful sampling that directly reflects the purpose of the study (Merriam, 2009). In order to qualify for the study at Fairfax Elementary (setting A), participants were fourth-grade students who participated in AR since kindergarten. At Mountain Ridge Elementary (setting B), fourth-grade-students who never experienced AR qualified for the study. The STAR reading assessment administered in November of the 2016-2017 school year was used to determine scoring ranges for varied proficiency groups.

Stratified randomized sampling was also employed. Stratified randomized sampling means that each member of the population is assigned to a specific subgroup (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). The STAR reading assessment is adaptive in nature, for it adjusts the difficulty of the items during the test based on student responses. According to Renaissance Learning (2015), due to the adaptive nature of the computerized STAR reading assessment, there is no set standard error of measurement (SEM). Since the STAR software calculates the SEM for each student based on individual performance, score group classifications must be established while ensuring that no overlap occurs across groups. Therefore, fourth-grade students participating in the study were divided into proficiency groups as indicated from the most current

STAR reading assessment. Students were assigned to one of four groups: high-achieving, average, low, and those with learning disabilities. For the purposes of this study, high-performing students were identified as those who scored at the 80th percentiles and above. Students classified as average-achieving were classified as fourth-grade students who scored between the 50th and the 79th percentiles. Low-achieving students were defined as those fourth-grade students who scored in the 40th percentile or below on the STAR reading assessment. Those with learning disabilities were defined as those with Individual Education Plans.

To ensure that a diverse range of students with varied attitudes about reading as indicated by the MPR-R survey were represented in the semi-structured interviews, maximum variation sampling, a type of purposeful sampling was employed. Maximum variation sampling strategies should be used to ensure individuals across a diverse range of achievement categories are included in the population (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Following administration of the survey, the principals and teachers at each school used the STAR data to identify students across proficiency levels, including SPED students to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Using this method ensured that all ranges possible were represented in participant groups.

Participants

The participants for this study included a diverse range of fourth-grade students who were enrolled in two schools within two different school systems within Tennessee. Students were selected for participation without regard to race, gender, age, disability, or religion. Additionally, students were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate as well as particular characteristics pertinent to the nature of the study. In order for students at Fairfax Elementary (School A) to qualify for the study, all fourth-grade students participated in

AR since kindergarten. The fourth-grade students from Mountain Ridge Elementary (School B) who qualified for the study were students who had not experienced AR during their academic careers.

The sample for the survey consisted of 52 students from Fairfax Elementary (School A), and 35 students from Mountain Ridge Elementary (School B), making for a total of (n=87) students who participated in the quantitative portion of the study. For the quantitative portion of the study, the researcher classified fourth-grade students representing a diverse range of reading proficiencies, as defined by the combined literacy scores from the STAR reading assessment that was administered in November. Fourth-grade students with disabilities who qualified for the study were those with Individual Education Plans.

The secondary phase of the study incorporated qualitative data collection methods. Students were selected to participate in semi-structured individual interviews. An equal number of participants from both School A and School B classified as high, average, and low achieving as indicated on the STAR reading assessment, participated in the semi-structured individual interviews. Three fourth-grade students classified as pupils with disabilities at Fairfax agreed to participate in the individual interviews, while two identified as having learning disabilities participated in the semi-structured individual interviews at Mountain Ridge. All survey participants qualified for the secondary qualitative phase of the study. An interview protocol was established for survey participants who choose to participate in the semi-structured individual interviews. Twelve students from Fairfax Elementary (School A) and 11 students from Mountain Ridge Elementary (School B) (n=23) agreed to participate in semi-structured individual interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative Data Collection

In a whole group setting, students were administered the paper-pencil version of the Motivation to Read Profile-Revised Survey (Malloy, Gambrell, Marinak, & Mazzoni, 2015). The MRP-R was designed for students in grades 2 through 6, and is intended to be administered in a small group or a whole group setting. The scaled survey is intended to measure students' self-concepts of readers and value of reading. The survey portion consisted of 20 questions and was administered in the students' home room classrooms during a time that was scheduled by the principal. It took approximately 20-25 minutes to administer the MPR-R survey.

Researchers arranged each item in the survey so that some responses would be listed from least motivated to most motivated (scored 1-4), while other responses are listed in reverse order from most motivated to least motivated (scored 4-1). The 4-point Likert scale response items fall within an ordinal measurement scale, where responses are ranked with ten items for each subscale relating to self-concept of a reader and value of reading (Malloy, *et al.*, 2014). To assure adequate data collection for the primary phase of the study, two weeks were reserved to collect survey data from both school sites.

Quantitative Data Analysis

After the fourth-grade participants completed the surveys, results were scored. The data were analyzed to determine students' overall self-concepts and value of reading. A score for each subscale, value of reading, and self-concept as a reader were generated. The two subscale scores were added together to obtain a total score for motivation of reading. Because the response sets

are not uniformly listed in the same format; a scoring guide provided guidance in determining a score for each survey item. Specific survey items that received low and high scores were examined, and interview questions were developed to further explain the quantitative results.

The data were entered into the SPSS program to analyze the data. Statistical analysis was used for the ordinal measurement of scale items. The information gleaned from the data were used to create many of the interview questions for the secondary, qualitative phase of the study.

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative portion, or secondary source of data were generated via semi-structured individual interviews. The information gleaned from the analysis of the survey results were used to create the semi-structured interview questions for the secondary, qualitative phase, of the study. The purpose of generating the interview questions was to enhance the quantitative findings. By providing students the opportunity to explain their perspectives, the interviews provided a more substantial data set to answer the research questions.

Twenty-three fourth-grade students agreed to be individually interviewed. An equal number of students classified as high-, average-, and low-achieving as indicated by STAR reading assessment, as well as students with disabilities from each school were selected to participate in the post survey, individual interviews. Careful selection ensured adequate representation of participants in relation to diverse reading proficiencies. Since individual interviews require more time to conduct, the qualitative component took one month to complete.

In qualitative research studies, semi-structured interviews provide an appropriate source to generate data. Such interviews allow students to voice their thoughts and feelings regarding their experiences with reading and with the Accelerated Reader Program. The semi-structured

individual interviews allowed students to describe their self-concepts as readers and how they value reading as well as provide information regarding current motivational contexts and provide suggestions to increase reading motivation. By conducting interviews, the researcher was present in the natural setting of the phenomenon under study, and gathered data on the subject under scrutiny without any attempt to control for extraneous influences (Yin, 2014).

To determine an in-depth understanding of how AR influences students' attitudes of reading, the researcher developed an interview protocol according to APA guidelines. In order to ensure that any additional questions created were high quality and appropriate for fourth-grade students, the interview questions were field tested with fourth-grade students not participating in the study under investigation. To conduct a field study of the interview questions, the researcher identified ten fourth-grade students from an elementary school not included in the study, and met with them personally to provide them with a copy of the interview questions. The researcher asked the questions and sought feedback regarding clarity and appropriateness of the interview questions. Modifications were made based on feedback received from the field-study participants. Data generated from the field-study questions were not included in the actual data analysis portion of the study.

The in-person, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a quiet, relaxed setting with minimal noise and distractions assigned by the principals at each school. With both the parents' and participants' permission, the single round interviews were recorded using a Macintosh computer. In an attempt to accommodate schedules and age levels of the students, the interviews took no longer than twenty minutes to conduct. Interviewees and/or parents had the opportunity to view the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

According to Patton (2014), there are several advantages and disadvantages associated with semi-structured interviews. Some advantages of semi-structured interviews are: they can be recorded with permission from the interviewee; the researcher can develop the questions and protocol prior to the interview; there is no time delay between questions and responses; the interviewer can observe social cues such as voice, intonation, and body language of the interviewee. The disadvantages of semi-structured interviews include: the time constraints that can develop in order to obtain the high quality: in-depth information that is needed to answer all open-ended questions; the researcher must rely on note-taking and memory skills if the participant does not agree to record the interview; and the transcription process is a tedious and laborious endeavor. According to Bryman (2001), one hour of recordings can take up to five hours to transcribe.

Qualitative Data Analysis

According to Hatch (2002), data analysis is a way to process qualitative data to ensure that what has been learned can be communicated to others. It is rigorous work as the researcher analyzes and organizes the raw data to identify patterns and themes that emerge. The researcher must carefully examine the transcripts, paying close attention to the intricate details to accurately synthesize the data and make accurate assertions. The first step in the data analysis plan was to transcribe the interviews. It was imperative to begin the transcription and data analysis process after each individual interview. The next step was to code the data. Data coding was classified according to the research questions guiding the study. The open coding process allowed the researcher to reduce the data through summarization, and categorization. Following this process, data were further reduced by quantifying the qualitative responses. This was necessary in order

for themes and patterns in the data to emerge within proficiency groups. Relevant pieces, words, phrases, and sections were labeled and linked directly to the research questions under investigation (Merriam, 2009). In order to ensure inter-coder reliability, a doctoral colleague reviewed the first interview that is coded. To increase the reliability of the coding, the researcher asked a colleague to code one interview and compare it to a personal coding of the same interview to determine any errors. Careful analysis of the qualitative data took place with a colleague, and the coding of each script was found to be aligned. Counts provided reflect the number of responses that correspond to key words, and are not related to the number of students who responded.

Mixed Method Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis was analyzed, and the researcher determined which results from the MRP-R survey needed to be explored further. The second, qualitative phase served directly to expand upon the survey results and further explore students' attitudes and reading motivation. The researcher made sound judgments provided by the quantitative data to select which aspects needed to be expanded. By using the survey results as a compass, the researcher was able to generate questions for the semi-structured interviews that provided greater insight and explanation of the quantitative results, and further determined factors related to students' reading motivation.

Validity

There are possible threats that affect the validity of explanatory sequential designs. Creswell (2015) provides some helpful advice to ensure that the quality of a mixed method study

is not compromised. It is imperative that the researcher understands the quantitative results from the initial phase. Without firm knowledge of how to interpret the results, the ability to generate relevant questions to extend and explain the findings would have been impossible. Additionally, the ability to select key participants for follow-up interviews was key, for the researcher had to ensure that the qualitative data would explain the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2015).

In relation to the quantitative portion of the study, the MRP-R survey provided a valid measure of students' attitudes and motivation towards reading. The reading survey was field tested by the developers in three schools across the mid-Atlantic and Southern regions of the United States. Two hundred eighty-one students across Grades 3 through 5 were administered the MRP-R survey. Teachers involved in the field testing were given administration and scoring instructions, paper copies of the survey and conversational interview questions. Student scores were entered into a spreadsheet, and validity and reliability testing was conducted using Mplus statistical software. The MRP-R is considered to be a reliable and valid survey to measure reading attitudes and motivation towards reading.

Inference

To ensure inference quality of the qualitative portion of the study, peer debriefing was a measure used to secure inter-coder reliability. A doctoral colleague coded one interview and compared it to the researcher's initial coding of the same interview to determine any errors. Member checks supported validation of research and strengthened findings. At the end of each participant interview, all interviewees were asked for clarification of responses to questions, and verbally summarized their statements before the interviews concluded. Validation was sought

from the participants, ensuring that their stories, statements, and comments were interpreted accurately.

Positionality

As a Literacy Curriculum Specialist who values and respects quality literacy practices, much of my life has been devoted to learning how to provide the best literacy instruction possible for the students I serve. Throughout my twenty-two years as an educator, I have sought the advice of experts across the literacy field to direct my instructional paths. Richard Allington shares six T's of effective elementary literacy instruction that exemplary teachers employ. The following elements of exemplary teachers' instruction include: adequate time in text; choice of texts; explicit teaching of comprehension and decoding strategies; time to purposefully talk about texts; meaningful literacy tasks; and the use of tests as a formative approach to assessment (Allington, 2002).

Fairfax Elementary, a National Blue Ribbon School, attributes a large portion of its success to the strong emphasis placed on literacy as well as the school-wide focused use of the AR. This high achieving, Title I school allocates a substantial amount of funds each year to ensure the success of the AR program including hardware, software, books, and rewards. Each classroom contains an extensive, organized leveled library with approximately 2,500-3,000 books spanning across genres. All students have complete autonomy during the independent reading portion of their day to self-select the books they will read. Teachers elicit student input concerning book titles and topics of interest prior to the purchasing of new titles. Every classroom receives \$500 per year to purchase new texts and replace old or lost texts. In an attempt to reduce summer literacy loss, funds are allocated to employ a paraprofessional during

summer months, which provides students unlimited access to AR books and quizzes. To streamline instructional practices, Fairfax Elementary incorporates the district's core reading program with fidelity. Teachers at each grade level work collaboratively to unify lesson plans according to the Learning Focused Model, which is a lesson plan format that organizes teaching and learning surrounding isolated standards. According to the principal, teachers' literacy instruction is delivered in whole group, and differentiated small group instruction is nominally implemented. Inclusion is provided for many students with disabilities, and after-school intervention and enrichment opportunities are provided through the district's Extended Learning Program and Title I funds.

Mountain Ridge Elementary, also a National Blue Ribbon school, attributes much of its success to a strong focus placed on reading and best practices surrounding balanced literacy instruction. This high achieving Title I school also allocates a substantial amount of funds to literacy learning by purchasing fictional novel sets, which are the primary means of providing instruction rather than the use of traditional textbook materials. The use of authentic literature that students read, along with the curricular integration, provide students with a genuine reading experience and venue to gain knowledge of the world.

Mountain Ridge places a strong emphasis on a balanced literacy framework. Students receive a balance of whole group, small group, and independent reading instruction daily. Each month, each student receives a new novel which the teacher uses to provide whole group, small group, and independent reading opportunities. Though extensive classroom libraries at Mountain Ridge are nonexistent, students are afforded several opportunities each week to check out individually selected books from the school-wide library, which provides a vast assortment of books across topics, genres, and interests.

In relation to effective literacy practices, both Fairfax Elementary and Mountain Ridge Elementary incorporate many of the practices within their daily instruction that promote academic success. Though they have taken varied paths to success, they differ in relation to how they address literacy instruction and the time they allocate to independent choice reading. This research study will seek to determine the reading attitudes of fourth-grade students attending two different Blue-Ribbon Schools within the same region of East Tennessee. The study will determine if differences exist among students who have and have not been entrenched in AR.

Role of Researcher

In this study, the researcher will embrace the role as both District Literacy Coach and researcher. I, the researcher, am employed by a school district participating in the study. Bracketing is defined as a method used in research to mitigate the potentially damaging effects of preconceptions that may alter the research process, thus increasing the rigor of the research project (Patton, 2014). Due to professional affiliation, the researcher will maintain a journal, keeping track of emotional reactions during the study. This type of deep reflection will help the researcher negotiate the relationship between researcher and field practitioner. Informal support from colleagues will additionally provide a means by which to confer about the emotional stress involved in maintaining the balancing act across the insider and outsider boundaries (Arber, 2005).

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study that must be identified. The sample size of the study prohibits the ability to generalize findings to a larger population, and the perspectives of

the students in the study are individual and may not reflect those of the larger student population.

The settings for this study did not include for a vast amount of ethnic diversity.

Delimitations

Due to the grade level constraints posed by varied school districts, I confined this study to fourth-grade students among two high-achieving elementary schools in Tennessee. These two schools within two separate school districts under investigation pose unique circumstances, for they are two high-performing schools that serve low socioeconomic populations.

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study are presented. The chapter is presented in the order of each of the three research questions. The data generated to answer question one are presented quantitatively, and questions two and three are answered qualitatively.

The purpose of this chapter was to determine differences in reading attitudes among fourth-grade students who have been exposed to AR since kindergarten and fourth-grade students who have not. Data were generated in two distinct phases. Phase I of the study was comprised of the MRP-R survey. The survey was administered in a paper/pencil format to 52 students at Fairfax Elementary who had been exposed to AR since kindergarten and 35 students from Mountain Ridge Elementary, who had never been exposed to AR. There was a total of 87 students who participated in the survey.

The survey had two subcategories identified as self-concept and value of reading. The survey contained a total of 40 questions. Twenty questions were specific to their self-concepts as readers and 20 questions were specific to their value of reading. After all surveys were completed, survey data were analyzed using SPSS, an analytics software package. An examination of the descriptive statistics for each survey question from each respondent was used in formulating the 17 semi-structured independent interview questions used in the second phase of the study. It is the goal of explanatory mixed methods to allow the students' voices to further explicate the quantitative findings. Both quantitative and qualitative data were generated and analyzed to address the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in attitudes toward reading between fourth-grade students who use

the AR program and those who do not? (QUANT)

2. How do high-, average-, and low-achieving fourth-grade students, including those with disabilities who use the Accelerated Reader program, describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading? (QUAL)
3. How do high, average, and low-achieving fourth-grade students, including those with disabilities who do not use the Accelerated Reader program, describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading? (QUAL)

Phase I: Motivation to Read Profile-Revised Survey

The results from the MRP-R provided the quantitative data for the initial phase of the study. Students were administered the survey in a traditional paper/pencil format. The researcher followed the protocol outlined by the survey creators when administering the survey. The questions were read aloud to students in a whole-group setting within the regular classroom, and scores were calculated to determine all students' cumulative and subscale survey scores.

Research Question One: Are there differences in attitudes toward reading between fourth-grade students who use the AR program and those who do not?

There were a total of 52 students (26 boys and 26 girls) who participated in the MRP-R survey at Fairfax Elementary. Their scores ranged from a low of 23 to a high of 35 on the Self-Concept portion of the survey with an average score of 27.37 (SD = 2.81). On the Value of Reading portion of the survey, their scores ranged from a minimum of 25 to a maximum of 35 with an average of 30.5 (SD = 2.98). Combining SC and VR totals for Fairfax Elementary resulted in a

minimum score of 51 and a maximum score of 69 with an average 59.13 (SD = 4.97). See Table 4.1, Appendix F.

There was a total of 35 students (20 boys and 15 girls) who participated in the MRP-R survey at Mountain Ridge Elementary. Their scores ranged from a low of 22 to a high of 33 on the Self-Concept portion of the survey with an average score of 28.69 (SD = 2.64). On the Value of Reading portion of the survey, their scores ranged from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 34 with an average of 29 (SD = 3.44). Combining SC and VR totals for Mountain Ridge Elementary resulted in a minimum score of 45 and a maximum score of 65 with an average 57.69 (SD = 5.24). See Table 4.2, Appendix F.

The total of 87 students from both Fairfax and Mountain Ridge Elementary Schools were categorized by reading proficiencies. Very high- and high-achieving students were grouped together in one category. The 24 high achievers from Fairfax Elementary had an average score of 61, and the 11 students in the same category from Mountain Ridge had an average score of 59.45. Average achievers (n=20) from Fairfax scored 57.7 and average achievers (n=11) from Mountain Ridge had an average score of 58.18. There were 3 students with a low achievement status at Fairfax with an average score of 57.78 and 9 at Mountain Ridge with an average score of 57.2. The survey included 3 SPED students from Fairfax and 3 SPED students from Mountain Ridge. The average score for SPED at Fairfax was 56.67 and 51.25 at Mountain Ridge. Students classified as learning disabled at Fairfax had higher overall scores on the MRP-R than those at Mountain Ridge. See Table 4.3, Appendix F.

In order to analyze the frequencies of scores for each subscale as well as the total survey, frequency histograms were created to display the distribution of response prevalence. The following sets of figures allow for comparison by displaying the score frequencies from Fairfax and Mountain Ridge side-by-side across subscales as well as total survey scores. The first set of figures compares the two schools displaying the results of the Self-Concept subscale of the MRP-R survey. The results resemble a normal distribution for Fairfax. In comparison, Mountain Ridge scores produced a frequency histogram that was skewed to the left with one spike representing seven students who scored at the upper end of the survey. See Figure 4.1.

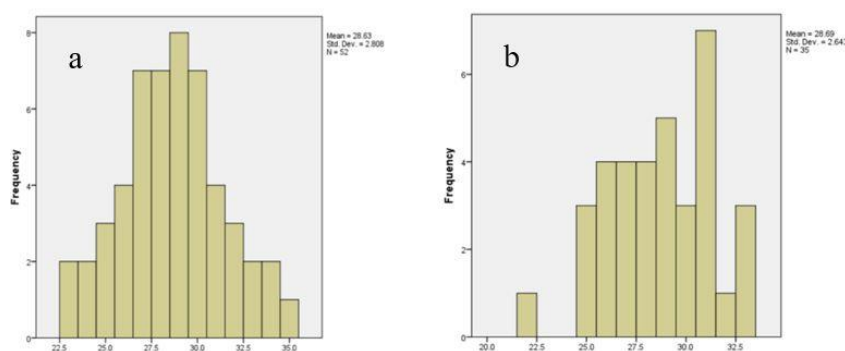


Figure 4.1 Frequency SC Scores: Fairfax (a) and Mountain Ridge (b)

Just as the frequencies regarding self-concept survey scores for Fairfax were displayed, Figure 4.2 displays an additional normal distribution of scores for the subscale of Value of Reading. Regarding the value of reading scores for Mountain Ridge, a varied distribution which is skewed to the left meaning that the majority of responses were at the upper end of the value reading subscale within the MRP-R survey (Figure 4.2)

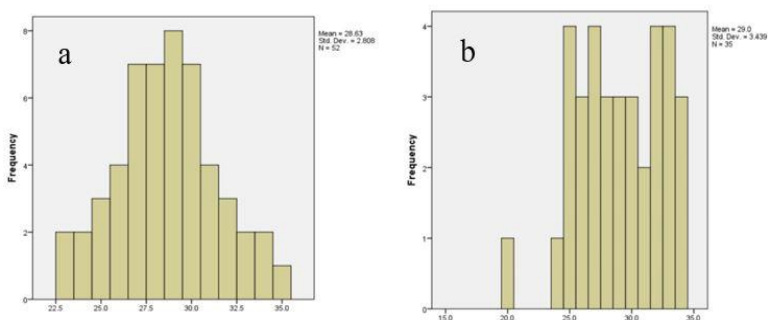


Figure 4.2 Frequency VR Scores: Fairfax (a) and Mountain Ridge (b)

The histogram for Fairfax's combined total scores for the MRP-R survey shows no apparent pattern of responses indicative of a multimodal distribution. The frequency histogram for Mountain Ridge, however, shows a distribution that is skewed to the left with two spikes in the upper range of response scores. This skewed distribution of the combined scores reaffirms the same skewed distribution found in both subscales for Mountain Ridge. These disparate frequency distributions for the two participating schools' students' total scores, is displayed in Figure 4.3.

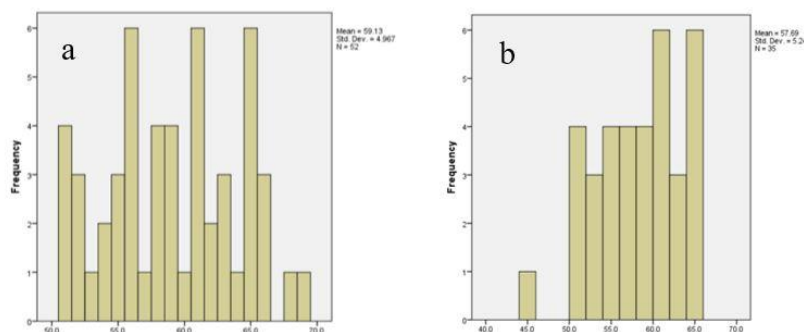


Figure 4.3 Frequency Total Scores: Fairfax (a) and Mountain Ridge (b)

Levene's Test and a t-Test were performed in SPSS to assess the equality of variances and the equality of means. Many routine statistical techniques accept that variances are equal in populations from which samples are derived. Levene's test evaluates this premise. Given an alpha of 0.05, a Levene Statistic of .071, with a statistical significance of .79, was produced (Table 4.4, Appendix F). Accordingly, when there is insufficient evidence to claim that the variances are not equal, the premise is accepted.

In view of the fact that the t-test, which compared combined scores by school, was not statistically significant, an analysis of variance, or ANOVA, was also performed using both subscales and the total scores. For this analysis, Self-Concept Scores and Value of Reading

Scores were the dependent variables and the independent variable was whether a school was an AR school or not an AR school.

At a 95% confidence level, there is not a statistical difference (.932) between the AR school and the non-AR school regarding self-concept questions. At a 95% confidence level, there is a statistically significant difference between the results at the AR school and the non-AR school among the value of reading questions from the MRP-R survey (.033). The statistical analysis revealed that the difference in the scores for the value of reading subscale between the two schools was significant because the school that did not utilize AR produced a VR score that was below the critical value. In other words, the prediction that there would be a difference in the MRP-R scores between students exposed to AR since kindergarten and students who were not exposed to AR since kindergarten was correct, with respect to the Value of Reading subscale.

To understand these findings, it is important to note that the term “Between Groups” refers to “explained” or “systematic variance.” For instance, the difference between a respondent’s score from School A and a respondent’s score from School B, would represent explained variance. Any variance found “within groups” represents “error variance.” This refers to the difference between one respondent’s score from School A and another respondent’s score from School A. See Table 4.5, Appendix F.

Since the aim of explanatory mixed methods is to allow the students’ voices to further explicate the quantitative findings, independent interview questions for the qualitative phase of the study are described in Tables 4.6 and Table 4.7 in Appendix F.

Summary of Phase I

SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics, Levene's test, a t-test, and ANOVA for the quantitative data resulting from the administration of the MRP-R to students at Mountain Ridge and Fairfax Elementary Schools. These analyses revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the participants' self-concept as a reader irrespective of the students' exposure to AR. The analyses did, however, reveal a statistically significant difference in the value of reading scores between students who have been exposed to AR since kindergarten and those who have not been exposed to AR. The raw scores for the value of reading subscale for Mountain Ridge reveal a higher variance than those for Fairfax although Fairfax had a higher average score for the value of reading subscale. The difference in students' attitudes regarding reading were found in the value of reading subscale in that the school exposed to AR since kindergarten had higher scores on that subscale. Both the Levene's test and the ANOVA confirmed the internal validity of the survey instrument and the homogeneity of variance within the study population subgroups.

Phase II: Independent Interviews

For phase II of the study, students across proficiency categories were selected using maximum variation sampling, where semi-structured independent interviews were conducted. Twelve students were interviewed at Fairfax Elementary, while 11 were interviewed at Mountain Ridge. Then, all data generated were combined to identify themes and corroborate conclusions. For the second phase of the study, a total of 23 students were interviewed. To ensure questions would generate appropriate responses, independent interview questions were piloted among

fourth-grade students who did not participate in the study. During each interview, students responded to 17 questions from a predetermined interview protocol (Appendix E). The questions were generated to provide voice to the statistically significant findings from the MRP-R survey administered at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge Elementary Schools.

During the interviews, additional questions and prompts were incorporated as the conversations progressed. Each conversational interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were reviewed and coded using open and axial coding procedures. The following sections answer each research question in relation to the post survey, qualitative findings. Table 4.8 provides the names (pseudonyms) of the participants across proficiency categories and survey scores that were individually interviewed at Fairfax (See Appendix F). Table 4.9 provides the names (pseudonyms) of the participants across proficiency categories and survey scores that were individually interviewed at Mountain Ridge (See Appendix F).

Research Question Two: How do high, average, and low-achieving fourth-grade students, including those with disabilities, who use the Accelerated Reader program, describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading?

Independent interviews were conducted with 12 students who have used the Accelerated Reader program since kindergarten. There was a total of 17 post survey questions that were developed to further explicate results from the MRP-R survey. From the qualitative methods used in this portion of the study, several major themes emerged that describe students' attitudes and motivation toward reading: 1) Reading Enjoyment; 2) What Students Like to Read; 3) How Students Like to Read; 4) Access to Text; 5) Self-concept as Readers; 6) Value of reading; 7) Identities of Readers; 8) Social Aspects; 9) Instructional Practices; 10) Environmental Influences

11) Current Motivational Contexts; and 12) Suggestions to Increase Reading Motivation. Table 4.10 through Table 4.22 provide excerpts of student responses from the independent interviews, which serve as justification for themes and patterns that emerged at Fairfax Elementary. The term “Counts” in each table refers to the number of times the topic was mentioned by students during the independent student interviews.

Reading Enjoyment

According to the MRP-R survey, 94% of the students at Fairfax responded that reading a book is something they like to do. Survey responses also indicated that 73% of students think that reading is a fun activity. Interview questions were asked to expand upon the survey findings concerning students’ attitudes toward enjoyment of reading.

Interview responses concluded that most students at Fairfax Elementary across all proficiency categories who participated in AR since kindergarten reported positive attitudes toward reading. For instance, Darin stated, “I love it. Reading is something that I always wanted to do when I came to school here in kindergarten.” Lisa, another student, displayed a positive attitude regarding reading as she responded, “I absolutely love reading. I really do!” Rita claimed, “Reading is very fun, and I like it.” Though all students claimed that they do enjoy reading, Ron, an average-performing student, responded that though he enjoys reading, it is not something that he has always enjoyed. Ron commented, “I used to not like reading, but at this school, no one can’t like reading. I did not like reading little books, but now I like reading chapter books.”

Another student classified as average mentioned that most other students in her class also enjoy reading. She stated, “I like it! Only a small amount of kids think reading is not good, but

most everybody here likes it.” Another average-performing student provides a different perspective regarding reading enjoyment. Nathan responded, “I like reading. Some books, I look at them, and they don’t look good, but when I start reading it, it’s really good!” All students across proficiency levels reported reading was enjoyable, except for one student among the special education participants. Though the female student did not claim to dislike reading, her statement reaffirmed that she could enjoy reading under the condition that she would not have to read a book multiple times. Cindy voiced, “I think reading is okay. It would be great, but I have to read my books two or three times before I take an AR test.” Table 4.10 illustrates examples of students’ responses across proficiency categories when questioned about reading enjoyment (See Appendix F).

What Students Like to Read

Specific interview questions led students to express their opinions about the types of books they like to read, and students’ experiences with new forms of literacies were also explored. Fourth-grade students across all proficiency groups enjoyed reading a variety of books and genres, and have experienced reading in ways that incorporate technology. Many students described that they enjoyed reading adventurous texts and books with exciting events. During the interviews, students across all proficiencies provided the name of online libraries such as myON® and Epic! that they often use to locate and read books with AR tests. All participating fourth-grade students at Fairfax Elementary reported they often use iPad devices and computers as a means to read books online that are included in the AR program.

Among the high-performing group, fiction was the genre of choice. Some fiction titles that were termed as current favorites among the high-performing group were *The Hunger Games*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Harry Potter*, and *Percy Jackson*. Though fiction was the favored choice among high-performing readers, only one student in this classification group discussed enjoying reading historical fiction and nonfiction text related to science and math concepts. Rita stated, “I really like historical fiction, but I like to read books about what we are learning about in science. Also, I read math books, not math workbooks, but nonfiction books that are about math.”

When questioning average readers from Fairfax Elementary about the types of books they enjoy reading, two students mentioned that they enjoy reading fictional series books such as *Jedi Academy*, *I Survived*, *Wimpy Kids*, and *Zodiac Legacy* series. Another average participant responded, “I like to read about sports and basketball. I’m also reading a good book called *The Year of the Dog*. It’s about Chinese New Year. Like the higher performing students, a few students classified as average read nonfiction texts. Most average readers enjoy reading both fiction and nonfiction books. Between the two students who reported that they liked reading nonfiction texts surrounding the topic of sports, one student, Kamie stated, “I mainly read sports books, but I like series books and graphic novels, too.

Interview responses indicated that fourth-grade students classified as low achieving enjoy reading books across multiple genres. Just as high- and average-performing students enjoy reading series books, low performing students indicated that they do also. Clark claimed, “I like *Shiloh* series books and *The Weird School* series books.” Katie, an additional student within the low-achieving category enjoys reading across varied genres. She stated, “I like to read nonfiction books, adventures, mysteries, and some graphic novels.” Among the three special education

students interviewed, their reading interests were as diverse as the students within the average and low proficiency categories. Nolan and Ethan responded, “I like reading nonfiction books about animals, frogs, and sports.” Table 4.11 organizes the responses of students across all proficiency categories regarding the types of books students enjoy reading (See Appendix F).

Easy Access to Text

According to MRP-R survey results, 92% of the students indicated they have easy access to texts. At Fairfax Elementary, a school-wide library containing a large assortment of texts across genres and topics abound. Students across all proficiency ranges vouched that they routinely visit the school-wide library once per week to check out books. Students explained how they locate books in the school library. Lisa explained, “Books in the school library are organized by topics and authors’ names.” There was no difference in how the students of varied proficiency categories explained the use of the school-wide library.

Each of the four fourth-grade classrooms also contain extensive classroom libraries that house thousands of books per classroom. The books are carefully organized across levels, genres, and topics. Due to the great abundance of texts that are organized in a simplified manner, students can easily access interesting books. When discussing the concept of libraries with students at Fairfax, interview responses demonstrated that the clear majority of students viewed libraries primarily through the lens of their classroom libraries. As one student responded, “It is good to have a class library so you don’t have to go to the school library for books. Since you only go to the library once a week, it’s better to have books in your classroom. There’s a lot of books in my classroom.”

Rita, describing ease of access to texts in her classroom, said, “We have big libraries in our school and in our classes. In my class, teachers separate the books by levels, and by fiction and nonfiction. We have all kinds of bins of series books that are labeled. We even have the whole *Harry Potter* series!” Other students gave similar answers. When students were asked about the library at Fairfax, most students from all groups referred to classroom libraries rather than the school-wide library. Students described Fairfax as having many books across genres. While all students noted the many books in both school-wide and classroom libraries are available for students, Darin, a student identified as high-performing, provided a unique response. “It’s good to have a class library. You don’t have to go to the school library for books. Since you only go to the school library once a week, it’s best to have books in your room.” Table 4.12 is an overview of the various responses during the interview portion of the study (See Appendix F).

Time Allocated to Independent Choice Reading

Survey results showed that 88% of the students at Fairfax feel positive about the time they spend reading. However, eight students reported that they found time spent reading to be really boring. To glean more information on students’ attitudes toward time spent reading, individual interview questions were developed.

Ten of the 11 students interviewed at Fairfax Elementary reported that all students were provided time daily for independent choice reading. Students begin their day with thirty minutes of uninterrupted, independent reading of AR books. Again, any time students have extra time during the school day, they engage in independent reading. Students self-select texts within their appropriate levels of reading as indicated by STAR. During the interview, students explained

that reading was an important component in the daily schedule. Darin claimed, “We read our own books here every day. Reading every day is very important here.” All students across proficiency categories claimed most of their reading experiences were at school, while some reported also reading at home. All high-achieving students claimed they spend some time reading outside of school. Lisa stated, “I read at school, but I read every day when I come home, too.” Darin added, “I read a lot at home. It was last year when I was at home that I read and got the most AR points.”

Just as with high-achieving students, all average-achieving students reported reading outside of school (Table 4.13, See Appendix F). Ron says sometimes when he reads at home, he does not like to be interrupted. He reported, “When I am reading and my mom wants to go to the grocery store, I want to stay home and read.” Nathan, another average-performing student, claimed that while he mostly read during school, he often read books and magazines at home to avoid boredom. Only one student among low-proficiency students, Katie, claimed to read outside of school. While several students across most proficiency categories voiced that they enjoy reading in and out of school, the students in special education did not report to read outside of school.

How Students Like to Read

The fourth-grade students at Fairfax are not only provided large amounts of time during the school day to read independently selected books, but have opportunities to read in diverse ways. Students have frequent experiences reading books traditionally, and they have opportunities to read fiction and nonfiction books from online library sites such as Big Universe, myON® that are purchased by the district, and Epic!, which is a free resource for public schools.

Students access these sites using desktop and/or laptop computers and iPads. Independent interview questions regarding the varied modes in which students prefer reading generated a variety of responses. The fourth-grade students provided mixed results on whether they preferred to read traditional or electronic books (Table 4.14, See Appendix F).

The fourth-grade students provided mixed results on whether they preferred to read traditional books or read texts electronically. Some students reported to enjoy reading books traditionally as well as electronically. Surprisingly, when students discussed how they liked to read, most students responded that they enjoyed reading traditional books. In terms of how students across abilities reported to enjoy reading, responses were diverse, were found to be based on individual preferences, and were unrelated to reading proficiency.

Self-Concept of Readers: Oral Reading and Decoding

Most students responded on the survey that they feel positive about their reading abilities. In reference to self-perceived reading abilities, 69% of the students reported to read better than their peers, 19% reported to read about the same as their peers, and 12% responded that they do not read as well as their peers. Specific questions were asked in the quest to further explicate how fourth-grade readers across proficiency categories at Fairfax Elementary view themselves as readers. Though over half of the students surveyed showed that they feel confident about their reading abilities, interview responses provided evidence that most students across each of the proficiency groups do not feel comfortable reading aloud in front of teachers and peers. Among the 12 students interviewed at Fairfax Elementary, only one student reported to enjoy reading aloud in front of others. Across all proficiency categories, 11 students claimed that they do not find reading aloud enjoyable. Darin, a high-performing student stated, “I feel like I mess up more

when I'm reading in front of other people. It's hard to explain this feeling when you can't read the words on the page." Another high-performing student responded, "I get a little nervous. Sometimes, you look up when reading, and people are staring at you." All of the students classified as average-performing readers responded negatively about reading aloud in front of individuals. Ron, an average-performing reader claimed, "It kind of makes me nervous to read out loud. If you miss a word, you will embarrass yourself." Nathan and Kamie, other average readers, reiterate the negative feelings about reading aloud. Kamie voiced, "If I mess up, then I get embarrassed." Nathan admitted, "I don't like it. I get nervous when I read out loud. I stutter on my words." Each of the three students classified as low as well as each of those receiving special education services, all claimed that they dislike oral reading in front of peers.

Survey responses showed that 96% of the students who participate in AR are unable to decode unknown words when encountered in text. Therefore, interview questions were generated to investigate further. Interview discussions held across proficiency groups concluded similar results. The majority of students regardless of proficiency category, do not use a variety of decoding strategies. Interview responses concluded that students' primarily use phonetic cues to decode unknown words in text. Among the 12 students in high, average, low categories, as well as students classified as those with disabilities, only two students reported using meaning, visual, or syntax clues as strategies to problem solve challenging words. Other than using phonetic cues, students classified as high reported that when they encounter unknown words, they skip the word or appeal to an adult to provide them with or assist with the word. Darin stated, "I try to sound it out." Rita's response was similar as she replied, "I just try to sound it out, or I ask my mom or my teacher what the word is." Only one student reported to use varied strategies Lisa claimed, "I look around the passage for any context clues that will help me." With the exception of one

high-performing student, all students described negative feelings about reading aloud, and students across all proficiency levels described insufficient decoding strategies. Even though the majority of students reported to feel confident in their reading abilities on the survey instrument, students responded negatively about reading aloud in front of peers and reported using limited decoding strategies flexibly. The following table highlights example responses regarding students' self-concepts regarding oral reading and strategies used when unknown words are encountered in text (Table 4.15, See Appendix F).

Value of Reading

The MRP-R survey results illustrated that 94% of the students at Fairfax think becoming a good reader is important. Due to the overwhelmingly positive survey responses, interview questions were generated to further explicate students' reasons for valuing reading.

According to responses to interview questions regarding the importance of reading, responses indicate that at Fairfax Elementary, fourth-grade students highly value reading. The students primarily value reading as a venue in which to gain knowledge of the world and for current and future academic success. Several examples provide evidence that students across all proficiency categories value reading. Ron, one student classified as average referred to his principal when he described the importance of reading at Fairfax Elementary. He explained:

“Reading is pretty important here because our principal just loves reading. She has lots of favorite books. We read all the time here. In kindergarten, you read a lot books, and all the way through fourth grade, you read a lot of books, too.”

Lisa, a high-performing student claimed, “If you don’t read much, I don’t think you will have a good education.” Another student felt strongly that wide reading practices benefit students in

word recognition skills. Rita affirmed, “People who read a lot figure out words easier than people who read less.” Darin, another high-performing student suggested, “Reading is really good for you, and it helps you learn vocabulary words. It really helps you learn a lot about the world.” Students identified as low and those with disabilities also claim to value reading.

Students across these categories indicate future success, new knowledge gained, and learning the meanings of unknown words as the reasons to value reading. Nolan, a student with disabilities stated, “Reading is important because it helps you get smarter.” Though those who participate in AR provided various reasons for why they value reading, none claimed to value reading solely for the sake of pleasure. Table 4.16 illustrates how fourth-grade students across the various proficiency groups responded about how they value reading (See Appendix F).

Traits of Students Who Read Often

An overwhelming 93% of the AR participants responded on the motivation survey that people who read a lot are interesting. To determine why so many participants responded so positively about those who read often, interview questions were formulated to reveal specific traits peers associate with high volume reading.

During the independent interviews, the theme of traits identified of students who read often emerged. Interview responses across proficiency groups provided evidence that fourth-grade students at Fairfax Elementary identify peers who read often. Though students across reading proficiencies view all students as those who read often, students at Fairfax identify the varied reading abilities and book interests of their peers. Discussions revealed that some students’ view good readers as those who read voraciously with appropriate fluency. Some

students across all proficiency groups identified the best readers as those who obtain the most AR points.

It was evident that many students were aware of the varied proficiencies of readers in their classrooms. Some students were eager to share the academic successes of their peers, while others expressed thoughts about students who struggle. Darin, a high-performing student, expressed thoughts about students who struggle regarding book selections. He responded:

“Everybody is a different kind of reader, and we read different stuff. I have a friend, and some books are just too big for him. When we are in the class library looking for books, I help him find smaller chapter books that are best for him that he likes.”

Lisa, an additional high student identified with peers who are exemplary readers as those who accrue large amounts of AR points. She shared, “Darin is the best reader because he got 1,000 AR points last year, and he has 1,500 points this year.” Moreover, another reader classified as high claimed that good readers are those who read with great speed and read lengthy chapter books. Rita voiced, “Lisa and Darin read like big, thick, heavy books. They look like college books or something. They can really read fast because they both can read a big chapter book in a day.”

Responses from average-achieving readers indicate that they also view good readers as those students who obtain a large amount of AR points. Ron stated, “One new student who just came in during the third quarter already has 150 AR points! He makes 100 on all of his AR tests.” Among the group identified as average, only one student identified the types of books read by peers. Nathan expressed, “Sean is a really good reader. He reads a lot of *Harry Potter* books.” An additional student in the average group identified peers who read well as those who

read with appropriate speed. He mentioned, "...When Jaxson reads books, he reads really, really fast, and Greg is a really fast reader, too."

Just as other students identified the best readers as those with the highest amount of AR points, so did the students with disabilities and those classified as low achieving. A student with disabilities identified good readers as those who read well, and not only accumulate large amounts of AR points, but are those who read widely as well. She voiced, "One boy has 400 AR points. He really reads a lot." Some students in these categories referred to the speed in which peers read. Amy stated, "Lisa reads AR books worth a lot of points. She finishes them in one or two days!"

When analyzing student responses across varied proficiencies, only one student, classified as high, identified peers across abilities as he described how he often assists individuals in making appropriate book selections. Table 4.17 presents varied responses regarding how students described peers who read often (See Appendix F). As with most aspects of reading, most students across all proficiency categories described those who read often solely through the lens of AR.

Social Aspects

Students' attitudes surrounding the social aspects of reading was a facet of motivation addressed on the survey. Survey results indicated that 96% of AR participants enjoy talking about ideas surrounding books. Specific interview questions related to the social aspects of reading were generated to investigate the contexts surrounding the social opportunities students have to converse about books.

The social aspects of reading were a prominent theme that emerged during the individual interview process. Most students classified as high and average at Fairfax Elementary reported that social exchanges in group settings surrounding books do occur. However, the social exchanges about which they felt positive were not part of the structured existing instructional framework set forth by teachers. Consequently, most students were motivated to socialize about books when the students themselves created the opportunities to collaborate about books. Among the high-achieving students, most students do collaborate about books. Only one student in this category reported that their teacher occasionally provided time for students to share and recommend books. One high-achieving student shared how she discussed books with her peers. “Sometimes at recess, when we are outside or inside, and during snack time, we talk about books. Me and my friends right now are reading *A Wrinkle in Time*, and we like to talk about the characters and stuff.” Another high-performing student’s response supported Lisa’s. Rita stated, “Sometimes on the playground, some of us bring our books outside to read. Sometimes we read the same book, and we read different books too, but we like to bring them out and talk about them.” Rita also shared that her teacher occasionally plans for social exchanges across peers regarding books. Rita shared, “My teacher lets us sit in a circle and pass books around that we like and are reading. That way, people might want to read it later.”

Two of the three students classified as average described opportunities they create to engage peers around books. Kamie described how she enjoys sharing books with peers. “If I think that a book is really good, I like to tell my friends about it. I talk about my books at lunch or just when we have a break.” Another student explained how he creates opportunities to share books with peers also. “You like join up at outdoor or indoor recess.” Additionally, this student reported that his teacher provided opportunities for students to create and share books with peers.

Ron stated, “In my class, we write about books and make books. We stand up and read the books.”

The interview responses of most students within the low-achieving group indicated that though collaborations exist, not all students engage in or benefit from such discussions and books recommendations. A student in this proficiency category voiced, “My friends told me about good books, but I didn’t have my AR points yet, so I didn’t get to read them.” Another student stated, “Some people talk about books with their friends.”

Independent interview responses of students with disabilities indicated that all students create opportunities to share and discuss books. One student shared that he talked about books with his assistant, while another discussed that they collaborate with peers about books during lunch. A particular student described a unique scenario where she shares books with a peer. Cindy reported, “Me and my friend read together and we are trying to make our 200 AR points together. We swap books we like together.”

After analyzing the responses of all students, it is clear that most students across proficiency groups collaborate with peers about reading books they created themselves. Only two students described social experiences where the teacher planned for collaborations to occur surrounding books. Among all students interviewed, only one participant responded that they did not engage in collaborative exchanges regarding books often. Though this response is not indicative that the student never collaborates with peers about books, it does not occur often. Table 4.18 summarizes students’ responses to questions concerning the social aspects of reading (See Appendix F).

Instructional Practices

Interview questions were generated to explore students' perspectives of the literacy instruction that is provided at Fairfax Elementary. Responses indicated that six students classified as average and low achieving identify teacher read-alouds as an instructional practice that occurs routinely. At Fairfax, some students are exposed to read-alouds by listening to books on tape. Other students recalled times in the past when the science teacher rewarded students by reading texts aloud. Overall, these students vouched that even though the teacher read the book orally for fun, students could take AR quizzes on them, which also helped students accrue additional AR points.

An overwhelming number of students at Fairfax view literacy instruction primarily through the lens of AR. When students were asked, "How does your teacher teach reading?" an overwhelming number of students described the various aspects of AR such as goal setting, points, quizzes, and reading outside of predetermined reading levels. Teachers at Fairfax use the core reading program purchased by the district with fidelity to streamline whole group instruction across all fourth-grade classrooms. Though the basal reader is used as the primary mode of whole-group reading instruction, no students mentioned reading from the textbook as part of their reading instruction. Two students identified as average and low-performing explained that their teacher allows them to serve as authors as they create books. Table 4.19 displays the responses to this question (See Appendix F).

Students at Fairfax Elementary described instructional practices overwhelmingly through the context of AR. Only average and low students described writing and teacher read-alouds as part of reading lessons they found enjoyable. Neither high-performing students, nor special

education students identified writing or teacher read-alouds as a part of the instructional components of the literacy block. Across all proficiency levels, students described AR as the primary method of instruction. Additionally, students described experiences with AR as expectations that included: reading, testing, accruing points, and meeting goals set forth by the teacher. An average-performing student complained that punitive consequences for not meeting these expectations occur.

Environmental Influences

Overall, interview responses during the independent interviews provided clear evidence that specific environmental factors influence all students' reading attitudes and motivation. Most students desire reading in comfortable environments free from loud noise and distractions.

High-performing readers, Darin and Rita's responses indicated that they like to read in comfortable environments. Darin responded, "I like to read in my beanbag chair. When I broke the AR record for most AR points last year, that is where I did most of my home reading." Rita claimed, "I like to read in a comfy place where I can lay down." One student classified as a high-performing reader stated that she enjoyed reading in outdoor environments.

Responses from all readers identified as average reported that they also prefer reading in quiet environments with comfortable chairs. Nathan exclaimed, "I can't read in loud places; I like a quiet room."

Just as the high-performing group of readers had one participant who identified the outdoors as a favored venue for reading, one participant, classified as low-performing, also stated that she preferred outdoor environments while reading independently. An additional participant

in this category, like others, proclaimed, “I don’t like people talking at once. I like reading where it is really quiet.”

Two readers with disabilities responded that they also desire quiet, calming environments when reading, while other students in this group described optimum environments for reading as those that incorporate dim lighting and seating options that reflect a home-like environment. Cindy reported, “I like reading when it is a little dark, but not too dark in the room.”

Data collected during the independent interviews provided clear descriptions of how environmental factors have impacted students’ reading attitudes. Students across all proficiency categories described comfort and quiet were two of the key environmental factors that influenced their attitudes and motivation toward reading. One high-performing and one low-performing student described the outdoors as being the venue of choice for reading. Table 4.20 highlights these responses (See Appendix F).

Current Motivational Contexts

Students were asked to describe things their school does that currently motivated them to read. Students across each of the proficiency categories described the following school experiences that they currently find motivating: books read aloud by teachers; connecting reading and writing; abundant book choice; imagination; and extrinsic motivational components of the AR program. Though a variety of motivational contexts were described, several students’ responses reflected extrinsic motivational factors associated with the AR program.

For Darin, his statement of current motivational contexts at Fairfax Elementary reflected extrinsic motivational factors associated with the AR program. He stated, “I am just glad that I have the most AR points in my class! It’s just a relief to know that I got the most AR points at

the end of this year. Last year, I broke the record for the most AR points, too.” It was found that another student in the high-performing group was also motivated by extrinsic rewards, but was also motivated by the vast amount of books within the classroom library, and the imaginative and social experiences that books provide. Lisa explained:

There are just some things that you cannot do like get a dog or pet, but you can when you read books. It is hard to explain, but it makes me feel really good when I read books. I also like it that there’s so many books in my room. You get to sit with your friends and suggest books. I have to say that I like getting prizes, too. You get a trophy if you get 100 AR points, and you get a medal if you get 200 points, and a water bottle and a lunch box at the end of the year if you get 300 points.

Though two students within the high-performing group discussed aspects of the AR program they found motivating, one student in the group found the wide assortment of books that exists within the classroom library as a current motivational factor. Rita responded, “In my class, there’s lots of different books in my room. I like it that that there’s just so many books!”

Some responses from students identified as average were different than those classified as high achieving. Only one student in this group described aspects related to AR as current motivational contexts. Kamie discussed that she found AR tests to be motivating. “I like tests on AR. If you make 100, that is an automatic 100 for you.” The majority of the students among average readers attributed the wide variety of books, book fairs, and imaginative experiences that book events provide as motivational contexts. Two students voiced similar areas of motivation grounded in book choice, book fair events, and the imaginative experiences fiction books provide. Nathan asserted, “At this school, you have books all around you. There’s more than a thousand. I like it when you get too excited about your book and they get exciting and scare you!

I also like the book fairs that we have here. We're having one right now." Ron, another average-performing reader also referred to imaginative and emotional experiences books provide. "I just love series books. I have already read five sets of series books. It's just fun to imagine. Some books are emotional, so you can laugh, cry, or be scared."

Low-achieving readers at Fairfax Elementary revealed a variety of motivational contexts that influence their current reading motivation. One student identified extrinsic rewards associated with AR points as a current means of motivation. Clark responded, "Taking AR tests is fun. You get rewards and stuff like trophies and medals. I got a lunch box when I was in first grade." To motivate students to read more nonfiction texts, Clark explained how his teacher uses candy to motivate students. "My teacher gives us candy if we make 100 on our AR tests. That makes it really fun." While Clark was the only low-achieving student who mentioned aspects of AR that promoted motivation for him as a reader, two other students within the low-performing category provided some of the most unique contexts for motivation at Fairfax Elementary. For instance, one student reported that feedback was a motivating factor for her. "With AR, you get to know if you are right or wrong", stated Amy. Another student voiced that she was motivated by the integration of reading and writing. Katie reported, "I really like it when we read stories and write something up. It is fun to get to type it up just like it's a real story."

Fourth-grade students who have participated in AR since kindergarten described current motivational contexts that promote positive attitudes toward reading. Several students described how teachers reading aloud was motivational; however, two of these students described that these read-alouds could directly lead to more points.

The highest amount of responses for current motivational contexts surrounding reading were those associated with AR and practices surrounding the program. Students across high,

average, and low proficiency categories described points, prizes, and other rewards as their primary motivation. Only one student classified as low had a different perspective regarding the motivational aspects of AR. This student claimed to appreciate the immediate feedback regarding correct answers to questions on AR quizzes.

Other current motivational categories included: books, content area, writing, imagination, and book fairs. Table 4.21 provides examples of responses (See Appendix F).

Suggestions to Increase Reading Motivation

When questioning students about what their school could do to increase their motivation to read, students voiced numerous ways the school could enhance their desire to read. When analyzing the independent interview responses, there were no suggestions from students to receive additional rewards. Among the 12 students interviewed, only one student suggested more teacher read-alouds for the purpose of accruing more AR points. In relation to the responses across proficiency levels, a high-performing reader suggested that student book clubs be formed, and more time be spent on projects aligned to online reading tasks. Lisa, a high-performing reader suggested, “We really need to organize a book club for the classrooms that are organized for students. That way, we would be able to discuss reading and our books more.” Another student provided her opinion that more topics across the content areas be explored. Rita voiced, “Our library teacher lets us go on the site myOn[®] and she lets us read on topics. Then, we get to do projects on it. We’ve already read about pyramids and did an online project. I would like to do more reading projects about science. I am really interested right now in seasons because we are learning about them in science. We could do more things like that.”

Responses generated from students classified as average-performing provided clear evidence that to increase reading motivation, student book clubs should be established, more time should be allocated for independent reading, additional time should be spent on reading with other students, and more series books and nonfiction texts should be generated. Kamie concluded, “I would like to read with other grades like as a group or with just other people. It would be really nice to be able to read with the autistic kids.” Some students requested more time be allocated to independent reading, and additional books across genres be purchased to extend classroom libraries. Nathan, an average-performing reader stated, “They could give us more reading time. I also want more series books like from the *Who Would Win* animal series. I wish they had more nonfiction sports books, too.”

Responses regarding ways to increase reading motivation among students identified as low-achieving resulted in a diverse set of suggestions. One student in this group requested that teachers read aloud more books to assist students in generating more AR points, while another claimed that an increase in time allocated for independent reading would be motivational. A student also stated that she desired more books that are shorter in length since it takes more time to read and take tests on lengthy books.

Students with disabilities provided minimal suggestions for increasing motivation. Two students in this group were unable to state ways Fairfax Elementary could improve reading motivation. Nolan’s responses were quite different from those across other proficiency classifications. His suggestions were to remove the punitive consequences associated with not achieving quarterly AR goals and eliminate the visual indicators of failure associated with AR testing and reporting. His suggestive response included:

“People should not have to read during recess when they don’t get their AR points. Also, if you don’t get the right amount of points, you might have to read during lunch. I also don’t want the school to use the thing called percentage correct on AR. If you do good, it goes up, but if you make a bad grade, it goes down.”

While suggestions were varied, they can be divided into two categories: prescriptive and proscriptive. Within the prescriptive category, students have various suggestions to improve their reading motivation. High and average students suggest the incorporation of book clubs, while some average, low, and SPED students claimed that opportunities to read aloud to younger peers and those with special needs would increase their motivation. Several average students along with one student classified as low-performing desired more time to be allocated for independent choice reading. One average student made a plea for more series books, while a low-achieving reader made a specific request for shorter books. One high-achieving student asserted that the opportunity to learn about topics across content areas would be motivating.

Within the proscriptive category, students from high, average, and SPED categories gave specific AR practices they would abandon. A high student desired to read “just to relax” and read choice books outside of the AR program, and an average student disclosed that reading should be for “fun” rather than for accumulating points. A student with learning disabilities requested that visual indicators on the computer screen associated with the percentage of correct responses given during and AR be eliminated, as well as punishments for not meeting AR goals. Table 4.22 provides an account of students’ suggestions for increasing reading motivation at Fairfax Elementary (See Appendix F).

Summary of Research Question Two Findings

High-, average-, and low-achieving fourth-grade students, including those with disabilities who use the AR program described their attitudes and motivation toward reading, through the previously enumerated themes, which provided an overall picture of attitudes toward reading and motivation to read. With the exception of one student classified as special education, students participating in this study claim to enjoy reading.

Fourth-grade students described enjoying reading fiction, nonfiction, and some series fictional books. Students described independent choice reading as something they typically did during the school day. They described libraries within the context of their classrooms. The few students who did describe experiences within the school library did so by comparing it unfavorably to classroom libraries. Among students within the low-proficiency category, only one claimed to read outside of school. Several voiced that they experienced reading both in and out of school. Fourth-grade students provided mixed results about whether they preferred to read traditional books or to read texts electronically. Most students responded that they enjoyed reading traditional books. In terms of how students across abilities enjoyed reading, interview responses were based on individual preferences and were unrelated to reading proficiency. With the exception of one high student, all students described negative feelings about reading aloud.

Students across all proficiency levels described insufficient decoding abilities and inadequate use of decoding strategies. While most students reported feeling confident in their reading abilities, interview responses indicated negative feelings about reading aloud in front of peers. The same students reported using limited decoding strategies flexibly. Some high and average students at Fairfax described valuing reading as a result of adult influence, while low-

achieving students did not. Most students described their value of reading as being derived from the acquisition of new words and information. Students across all proficiency categories stated they value for current and future success in life and in the workforce.

Only one student, classified as high, identified peers with diverse abilities as he described that he often assists individuals in making appropriate book selections within predetermined reading ranges. Most students described those who read often solely through the lens of AR.

In contrast to survey responses, most students described positive attitudes about collaborating with peers about their literary experiences. Most students collaborated with peers in venues they create themselves. Only two students described social experiences where the teacher planned for collaborations. Only one participant responded that she did not engage in collaborative exchanges regarding books often. Students described positive attitudes toward the social aspects of reading. The majority of students created their own opportunities for social collaborations during unstructured times within the school day. Students described positive attitudes toward teacher-led social interactions surrounding books; however, these opportunities were far less frequent.

Students who have been exposed to AR since kindergarten described instructional practices overwhelmingly within the context of AR. A few students described writing and teacher read-alouds as parts of the lessons they found enjoyable. There were no students who identified formal reading, writing, or word study instruction as components of the literacy block. Students across all proficiency levels described the AR program as the primary method of instruction without regard to other literary instructional components such as whole group, small group, writing, or language arts. Additionally, students described experiences with AR as expectations that included reading, testing, accruing points, and meeting goals set forth by the

teacher. A special education student complained that punitive consequences for not meeting these expectations occur.

Students across all proficiency categories who have been exposed to AR since kindergarten described environmental factors that influenced their attitudes and motivation to read. Students across all proficiency categories described comfortable and quiet environments more frequently than any other environmental factors that influence their attitudes and motivation toward reading. Their descriptions indicated a profound need for comfortable and quiet atmospheres during the time allocated to independent choice reading. One high-performing and one low-performing student described the outdoors as being the venue of choice for reading, while one student with disabilities described lighting as a factor related preferred reading environments.

Fourth-grade students described current motivational contexts that promote positive attitudes toward reading. Four students described how teacher read-alouds were motivational; however, two of these students described that such read-alouds could also lead to more AR points. Six students across high, average, and special education categories described the wide choice of books within their classrooms, which are well-organized within arm's reach, as motivational.

The highest amount of responses for current motivational contexts surrounding reading were those associated with the AR program and classroom libraries. Students across high-, average-, and low-proficiency categories described points, prizes, and other rewards as primary sources of motivation. Only one student classified as low had a different perspective regarding the motivational aspects of AR. This student claimed to appreciate the immediate feedback regarding correct answers to questions on the AR quizzes. Other motivational categories

included: books, content area, writing, and imagination. Most of the responses unrelated to AR were supplied by low-performing and students with disabilities.

Students had various suggestions to improve their reading motivation at school. High and average students suggested the incorporation of book clubs, while some average, low, and students with disabilities claimed that opportunities to read aloud to younger peers and those with special needs would increase their motivation. Several average-performing students, along with one student classified as low-performing desired more time to be allocated to independent choice reading. One average-performing student made a plea for more series books, while a low-achieving reader requested shorter books. One high-achieving student asserted that the opportunity to learn about topics across content areas would be motivating.

Students from high, average, and SPED categories named specific AR practices they found to have a negative impact on their motivation to read and should be abandoned. A high student desired “just to relax” and read choice books outside of the AR program. An average student disclosed that reading should be for “fun” instead of for accumulating points. A student with learning disabilities requested that visual indicators on the screen associated with the percentage of correct responses given during an AR test be eliminated due to the negative feelings engendered when the student is not as successful on AR quizzes as desired. This same student also suggested that punishments should be eliminated for not meeting quarterly AR goals.

Overall, students who have been exposed to AR since kindergarten and have reading abilities classified as proficient or advanced described positive attitudes toward reading. When students classified as low-achieving or as having learning disability described their attitudes about reading, their descriptions were positive, given success in meeting AR goals. Conclusions

regarding if students were intrinsically motivated was inconclusive; however, the extrinsic factors such as prizes, awards, trophies, and other rewards associated with AR were described by students as being motivational.

Research Question Three: How do high-, average-, and low-achieving fourth-grade students, including those with disabilities, who do not use the Accelerated Reader program, describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading?

Independent interviews were conducted with 11 students who have not participated in the AR program or any other program used to monitor independent reading. The students responded to the same 17 post-survey questions that were asked to the students at Fairfax Elementary. The qualitative methods used in this portion of the study illuminated several major themes and patterns regarding students' attitudes and motivation toward reading. The following themes and patterns emerged from the independent interviews: 1) Reading Enjoyment; 2) What Students Like to Read; 3) How Students Like to Read; 4) Access to Text; 5) Self-concept as Readers; 6) Value of Reading; 7) Traits of Students Who Read Often; 8) Social Aspects; 9) Instructional Practices; 10) Environmental Influences; 11) Current Motivational Contexts; and, 12) Suggestions to Increase Reading Motivation. Table 4.23 through Table 4.36 provide examples of student responses from the semi-structured individual interviews at Mountain Ridge Elementary (See Appendix F). For the purposes of this study, the term "Counts" refers to the number of times the topic was mentioned by students during the interviews.

Reading Enjoyment

Interview questions were developed to further explicate the quantitative findings from the MRP-R survey. According to the survey results, 37% of the students responded that reading books is something they like to do, while 60% responded that they sometimes enjoyed reading books. Additionally, 60% of the participants reported that their friends consider reading to be a fun activity.

Data generated from the qualitative findings indicated that among the 11 students across proficiency categories, 10 responded that they enjoy reading. Only one student classified as learning disabled reported to not enjoy reading. Table 4.23 illustrates some of the responses to the interview questions concerning reading enjoyment (See Appendix F).

What Students Like to Read

Specific interview questions were asked to gain insight as to what specific genres and topics students enjoy reading. Students at Mountain Ridge like reading fiction and nonfiction texts. Many students across proficiency groups described action and adventurous books as a type of text they enjoyed.

A student (Sandra) explained that she enjoyed reading, but she did not like picture books because “. . . I enjoy making the pictures in my mind so I can use my imagination.” An additional student within the high category mentioned that though she (Cathy) liked both fiction and nonfiction genres, she also enjoyed reading poetry and dramas.

Students across all proficiency levels also reported enjoyed nonfiction. Some favored topics students named were trains, sports, and animals. A female student (Cathy) also stated that

she enjoyed reading books about war, and claimed that World War II was her favorite historical era about which to read. Though many girls enjoy historical fiction, Cathy claimed, “I like reading the nonfiction books about history the best.” Table 4.24 lists the genres, topics, and titles that interested students (See Appendix F).

Access to Text

Part of the MRP-R survey was allocated to gauge students' attitudes toward libraries. According to the survey results, 88% of the students responded positively about spending time in libraries. To further determine students' experiences and attitudes about both school and classroom libraries, questions were asked and discussions were held regarding text access within the classroom as well as the school-wide library.

Students across all proficiency categories elaborated about the high-quality library that serves the school. Discussions with participants revealed that a friendly librarian manages the school-wide library, and they are scheduled to visit the library twice a week to return and check out new books. According to most students, a large assortment of books across genres abound in the school-wide library at Mountain Ridge Elementary. Reggie, a student classified as learning disabled, voiced, "I love to go to the library to pick out books. It's really cool in the library with books everywhere!" A student classified as high (Tina) exclaimed, "The library at school has *Harry Potter* and *Judy Moody* chapter books. I love series books. I've already pretty much checked out and read every *Judy Moody* book in the library." Tanner, a student with a learning disability discussed how his access to texts has been limited due to negative past experiences with libraries. Tanner exclaimed:

"Sometimes I don't check out books in the library because I'm afraid I might lose them.

Last year, I was at another school. I picked out a book, and I had it in my book bag. I was reading it, but I laid it down. I should not have put the book down; I should have put it right in my book bag. All of a sudden it was gone! I went back to my classroom to look

for it, and it was really gone. I had to pay nine dollars for it. Nine dollars is a lot of money, and I'm afraid that I will lose books again.”

The semi-structured interviews revealed that students consider the concept of libraries to be that of school-wide libraries. It was further determined that fourth-grade students at Mountain Ridge have limited access to texts within the classroom for the purpose of independent choice reading. Of the 11 students who were interviewed, eight revealed that their classrooms did not contain extensive classroom libraries. Responses across proficiency levels revealed that a shelf within the classroom contained a limited amount of books. Though books are scarce, students are given complete access to explore the assortment that exists. Fourth-grade students at Mountain Ridge have access to a wide variety of books through the school-wide library that they visit twice per week. Though they have access to a school-wide library, classroom libraries are nearly nonexistent. Table 4.25 highlights some of the comments about libraries (See Appendix F).

Time Allocated for Independent Choice Reading

Most fourth-grade students at Mountain Ridge reported positive attitudes in relation to time spent reading. Though 80% of the students surveyed indicated that spending time reading is a good thing, some of the students' reported negative attitudes. Twenty percent of the students selected the second most negative response on the MRP-R survey. Such students reported that they found reading to be a boring activity. To further explore students' experiences and attitudes about independent reading across proficiency categories, independent interviews were conducted.

Students at Mountain Ridge Elementary have daily time allocated to read instructionally within the whole group portion of the reading block, but no time is reserved for independent

choice reading. Additionally, though students have books they have checked out from the library, no time is reserved within the regular school day for them to engage with the texts. Nine of the 11 students reported that adequate time to read choice books was not provided during the school day. Nile, a student classified as low, described his challenges with time to read books he checks out from the library. He voiced:

“One time, I checked out a *Harry Potter* book. Everybody said they were really good, but it takes me longer to read thick books. I never did get time at school to read the book, and I knew it would take me a while to read it. Then, I had to return it to the library.

Somebody else wanted it, so I checked it back in and didn’t get it again.”

Discussions with students revealed that although independent choice reading is not a daily planned event, neither is it forbidden. Students claimed that when classroom work is completed, they are allowed to read library books. Tina, a student classified as high, stated, “We really have a lot of work that we have to. We are really busy, but if we have spare time, we can read. We would also read more if we had more spare time.”

Though fourth-grade students at Mountain Ridge spend little time reading choice books in school, all students that were interviewed across high-, average-, and low-performing students reported that they often spend time reading outside of school. Tina, a high- performing reader, discussed how she looked forward to summer reading. “I can’t wait until summer. I’m going to reread a lot of my favorite books again.” Abby, an average-performing reader, stated, “I read more at home because I have my own bookshelf. I read my library books at home, too.” A low-achieving student exclaimed, “I always read at home because we don’t have time to read our library books at school.”

Though 20% of the students reported on the MRP-R survey that reading was a boring activity, the interviews revealed that only one student displayed a negative attitude toward independent choice reading. Tanner, a student with learning disabilities, expressed his strong concerns about being a struggling reader. “I can’t read, so picking out books don’t matter. My teacher has some on the shelf that she lets me have, but I can’t read them. I don’t like to read at school, but I will read at home on my bed.” Table 4.26 highlights some of the responses to the semi-structured interview questions about independent reading in and out of school (See Appendix F).

How Students Like to Read

During the interview process, discussions unveiled students’ perspectives on the various modes of text reading. All of the students classified as high and average, and one student from each of the low and special education groups mentioned reading traditional books during the school day. Among the 11 students who participated in independent interviews, eight view the concept of reading through the lens of traditional texts. However, three students had opportunities to read books on iPads and computers at home. Two students within the low proficiency ranges and one student with disabilities reported that they like to read across varied modes. For instance, Jade explained, “At home, I like to read stories on my laptop. Then, I turn the stories into real books.” Reggie voiced, “At home, I like to read on my iPad.” Table 4.27 provides additional excerpts of students’ responses. At Mountain Ridge, most students discussed school-based reading experiences which did not include varied modes of reading (See Appendix F).

Self-Concept: Oral Reading

The MRP-R survey results of fourth-grade students at Mountain Ridge revealed that most students have a positive self-concept of reading. The survey questioned students about reading ability in relation to their peers. Survey analysis confirmed that 74% of the students feel as if they read about the same as their friends, 34% of the students at Mountain Ridge reported they read a little better than their peers, while 9% of the participating students reported that they read a lot better than their friends. To further explore students' self-concepts of reading, an additional survey question asked for students to rate themselves concerning ability. Regarding reading ability, 81% of the students at Mountain Ridge disclosed that reading was very easy or kind of easy.

Surprisingly, interview responses provided results that were in conflict with data generated from the MPR-R survey. Though 43% of the students felt they were better readers than their peers, 57% of the students surveyed expressed negative feelings about reading aloud in front of peers. All of the students classified as high reported positive feelings about oral reading, yet one student classified as average and one classified as low responded that they felt comfortable reading publically. Four students among those identified as low or learning disabled communicated negative feelings about oral reading. However, it cannot be assumed that all advanced readers have a positive self-concept about reading aloud, for one high-achieving student, Tina, admitted to feeling uncomfortable in public situations. She described, "Sometimes I get really nervous if we have long paragraphs. I prefer to not read out loud." Table 4.28 provides examples of student responses (See Appendix F).

Self-Concept: Decoding Strategies

To determine other dimensions of readers' self-concepts, the survey posed questions to determine what students do when they encounter unknown words in texts. One would assume that high and average readers would use an array of strategies flexibly. According to the MPR-R survey, 43% of the students admitted that they can only sometimes figure out unknown words, while 54% of the students recorded that they are never successful at figuring out unknown words. More importantly, 97% of the students reported that they do not possess the necessary skills and strategies to independently problem-solve unknown words.

To glean a more in-depth understanding of how students deal with decoding challenges, individual interview questions were presented to participants. Responses across all proficiency categories identified the top strategy used as the age-old method of "sounding it out." Interview conversations provided evidence that though most students rely on phonetic skills to decode challenging words, only one student identified as average reported to visually segment words using common consonant and vowel patterns. Most students reported to simply decode in a left to right format without any use or knowledge of meaningful affixes, common consonant, or vowel patterns. It was found during interviews that other than "sounding out words," students typically skip the problematic word or plea for someone to provide them with the word. Discussions led me to discover that most students, regardless of reading proficiency, have limited flexible use of decoding strategies to assist them in decoding unknown words. Table 4.29 provides an array of examples of students' responses (See Appendix F).

Value of Reading

The MRP-R data presented findings to indicate that only 86% of the students at Mountain Ridge think becoming a good reader is important. Due to the fact that this rate fell below the researcher's assumptions, more specific information across proficiency categories regarding students' value of reading were generated. Responses to the independent interview questions revealed that students expressed a much higher value of reading than the survey results presented.

Each of the 11 students interviewed communicated very positive, yet varied, reasons for why they value reading. The top reason students across proficiency groups at Mountain Ridge gave for valuing reading was for future success in the workforce. Jade, a low-performing reader claimed, "You have to know how to read to get a job." The second most popular reason for valuing reading across proficiency groups was to learn new words for the purpose of having fun, and for enhancing the writing process. A response from an advanced reader (Cathy) regarding the value of reading was to learn new information and assist with formal presentations. Several average readers along with one student with disabilities commented on the daily life skills associated with being literate. Jacob voiced, "If you don't know how to read, you cannot do checks for money or know the ingredients on food and things." Table 4.30 illustrates example responses for reasons for why students value reading (See Appendix F).

Traits of Students Who Read Often

According to the MRP-R responses provided by fourth-grade participants at Mountain Ridge Elementary, 49% of the students reported that students who read a lot are very interesting,

and 40% indicated that those who read a lot are sort of interesting. To further investigate students' perceptions of students who read often, specific interview questions were created. Among all proficiency groups, students associated peers who read often as those who display specific traits associated with proficient reading. Themes and patterns that emerged for traits of proficient readers included volume of reading, interests and genres, ability, and speed of reading.

Students were able to describe the interests and genre of books commonly selected by peers who are voracious readers. Students across proficiency categories described such peers as those who enjoy an array of genres. Students who read often were reported to engage with fictional, adventurous texts along with nonfiction topics of all types including sports and celebrities. One student classified as low reported, "One girl in my room loves *Black Beauty*, the *I Survived* series."

In relation to reading volume, Jacob, an average reader, described peers who read often. "Some kids carry books everywhere they go, and they are always reading. One girl even sneaks and reads during math. She gets into trouble sometimes for sneaky reading." Some students across proficiency categories described traits of students who read often as those who are good readers and read with sufficient speed. Consequently, only one student with a learning disability mentioned a specific trait associated with students who read often. Tanner voiced, "I think some people in my class really like books and they don't ever want to stop reading." Table 4.31 depicts examples of student responses surrounding traits of students who read often (See Appendix F).

Social Aspects

According to survey responses, 100% of the students at Mountain Ridge reported that they enjoy exchanging ideas about books read. Independent interview questions further illuminated survey results and confirmed that most students do enjoy engaging in conversations about books they read, and the majority of social interactions surrounding books are student-initiated. Only one student claimed that his teacher prompted discussions about books. Alan, a high-performing reader, responded that the teacher routinely incorporated social activities within the whole group portion of the literacy block before and after reading exercises. He stated, “We talk about the books we read before and after chapters.”

Six students across all proficiency groups confirmed that students created their own venues in which to engage in discussions surrounding books. Many students reported talking about books in the cafeteria, in the restrooms, in the school-wide library, and in the outdoors for recess. One student indicated that he enjoyed talking about books to his peers, but only if he found the book to be interesting. An average-performing reader (Jacob) referred to a book his class was reading during whole group instruction. He expressed, “I like to talk about books, but only if I am interested in the book. Right now, we are reading *The Cricket in Times Square*, and I really like it! I like to talk to my friends about sports books, too.” Some students reported witnessing other students collaborate about books they have read. A student identified as low (Jade) affirmed, “I like talking about books, and I see my friends talk about books all the time.” Table 4.32 provides student response examples regarding teacher-planned and student-created social events surrounding books (See Appendix F).

Instructional Practices

Many fourth-grade students at Mountain Ridge reported negative attitudes regarding teacher read-alouds on the MRP-R survey. While the survey indicated only 86% of participating students enjoy read-alouds, a startling 14% of participating students reported that they experience boredom when their teacher reads books aloud. Individual interview questions were generated to probe students' attitudes and perceptions regarding teacher read-alouds as well as other instructional practices surrounding literacy instruction. Surprisingly, interview responses revealed opposite findings from the survey results. Among the 11 students interviewed, nine confirmed that they, in fact, enjoy listening to their teacher read aloud books for pleasure. Nile, a low reader, described, "Our teacher reads to us for fun. She really acts out the story good."

Additional questions were also asked to determine how students view the overall literacy instruction. When students were asked to describe how reading instruction was provided at Mountain Ridge, students' responses were indicative of a balanced literacy framework where literacy instruction is divided into daily whole group, small group, and independent reading components.

The majority of students discussed novel units where all students regardless of reading ability were given individual copies of texts to read. Students beamed while naming and elaborating on the many titles of novel sets that were used for whole group, small group, and independent reading. Rather than using a textbook or basal reading program, reading instruction is provided through engaging novels that often integrate science and social studies topics. Students across proficiency groups were able to elaborate on deep emotional experiences as a

result of particular texts. Nile, a lower-performing student explicitly described his heartfelt experience with the book, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. He expressed:

“Well, Sadako was a very heart-touching story. Well, you need to know that the character died because of a bomb. She flew out of her window when the bomb hit, and she had a terrible disease, and was not very well. Then, there was a saying that if you made a lot of paper cranes that she would get better. Well, she only made like seventy, and then she died the next day.”

Table 4.33 provides details about how students at Mountain Ridge view instructional literacy practices (See Appendix F).

Environmental Influences

Interview responses during the independent interviews provided clear evidence that specific environmental factors influence all students’ reading attitudes and motivation. Students reported three diverse environmental conditions that promote a positive atmosphere for independent reading: comfort, quiet, and the outdoors.

Most students desire reading in comfortable environments free from loud noise and distractions. In particular, two students with learning disabilities reported that they desire an atmosphere free from noise. Reggie described, “I like to read in the school library because it is quiet, and you can think and concentrate.” Additionally, Tanner voiced, “I like to read in my bedroom because it is quiet in there.” Students considered low-performing provided varied descriptions of the types of environments they prefer for independent reading. One student claimed to prefer comfortable seating, one favored quiet environments, and two students revealed that outdoor environments were best for reading. Additional responses concerning

environmental influences that impact students' reading attitudes are listed in Table 4.33, Appendix F.

Current Motivational Contexts

Students were asked to describe things their school does that currently motivate them to read. Students across each of the proficiency categories described a wide variety of contexts within their school that they currently find motivating. The following school experiences that students currently find motivating consist of: environmental influences; social experiences; abundant book choice; time to read books; novel studies; extrinsic rewards; projects; and book fairs. Table 4.35 highlights the wide range of motivational contexts and excerpts of students' responses regarding areas that their school currently does to support positive reading attitudes (See Appendix F).

Suggestions to Increase Motivation

The fourth-grade students at Mountain Ridge were asked to provide suggestions to increase reading motivation. The top suggestion from high, average, and low students was to simply increase the amount of books. A student classified as high explained how she would like more challenging books because she had read most of the books in the school library, and many of the books she enjoyed reading were at higher levels not supported in the elementary library. Some other students desired more humorous and interesting books and more biographies about current celebrities. Consequently, students voiced that school funds were limited, and in order for more books to be purchased, the students would more than likely have to assist in raising funds at the school level.

Three additional high readers suggested teachers allocate more time to reading books. Tina pleaded, “We have a lot of work to do, but if they give us spare time, we would read.” Some suggestions provided by average-performing readers were to eliminate reading passages required for homework, decrease the amount of chapter books that are read aloud, and increase the amount of picture books read aloud by teachers. Another suggestion to increase reading motivation was to dramatize stories as a culminating activity after novel studies. A low-performing student stated that motivation could be improved by allowing students to engage in more project-based activities after reading novels. A student classified as a high reader made the suggestion to eliminate the noise level in the library so students can concentrate better, while another student claimed that the ability to read on electronic devices would significantly increase the reading motivation of fourth-grade students. Table 4.36 highlights the wide range of motivational contexts and excerpts of students’ responses regarding areas that their school currently does to support positive reading attitudes (See Appendix F).

Overall, students who do not participate in AR describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading in the following categories: 1) Reading Enjoyment; 2) What Students Like to Read; 3) How Students Like to Read; 4) Access to Text; 5) Self-concept as Readers; 6) Value of Reading; 7) Traits of Students Who Read Often; 8) Social Aspects; 9) Instructional Practices; 10) Environmental Influences 11) Current Motivational Contexts; and 12) Suggestions to Increase Reading Motivation. These themes emerged from the student responses from the students who participated in the independent interviews at Mountain Ridge Elementary.

Summary of Research Question Three Findings

High-, average-, and low-achieving fourth-grade students, including those with disabilities who have never been exposed to AR or any other program to monitor independent choice reading, described their attitudes and motivation toward reading, through the previously enumerated themes, which provided an overall picture of attitudes toward reading and motivation to read. Students across all proficiency levels, with the exception of one low-performing student, reported to enjoy reading.

Fourth-grade students described enjoying reading fiction, nonfiction, and some series fictional books. While no other students in this study mentioned other genres other than these, one high-performing student at Mountain Ridge described enjoying poetry and drama. Students across low-, average-, and high-proficiency levels described time allocated to independent choice reading as being equally divided between time spent reading in school and time spent reading out of school. When asked to discuss their interaction with books with regard to libraries, students across all proficiency levels at Mountain Ridge described limited classroom libraries. They described the abundance of books to be found in their school-wide library, and two average-achieving students expressed satisfaction with the assistance they receive in making selections from the school-wide library.

Fourth-grade students at Mountain Ridge across all proficiency levels described positive attitudes toward reading traditional books. However, one student from the high-achieving proficiency category, one student from the low-achieving proficiency category, and one student classified as having a learning disability mentioned accessing texts electronically at home. Students' attitudes surrounding reading text aloud in front of others were divided, with the

positive responses concentrated within the high-, average-, and low-proficiency categories and negative responses within the average-, low-, and SPED-proficiency categories.

Students across all proficiency levels described insufficient decoding abilities and inadequate use of decoding strategies. Students across all proficiency categories reported “sounding it out” when describing a strategy for dealing with unfamiliar words. Only one high-achieving student claimed to use context clues. High-, average-, and low-achieving students described skipping unfamiliar words or asking someone else to supply the correct pronunciation of the unknown word. Some of the reasons students at Mountain Ridge provided for valuing reading include daily life skills, new information and words, future success in the workforce, and testing. Average and SPED students mentioned daily life skills, while high-, average-, and low-achieving students mentioned new information and words as well as future success in the workforce. One student classified as learning disabled described valuing reading in the context of testing success.

While most students described positive attitudes about collaborating with peers about their literary experiences, only one high-achieving student described teacher-led opportunities for this type of collaboration. Students across all proficiency categories collaborated with peers in venues they created themselves. Students described positive attitudes toward the social aspects of reading. The majority of students at Mountain Ridge created their own opportunities for social collaborations during their bi-weekly library visits and during unstructured times within the school day.

Students who have never been exposed to AR or any other program used to monitor independent choice reading described instructional practices within a variety of contexts that included teacher read-alouds, novel studies, whole-group, small-group, and independent reading.

Students across all proficiency categories described positive attitudes regarding teacher read-alouds as part of literacy instructional practices. Neither high-performing, nor special education students, identified writing or teacher read-alouds as instructional components of the literacy block. Several students classified as high- and average-achieving as well as one student classified as learning disabled described the novel studies as the most appealing component of literacy instruction. One high-achieving student mentioned the sparse use of the textbook in relation to nonfiction reading instruction.

Students across all proficiency groups who have never been exposed to AR described environmental factors that influenced their attitudes and motivation to read. Students within all except the SPED-proficiency category described comfort as an environmental factor that influenced their reading attitudes and motivation toward reading. Additionally, all students, except those classified as average-achieving students, described quiet as being an important environmental factor. Their descriptions indicated a profound need for quiet atmospheres during the time allocated to independent choice reading. One high-performing and two low-performing students described the outdoors as being the venue of choice for reading.

Fourth-grade students at Mountain Ridge described positive attitudes about various current motivational contexts. These included environment, social, choice, books/book fairs, novel studies, more time to read, projects, and rewards. Environment was important to one student classified as Special Education. One low-performing student wanted more social venues for reading. A high- and a low-achieving student both stated that books and book fairs were motivational. Two high-achieving students described the novel studies as being motivational while one average- and one low-performing student each wanted more time to read. One low-achieving student mentioned that the opportunity to work on projects related to books was

motivational. One average-performing student remembered having a party for reading a specific number of books and thought that was motivational.

Students had various suggestions to improve their reading motivation at school. These suggestions included more books, time, book recommendations, teacher read-alouds, eliminate homework, projects, dramatization of stories, technology integration, and a quiet reading environment. High-, average-, and low-achieving students suggested that having more books available for selection would increase motivation to read. Three high-performing students desired more time to be allocated to independent choice reading. One average-performing student made a plea for book recommendations, while another in the same proficiency category requested more teacher read-alouds and another still requested that the “fake reading” routine of reading passages for homework be eliminated. One low-achieving student mentioned projects related to texts read as a suggestion to increase motivation. One high-achieving student asserted that the opportunity to learn about topics across content areas would be motivating, while another indicated that dramatizing texts after reading would be motivational. Another high-achieving student suggested technology as a motivational tool and another suggested keeping the library and the classroom quieter to facilitate concentration.

Overall, students who have never been exposed to AR described positive attitudes toward reading. However, they did voice specific requests that would further promote reading motivation.

Phase II Summary

After analyzing the typed scripts of each individual interview from Fairfax Elementary and Mountain Ridge Elementary, several common themes emerged from students' responses. The qualitative analysis revealed that overall, students who do and do not participate in AR have positive attitudes about reading. In relation to students' attitudes and motivation across proficiency levels, the analysis revealed that all AR students reported to enjoy reading with the exception one student classified as low and one student with a learning disability. Similarly, non-AR students across proficiency categories also reported positive reading attitudes, with the exception of one student classified as having a learning disability.

Fourth-grade students who participate in AR enjoy reading fiction and nonfiction texts, and consider their extensive classroom libraries rather than the school-wide library as their primary venue for selecting independent choice reading materials. In contrast, non-AR readers read fiction and nonfiction texts, but also enjoy reading drama and poetry. Unlike AR students, students from the non-AR school are not provided easy access to abundant choice reading materials within the classroom setting. The school-wide library serves as these students' venue of choice for the independent selection of reading material. It was found that AR students classified as high and average read outside of school for pleasure. AR students who are considered low and those with disabilities reported not reading for pleasure outside of school. However, students at Mountain Ridge described reading for pleasure both in and out of school across all proficiency categories.

At Fairfax, students spoke positively regarding opportunities to read both electronic and traditional texts. It was concluded that overall, students preferred traditional texts. For non-AR

students, the opportunities to engage with texts electronically were limited due to availability. The two students who had access to electronic devices at home had positive attitudes about their use. Both AR and non-AR students described positive attitudes toward reading. The primary difference in the reported reasons for valuing reading were that non-AR students responded affirmatively to reading being an important a daily life skill. Both AR and non-AR students reported to value reading for the purpose of learning new information and words, as well as future educational and workforce success.

In relation to self-concept as a reader, AR students across proficiency levels reported negative feelings regarding reading aloud in front of others. In stark contrast, comments about reading aloud in front of others from non-AR students were equally divided between positive and negative comments. The positive comments correlated with high-, average-, and low-performing categories, while the negative comments were associated with average-, low-, and SPED-proficiency categories. Both AR and non-AR students reported insufficient decoding abilities and inadequate strategies that led inevitably to negative attitudes in relation to self-concept as a problem-solver within text.

At both the AR and non-AR schools, student-created opportunities to exchange ideas and to collaborate surrounding books read far outnumber those initiated by teachers. There were only three comments that referenced teacher-led social aspects of reading, while there were 16 comments that referenced student-initiated collaborations.

It is concluded that AR students view reading almost exclusively as a function of the AR program. Rather than reading for pleasure, they view independent choice reading through the lens of feedback: goal setting, quizzes, points, prizes, and rewards. In contrast to this narrow perspective, non-AR students have a broader vision of reading within instructional experiences.

Non-AR students have a more expansive view of reading within the instructional context. They view reading as one instructional component within the literacy block.

Suggestions to increase motivation to read were varied across reading proficiencies at both the AR and non-AR school. High-achievers at the AR school requested books clubs as well as more books and more time allocated to independent choice reading. One SPED student at the AR school desired “shorter books.” One average-achieving student declared that being able to read to the “autistic kids” would be motivational. Similarly, a student classified as learning disabled requested an opportunity to read to younger students as a primary motivation to read. At the non-AR school, high-, average-, and low-performing students suggested greater book selection and high-achieving students simply want more time to read books. These students also expressed the desire to have access to texts through electronic devices. Both AR and non-AR students expressed a desire to engage with texts across content areas and through the completion of more in-depth projects that incorporate technology. The more varied responses from the non-AR students regarding suggestions to increase motivation included more collaborative opportunities, more teacher read-alouds, and conducting surveys among the readers as to favorite texts from the novel studies. One student at the non-AR school suggested dramatizations of texts completed during novel studies as a culminating activity. She also expressed an interest in reading poetry.

Negative attitudes were reported by AR students regarding certain practices surrounding the AR program. Among these practices was the perceived punishment of losing unstructured time for socialization during recess and lunch time as a result of not achieving teacher AR goals. The lack of appropriately quiet and comfortable environments was also noted. Negative attitudes

were reported by students at the non-AR school surrounding these same environmental conditions.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have described the quantitative analysis of the MRP-R survey as well as the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured independent interviews of students at varying proficiency levels at two schools who do and do not use the AR program. In order to provide an accurate description of students' attitudes and motivation to read, I asked the following questions:

1. Are there differences in attitudes toward reading between fourth-grade students who use the AR program and those who do not?
2. How do high-, average-, and low- achieving students including those with disabilities who use the AR program describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading?
3. How do high, average, and low- achieving students including those with disabilities who do not use the AR program describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading?

By analyzing the MRP-R survey results using SPSS and analyzing the students' responses from the independent interviews, I have given examples of how students across varied proficiency levels who do and do not use AR describe their attitudes and motivation toward reading. In the next chapter, I will provide conclusions drawn from this research study and provide recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to determine the reading attitudes of fourth-grade students across diverse reading abilities who do and do not participate in AR. This study took place in two schools within two separate school districts in an eastern region in Tennessee.

To examine the reading attitudes across the two schools, the MRP-R survey was administered to 52 fourth-grade students at Fairfax Elementary who had been exposed to AR since kindergarten, and 35 fourth-grade students from Mountain Ridge Elementary who had never been exposed to AR. There was a total of 87 students who participated in the survey. To provide voice to the survey results and to further explore motivation toward reading, 23 students across reading proficiency classifications, 12 students from Fairfax Elementary and 11 students from Mountain Ridge Elementary, were selected and individually interviewed. Responses during the semi-structured individual interviews further explicated the survey findings and illuminated additional findings surrounding students' current attitudes and motivational contexts that support reading. As intended with explanatory sequential mixed methods studies, survey results and semi-structured interview responses were combined: conclusions were corroborated to reach conclusions regarding reading attitudes of fourth-grade students across diverse reading abilities who do and do not participate in AR.

This chapter is a discussion of the conclusions, how such conclusions relate to research across the field, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Conclusions

Most Students Enjoy Reading

Overall, it can be concluded that the majority of the fourth-grade students at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge have positive attitudes and are motivated to read. In relation to the cumulative MRP-R scores across proficiency categories, minimal differences remain between the AR and non-AR schools. The mean score from the cumulative motivation to read survey for Fairfax was 59.13, and 57.69 at Mountain Ridge. Survey results indicated that 94% percent of the students at Fairfax find reading books to be an enjoyable activity, and 97% of students at Mountain Ridge reported to also enjoy reading books. Individual interview responses confirmed that most students at the AR and non-AR schools are motivated to read. The outcome of this study supported Guthrie's (2013) conclusion that when readers are motivated, the result will be engagement and more positive attitudes toward reading.

In reference to the varied proficiency categories, the high-performing students (n=24) at Fairfax scored an average of 61, and the high students (n=11) at Mountain Ridge scored 59.45. The highest individual combined scores for the survey were achieved by the high-proficiency group from Fairfax, and the high-proficiency groups from both schools had the highest combined average survey scores. The data also revealed that as proficiency levels decreased, combined average scores on the motivation survey also declined. Though high students at Fairfax had slightly higher mean scores than students at Mountain Ridge, there remained no significant difference between the two groups. Interview responses and discussions revealed that all high-performing students in the AR and non-AR school are motivated to read.

Students identified as average (n=20) at Fairfax generated an overall mean score of 57.7 on the MRP-R survey, while average students (n=11) at Mountain Ridge accumulated a mean score of 58.18. During the interview discussions, all students within the average-performing groups confirmed having positive attitudes toward reading.

When comparing students identified as low-performing at the AR and non-AR schools, low students (n=3) at Fairfax scored an average of 57.78 on the motivation survey, while the average score for the low-performing group (n=9) at Mountain Ridge was 57.2. In relation to the quantitative results, there existed no significant difference among the two schools. The survey included 3 SPED students from Fairfax and 2 SPED students from Mountain Ridge. The average score for SPED at Fairfax was 56.67 and 51.25 at Mountain Ridge. All participants classified as low-performers expressed positive attitudes toward reading. Among students with disabilities, Fairfax students scored higher on the overall scores generated from the motivation survey when comparing schools.

One SPED student from each school verified during the independent interviews that they dislike various aspects of reading. At Fairfax, one female student in this group expressed that reading in and of itself was a satisfactory experience, but having to read books up to three times just to pass an AR test was not motivating. A male SPED student at Mountain Ridge discussed how he enjoyed the novel studies, and loved listening to the authentic literature read in class, but he felt overwhelmed with his inability to read the words. Due to insufficient decoding skills, this struggling student felt overwhelmed and had negative attitudes toward reading.

Students Describe the Types of Books They Enjoy Reading

The independent interviews provided students with opportunities to share details regarding the types of texts and books they found enjoyable. Students across proficiency categories at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge enjoyed reading a variety of types of books. The genre of choice at Fairfax was fiction, while the students at Mountain Ridge reported to enjoy fiction and nonfiction genres as well. Many students at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge reported that they enjoy reading fantasy, adventure, mystery, and series books. Several high-achievers from both schools reported reading titles such as *Harry Potter*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and *Percy Jackson*. Some average- and low-performing students at Fairfax reported reading graphic novels, and some fictional series books. Some books named among average- and low-performing readers at Fairfax were *The Jedi Academy*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *Zodiac Legacy*, and *The Weird School* series. Several high readers at both schools revealed that they enjoy reading nonfiction titles surrounding math, science, and historical topics.

Surprisingly, one high student at Mountain Ridge mentioned that she liked to read poetry and drama. Students served in special education at Fairfax reported to like reading mysteries and thrilling books, while several others described enjoying nonfiction books about animals. Students at Mountain Ridge responded that they often read books with similar characters and events as those used by their teachers for novel studies. Students classified as within the low proficiency group, along with those with learning disabilities, reported to enjoy reading books with details that provided vivid mental images, and nonfiction books about trains, planes, dirt bikes, four wheelers, animals, and historical war eras. Though students at Mountain Ridge claimed to read nonfiction books because they were genuinely interested in specific topics, interviews provided

evidence that students at Fairfax may read nonfiction simply in exchange for rewards. A student at Fairfax explained that prizes can be earned in exchange for reading nonfiction books and scoring high on AR quizzes. Kamie expressed, “I normally pick nonfiction books because when you make an 80 or better on AR quizzes, my teacher gives us candy.”

Students Describe How They Like to Read

The independent interviews afforded students opportunities to discuss the modes in which they like to read. Students at Fairfax have more experiences with new literacies than students at Mountain Ridge. At Fairfax, many fourth-grade students have individual iPads purchased with PTA and school funds that are used to access online libraries purchased by the district. Students not only have frequent experiences reading books traditionally, but they also have opportunities to read fiction and nonfiction books from online library sites that are purchased by the district such as Big Universe and myON® and Epic!, a free resource for public schools. Responses were mixed concerning how fourth-grade students at Fairfax prefer to read. While some students across all performing groups claimed to like reading with new technological devices as well as reading online, more students revealed that they preferred traditional books. Some response examples were, “I prefer to read real books because iPads die when you get to the juicy parts. Books don’t die.” Another student enamored by being able to witness vast amounts of books that are provided, stated, “You have books all around you. There’s more than a thousand.” One particular student spoke for several others at Fairfax when explaining how they enjoyed reading from multiple sources. “It’s fun to read on the iPad because you just swipe the screen to turn the page, but I like reading real books a lot, too.”

Students at Mountain Ridge have access to computers that could be used to access free online reading sites, but none of the students responded that they had experience with such alternative reading modes and platforms. Interview discussions revealed that most students at Mountain Ridge view reading through the lens of traditional texts. However, several students expressed that they experience reading on iPads and computers at home. Two students within the low proficiency ranges and one student with disabilities reported to enjoy reading books on technological devices at home. It can be concluded that to increase motivation to read for students across proficiency groups, Mountain Ridge should enlist in new literacies to provide students with alternative ways to experience reading.

Students Value Reading

There was a statistically significant difference in the results between the AR school and the school without AR among the value questions from the motivation survey. Overall, students who participate in AR generated higher scores on the survey subcategory of Value of Reading. At a 95% confidence level, there was a statistically significant difference between the results at the AR school and the school without AR among the value of reading questions from the MRP-R survey (0.033). According to the survey, students who participate in AR value reading more than those who do not. According to Eccles and Wigfield (2002), a dedicated reader persists and pushes forward because he or she believes that the activity is important and worthwhile. In contrast, students will not be motivated if they find little or no value in the activity (Nilsen, 2009).

Across all proficiency categories, students at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge provided an array of reasons for valuing reading. Students at both schools claim to value reading, for it

provides a venue in which to gain knowledge of the world, for survival in daily life, and for current and future academic success. Fairfax students value reading for the fact that “it makes you smarter, and the more reading you do, the more you know.” Some students claimed to value reading, for it allows them to learn facts about famous people. Several students at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge verified that “reading is an important thing you will need to do throughout your lifetime.” Students at Fairfax claim their principal has influenced them to value reading. Ron stated, “Reading is pretty important here because our principal loves reading. She has lots of favorite books that she tells us about. She talks to us about what we are reading and recommends good books.” At Fairfax, five students admitted that adults such as parents and teachers had significant influences on their value of reading. Of the 12 students interviewed at Fairfax, only one student discussed valuing reading for the sake of pleasure. The top reasons students across proficiency groups at Mountain Ridge provided for valuing reading was for future success in the workforce, to learn new information and words to assist in writing, formal presentations, and to function in daily life. Among the 11 students interviewed at Mountain Ridge, only one student referred to the value of reading for the purpose of testing, and none of the students valued reading for the pure sake of pleasure.

Students Who Spend More Time in Text Have Higher Achievement

The fourth-grade students at Fairfax spend much more time engaged in independent reading, and have higher achievement than students at Mountain Ridge. Previous researchers (Peak and Dewalt 1994) reported that students who participated in AR for five consecutive years had achievement gains twice as high as compared to students who did not. They also found that students who participated in AR spent significantly more time reading than students who did not

participate in AR. Furthermore, there is no scientific evidence to verify that time spent with AR improves academic achievement, yet time in text has been proven to boost achievement time and time again (Kohn, 1999). The large amount of time during the literacy block that Fairfax allocates daily for students to read self-selected books, allows students to accumulate sizable quantities of time in text, which translates to higher achievement. Research suggests that motivated readers tend to read often and attain higher levels of achievement on reading (Irvin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007).

Though Mountain Ridge has been recognized for academic excellence, this school does not allocate time within the daily schedule for independent self-selected reading. Surprisingly, it has been noted that 10 minutes of daily voluntary reading is an above average amount of voluntary reading time provided to students in schools throughout the United States (Foster and Foster, 2016). Though Allington (2012) posited that there is no evidence to date that prescribes precisely the amount of reading that students need to perform at high levels of reading proficiencies, Krashen (2003) purported that students who were provided more reading time in school performed as well or better than students who were not allocated additional recreational reading time. During the whole group part of literacy block at Mountain Ridge, independent reading is incorporated using an authentic text that is used for the purpose of whole group instruction. It is suggested that Mountain Ridge incorporate independent self-selected reading during the daily literacy block to further increase academic achievement.

Among the study participants from these two blue-ribbon schools, achievement status can be linked to increased time in text. Forty-six percent of the study participants from Fairfax were in the high-proficiency category, 38% were average, 9.7% were low, and 5.7% were SPED. At

Mountain Ridge, 32% were high and average, 26% were low, and 9% were SPED. These findings are in complete alignment with previous research in the field.

When responding to the survey question “I think reading is . . .,” the majority of Mountain Ridge and Fairfax students responded with the two most positive responses. Survey responses indicated that 77% of Mountain Ridge students read outside of school, while 69% of students at Fairfax reported that they read outside of school. Delving more deeply into this discrepancy, the semi-structured interview questions provided illumination into the true feelings of the participants regarding reading outside of school. At Fairfax only one high, one average, and one student classified as low responded that they routinely read at home.

In contrast, a significantly higher proportion of students at Mountain Ridge reported they spend time reading outside of school. Specifically, two high-, three average-, and two low-performing students reported reading outside of school. A truly unique situation involved a SPED student at Mountain Ridge and a peer mentor from the high-proficiency group. The SPED student gains additional time in text through this mutually beneficial partnership with a higher-achieving student who reads to him, which provides additional time in text for both. Although more Mountain Ridge students reported to read text outside of school more than students at Fairfax, the total amount of time in text at Fairfax is still significantly greater due to the increased emphasis placed on time allocated for independent self-selected reading during the school day. Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) claim higher-achieving students on average read three times as much in school as their lower-achieving peers (p.7). Stanovich (1986) reported that such disparity in children’s reading growth and development results in the “Matthew Effect,” a term originating from the biblical perspective where advantages lead to more advantages, and disadvantages lead to further, cumulative disadvantages.

Students Need Rich Literary Social Experiences

Researcher Gambrell (1996) suggests teachers should enlist time for students to socially interact with others about books to promote motivational contexts for reading. Students at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge are exposed to literacy instruction in varied ways, yet students at both schools are motivated to learn about the world around them, and desire social experiences in which to share ideas surrounding books. According to the MRP-R survey, 77% of AR students reported positive feelings about talking to a group of peers about books. In contrast, 77% of the students at Mountain Ridge are ambivalent toward sharing literary experiences in a group setting. Just as students at Mountain Ridge reported negative survey responses to inquiries regarding social aspects of literary discussions, 77% of the students also admitted that they do not converse about books they read with their friends. Furthermore, AR students had much more positive responses in relation to collaborations surrounding books.

The responses given during the interview belied the survey data regarding social aspects of book sharing. While the data reflected negative perspectives at Mountain Ridge, interview responses reflected a more positive light regarding social exchanges surrounding books. Though the survey data implied that some Fairfax students felt positive about social aspects of book sharing, interview discussions supported the findings that nearly all AR students reported positive feelings about sharing books with peers. While teacher-led social interactions surrounding peer collaboration are minimal, it was found during the semi-structured interview sessions that most rich social exchanges are student-initiated.

Students Describe Experiences with Oral Reading and Decoding

Survey data and individual interview responses indicated that students across proficiency groups at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge are not confident in decoding unknown words in text, and do not feel confident reading out loud in front of peers. Though many of the students at both schools reported their reading skills to be similar to those of their friends, survey responses indicated that most students at Fairfax dislike reading aloud in front of peers, and half of the students at Mountain Ridge reported to dislike oral reading. Further probing during independent interview discussions revealed students' negative feelings about oral reading in front of peers was grounded in the fact that many fear 'messing up.' One high student from Fairfax as well as one student with disabilities at Mountain Ridge admitted that oral reading made them feel nervous and fearful. Many students from both schools and across all proficiency groups do not display positive self-concepts in the areas of decoding and oral reading.

Survey data and individual interview responses indicated that students across proficiency groups at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge do not use a wide range of flexible decoding strategies. In response to survey question "When I come to a word I don't know...", at least 96% of the students at both schools responded they almost never or never figure it out. During interviews, students at both schools revealed the strategy of choice for decoding unknown words was "sound it out." Of the 23 students who were interviewed at both schools, only three reported using decoding strategies flexibly. Based on students' comments from both schools, most students decode in a left to right format without any use of meaningful affixes or common consonant/vowel patterns. It was found that other than "sounding out words," students typically skip the problematic word or plea for someone to provide them with the word.

According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory, beliefs about one's ability can impact motivation. Self-efficacy theory has been found to relate specifically to reading motivation, for according to Wigfield and Guthrie (1997), Bandura's self-efficacy theory has been found to positively correlate with the amount of time students spend reading for both academic and recreational purposes. Additionally, Malloy and Codling (1977) posited that to foster students' skill development in reading, educators must ensure that students develop the necessary reading skills to develop competence.

Students Find Some Current Instructional Practices to Be Motivating

The MRP-R survey provided a means by which to gauge fourth-grade students' reading motivation through the contexts of self-efficacy and value of reading. To further explore information surrounding current classroom contexts that students found currently motivating, interview questions were developed. At Fairfax, many students displayed positive attitudes toward reading and students overall, were found to be motivated readers. For many students at Fairfax, extrinsic rewards were found to be major sources of motivation. It was revealed that to motivate students to read more nonfiction AR books, some teachers provide small amounts of candy in exchange for high scores on quizzes. It was also reported to be motivational for students to earn AR points as a result of listening to teachers read books aloud.

For two students classified as high readers, competition was a prime motivator for wide reading. One high student said, "I am just glad that I have the most points this year." Moreover, the same student that was motivated by the competitive nature of AR was also intrinsically motivated to read non-AR books for pleasure. Darin said, "I can't wait until summer so I can just relax, and take my time reading books that are not AR." Not only did this show that the student

was intrinsically motivated to read, but it was also provided evidence that the competitive nature of AR that he described as being a source of motivation seemed to be exhausting and tiresome. While several students found trophies at the end of the year as well as public recognition for meeting quarterly AR goals to be motivating, some students at Fairfax found motivation in the wide range of books spanning topics and genres. Rita said, “We have tons of books in my class, and I really like having lots of books.” Some of the students were thrilled about the opportunity to transfer knowledge learned from books read to the writing process as they used varied forms such as electronic devices as well as paper and staplers to create student-authored books.

For some fourth-grade readers at Fairfax, the imaginative experiences of fictional books alone were intrinsically motivating. As one student expressed, “There’s just some things you can’t do like get a dog or pet, but you can in a book. It just makes me feel good when I read books.” This finding is in direct correlation with the research conducted by Miller, (2013) that found that providing easy access to books, time to read, reading engagement, and student choice are components of an independent reading program that will increase students’ motivation and reading achievement.

The majority of students across proficiency categories commented that taking AR tests was fun because of the awards given at the end of the year. Students enjoyed working to meet quarterly AR goals, for they found receiving trophies and medals to be motivating. Some additional struggling students found having access to electronic devices was fun because of the interactive capabilities. Two students classified as learning-disabled reported not to enjoy taking AR tests. However, one of them stated, “I like reading books on my iPad to make the characters look cool!”

Though extrinsic factors definitely play a role in promoting positive attitudes and motivation toward reading at Fairfax, it was found that some students are also intrinsically motivated, for some students reported to have developed a habit of independent reading that extended to the summer months. Intrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is initiated by internal needs. Several students across proficiency levels at Mountain Ridge reported that fictional novel studies were interesting and engaging to them. This enthusiasm for novel studies suggested a degree of intrinsic motivation among these students. A student served in special education said, “I could not read the book, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, but I enjoyed listening to it, and it made me want to read more.” Spaulding (1992) purports that students learn more in classrooms and schools that promote intrinsic motivation, because they become deeply engaged in an activity for the purpose of enjoying the activity itself.

Many students discussed how they enjoyed teacher read-alouds because the teacher made the stories “come alive” with her impressive oral reading skills. Students expressed having positive experiences reading with peers in groups. Students across all proficiency levels at Mountain Ridge reported positive attitudes about certain instructional components within the literacy framework.

Students Provide Feedback Regarding What Motivates Them to Read

Research across the literacy field (e.g., Gambrell, Codling, & Palmer 1996) shows the value in seeking feedback from students regarding what does or does not motivate them to read. AR and non-AR students provided suggestions for increasing motivation for reading. High-performing students expressed the desire for implementing book clubs as a way to incorporate more social interaction surrounding books. Additionally, a high student at Mountain Ridge

suggested that by incorporating more integrated projects based on books read from online sources, more students would be motivated to read. At Mountain Ridge, high students also requested more time to socialize surrounding books and desire to have access to electronic devices as an alternative way to read books. Average students at Fairfax simply want more series books such as the *Who Would Win* series, and additional books related to sports topics along with more time allocated to independent reading. Another student identified as average-performing concluded that she would enjoy increasing social interactions surrounding texts read. She voiced, “It would just be nice to read with younger grades, read books in groups, and read to kids with autism.”

Students considered high-, average-, and low- achieving at Mountain Ridge also requested access to more interesting texts. Additionally, a student classified as average within the non-AR school expressed that the opportunity to read books and hold annual book award contests for readers’ favorite books read would increase reading motivation. Students across the average group also provided feedback that more teacher read-alouds and the elimination of homework that included reading passages should be eliminated since passages were considered “fake reading.” Similarly, students at Fairfax suggested to read to younger students to improve reading motivation. An AR participant with learning disabilities suggested that the best way to improve reading motivation at Fairfax would be to allow older, more mature readers to read to the younger, less mature students. He further explained, “If you really want to motivate kids here to read, you have to make sure that the young kids like reading and are motivated. They need to make it where we can read to the younger kids.”

The non-AR students at Mountain Ridge who are classified as low-performing readers claimed that incorporating more projects into the literacy curriculum could increase reading

interest and motivation. Among the students with learning disabilities, students had a very simple suggestion for improving reading motivation. Most of these students expressed that they just wanted to learn how to read, and that obtaining the necessary skills to become a successful reader was enough to motivate them to read often in the future. This is in alignment to research that claims if students are to value reading, it is imperative that they master the necessary skills and concepts along the literacy continuum to develop positive perceptions of reading. To motivate students who have experienced repeated failure, teachers must create classroom contexts where students not only feel safe to take risks, but also assist students to make the connection between effort and success (Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland, 2003).

Most students across all reading proficiency groups in the AR and non-AR school explained that reading motivation could be enhanced by improving the reading atmospheres of classrooms. It was found that an overwhelming majority of students desire a quiet atmosphere for reading. Some reasons provided were that atmospheres free from loud noise enabled students to concentrate and think deeply, and quiet environments free from noise and distractions kept them from being interrupted. Six out of 12 students at Fairfax Elementary and five out of 12 students at Mountain Ridge reported that comfortable seating influenced their motivation to read. To increase reading motivation, it is recommended that both schools provide comfortable seating options for students when reading.

Conclusion

Do fourth-grade students who have experienced AR since kindergarten experience agony or ecstasy? The review of the literature and the results of this study encourage educators to question if students' continued practices with AR over time lead to agony or ecstasy. In this

study, it was found that students who experienced ecstasy are those average- and higher-performing students who read well. It was also found that most readers experienced ecstasy as long as they were meeting their annual AR goals, which led to prizes and rewards, or as long as they were among the top readers or considered the “top reader.”

Many fourth-grade students across proficiency groups who have participated in AR since kindergarten experienced ecstasy, for Fairfax has taken drastic steps to ensure that students have independent reading materials that match their interests and reading levels. Students are very much aware that they inhabit spaces where they are completely surrounded by books and enjoy having alternative ways to experience and practice reading. With thousands of AR books at students’ fingertips, one may assume that the desire to read books outside of the AR program would be diminished. In this study, it was found that high readers who often read outside of school were very much aware of books outside the AR program, and desired opportunities to read them. Voracious readers can experience agony during the school months if they are so consumed with accumulating high amounts of AR points that they feel they have to wait until the summer months to be able to relax and read popular, non-AR titles. Another finding among proficient and advanced readers is that they have developed a reading habit. For many of these students, as long as books are easily accessible, they would read even if AR did not exist.

It was also found that lower-achieving students experienced agony when they did not read as well as their proficient and advanced peers. As Cambria and Guthrie (2010) noted, motivated readers exhibit both the “will and skill” to read. Low-performing students reported the desire to read, but were discouraged by the perceived inability to read as well as their more proficient peers. Struggling readers often experienced agony as they routinely earned significantly fewer AR points than other skilled readers. Lower-performing students and those

with disabilities experienced an even greater agony at Fairfax in that they were denied time during recess to engage in physical activity because they were required to read during that time when they had not met their quarterly AR goals. This correlated to Groce and Groce's (2005) claim that utilizing rewards and punishments as methods for control have not been found to foster intrinsic motivation for reading. Another aspect of the feedback loop that inadvertently led to agony for a student with disabilities was the progress toward goal/percentage of responses correct function on the computer display of the AR program. Although this was intended to allow students to monitor their own progress, for this student, it was just another indicator of failure or inadequacy.

Furthermore, this study revealed that students at Fairfax experienced ecstasy when they were able to read AR books outside of their assigned reading levels. High-performer, Darin, excitedly relayed, "I'm actually glad that I'm getting out of school just so I can just read freely instead of AR. I won't have to rush through the books to get ahead of people where they are. I can just relax and read books that are not AR." Further ecstasy was experienced by these AR readers when they had more freedom to choose books beyond those designated as within their ZPD. High-performer Rita divulged an option she found pleasing regarding flexibility of choice, "When you meet your AR goal, they sometimes will let you read books a little bit higher or lower than your level if you ask them."

Fairfax students experienced a particular agony of which they may be unaware. While a high-performer from Mountain Ridge, Tina, announced her plans for summer reading were to reread all the books she had previously read, students at Fairfax had no such thought process regarding books as "old friends" to be revisited frequently and with pleasure. Guthrie, Wigfield, and You (2012) suggested that this kind of engagement with reading was directly related to

achievement because it involved opportunities for continued practice. The results of this study did not allow for drawing conclusions regarding whether students were motivated by extrinsic reward or by intrinsic desire.

Recommendations

While conclusions regarding student motivations cannot be drawn, this study did produce several inferences that generated three recommendations for future instructional practices.

Schools should invest in classroom libraries

Fairfax Elementary should be commended for their high achievement and their commitment to providing students with easy access to abundant choice reading materials. This is key in understanding the statistical difference in the value of reading scores produced in the MRP-R survey analysis of fourth-grade students. Expectations for high achievement are communicated clearly within the culture of the Fairfax Elementary. The administration, faculty and staff coordinate resources, funds, and manpower to support choice and availability of highly engaging texts across varied levels to meet the diverse needs of students. Fairfax Elementary allocates \$25,000 from Title I funds each year to support school wide classroom libraries. Throughout the thirteen years that Fairfax has funded classroom libraries, thousands of books per classroom have been accumulated, thus creating easy access to texts and abundant choice for students. Each teacher places books in baskets, which are labeled with topic, genre, and AR level. Not only is Fairfax's commitment to classroom libraries in alignment to the principles of AR, but it is also grounded in research across the literacy field.

According to Neuman (1999) classroom libraries should contain a minimum of 300 titles. In addition to the concept of book quantity, Neuman (1999) notes the importance of book quality. She states, “To spark children’s interest and enthusiasm about reading, books must catch children’s attention, captivate their imaginations, and make them want to return to their pages again and again” (p.4). During the semi-structured interviews, after being questioned more deeply regarding his view of classroom and school-wide libraries, a high performing student summed up the benefit of students having easy access to interesting texts. Darin noted, “It’s good to have a classroom library. You don’t have to walk to the school library for books.” Fountas and Pinnell (1996) recommend classroom libraries contain 300-600 books, depending on the grade level. Although AR suggests the number of books required per student decreases as the grade equivalent increases, Fairfax continues to increase the amount of texts across fiction and nonfiction by surveying students’ interests. This practice is in alignment with Fountas and Pinnell’s suggestions and ensures that topics and titles of interests of all students are supported.

Students at Mountain Ridge view libraries through the lens of the school wide library. Mountain Ridge students have access to a wide range of choice reading materials through their school wide library as they can check out books several times per week. The incorporation of extensive classroom libraries has the potential to ignite passion for reading among students. According to Allington (2012), one of the most widespread recommendations for providing reading motivation is providing students with choice. Additionally, Ryan and Deci (2000) found choice to be directly linked to improved achievement, engagement, intrinsic motivation, persistence, and more positive attitudes toward reading.

Mountain Ridge Elementary should reserve school funds to support extensive classroom libraries due to the overwhelming success that has occurred with providing students extensive

amounts of time to read choice books at Fairfax. Likewise, teachers should designate time within the school day for independent choice reading. Students at Fairfax and Mountain Ridge should receive instruction that provides students with a balance of hard, “just right,” and easy reading opportunities.

Schools should provide abundant choice across diverse levels

Another principle of the AR program is that students are expected to independently read and select books within appropriate ZPD levels, in order to experience success, and thus, accelerate literacy learning. Researchers (Gambrell, 1996; Oldfather, 1993; and Turner, 1995) also have found that books aligned to students’ abilities is a context that can support reading motivation. Additionally, Routman (2003) is in agreement claiming that if a book is too challenging, the result can be frustration. While books that are easy have been noted to free students from decoding issues, allowing them to focus on deeper meaning of texts, allowing students to spend too much time reading texts that are too easy can also impede the rate at which literacy growth occurs. Consequently, Schmidt (2008) makes the sound argument that when students read books independently, they should read books within a ZAD (zone of actual development) that do not require the assistance of an adult. At Fairfax, fourth-grade students select from thousands of books for the purpose of independent reading. As one student from Fairfax stated, “Books are all around us!” Though vast amounts of books spanning multiple topics and genres abound in all classrooms at Fairfax, students read within their ZPD ranges often without teacher assistance. Little to no time is designated for individual student conferencing, which is necessary for more intense individualized reading instruction.

At Mountain Ridge, a student with learning disabilities claimed, “I couldn’t read *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, but I loved it, and it made me want to read more.” A student classified as low said, “The story was just heart-felt and touching.” Due to the overwhelmingly positive remarks from students across all proficiency groups at Mountain Ridge regarding how novel studies were found to be motivating, Fairfax Elementary should consider incorporating novel studies within their current whole group instruction. Currently, Fairfax teachers rely on the basal series purchased by the district as their primary source for whole group instruction.

When students at Fairfax were asked about literacy instruction at their school, none of the students mentioned the basal stories, even though it is the substance for whole group instruction. This indicated that Fairfax students view independent choice reading as a more authentic and meaningful experience than teacher-directed instruction with the basal. Fourth-grade students at Fairfax could benefit from whole group instruction that incorporates novel studies, for it has the potential to boost motivation and inspire deep, emotional connections and develop a strong classroom community as described by students at Mountain Ridge. Since this feature of reading instruction at Mountain Ridge was motivating too all proficiency groups, including those with disabilities, it is recommended that Fairfax consider implementing novel studies within their whole group instruction.

Schools should seek student feedback regarding motivational classroom experiences

One of the guiding principles of AR is that teachers are provided immediate feedback regarding performance, and thus can intervene as necessary. AR is a tool that can assist teachers in monitoring student’s day-to-day reading behaviors regarding test scores and total books read.

AR can provide teachers with immediate feedback in the form of computerized reports informing teachers of students' basic recall and comprehension abilities. It can also provide students with immediate feedback regarding whether or not they pass AR tests. Although this feedback system may benefit teachers by providing data regarding students' test scores, it does not allow a venue for which students can provide input regarding motivational aspects of the reading experiences. It is recommended that both Fairfax and Mountain Ridge establish routine procedures for soliciting student feedback with respect to both reading instruction and independent reading.

Suggestions for Future Research

The students in this study who participated in AR since kindergarten will advance to an intermediate school when they enter fifth grade. It would be beneficial to determine students' attitudes regarding reading and motivation after a year of not participating in the AR program. Additional research in the area of gender among varied reading proficiency groups should be incorporated.

An additional study could be conducted that examines schools that provide students with easy access to texts through extensive classroom libraries. Schools within a larger population that uses AR as a means to monitor the independent reading of students could be compared with schools that do not use the AR program, but monitor the independent choice reading using other methods such as blogs, group book talks, and individual conferences with teachers. It could be beneficial to the literacy field to compare the achievement and motivation across reading proficiencies between the differing schools.

In the current standards reform movement, many states have chosen to adopt the Common Core State Standards or close variations. Such shifts in newly adopted standards

require students to read an increased amount of informational text. Research concerning students' attitudes and motivation toward informational text should be explored.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Informed Consent

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY

A Mixed Methods Study of the Accelerated Reader Program and Students' Attitudes Toward Reading

INTRODUCTION

Your child has been invited participate in a research study about attitudes and motivation toward reading in schools that do and do not use the Accelerated Reader program. This research study will help schools and educators to know what practices and programs motivate students to read.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

If you give permission for your child to participate, I will ask your child's teacher for his or her most recent STAR reading assessment, which will allow me to know how well your child is reading at this time. Your child will then complete a survey about reading motivation. The survey has 25 questions, and should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. I will read the survey aloud to students. After your child completes the reading motivation survey, your child may be selected to participate in an individual interview where he/she will answer questions about reading motivation if you give permission. If your child attends a school that uses the Accelerated Reader program, he or she will be asked questions about reading motivation and the Accelerated Reader program. The interview will be audio recorded so I can remember what they say about reading. The individual interview will only take approximately 20 minutes. I will

schedule a time with your child's teacher to make sure that your child will not miss classroom instruction. I can also meet with your child after school if you would prefer.

BENEFITS

Schools and teachers are interested in knowing if students are motivated to read as well as classroom methods and programs that motivate students to read.

As a result of this research study, teachers and schools will have a better understanding of what motivates students to read.

RISKS

The risks for this study are minimal. There are no more than those encountered in every day life. Children who do not participate will not lose any benefit.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The survey results and information from the interviews will be kept confidential. Data will be stored in a safe place. Your students name will not be used in the study, and only I (the researcher) will have access to the audio recording. After the audio recording has been done, you will have access to the information if you would like.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You or your child may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he/ she may withdraw at any

time without penalty and without loss of benefits. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will not be included in the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study, please contact LaDonna Stout-Boone by phone at (xxx) (xxx- xxxx) or by email boonel@xxxxxxxxxx.org . You may choose to contact my advisor at UT-Knoxville, Dr. Richard Allington by phone at (xxx) (xxx- xxxx) or by email rallingt@utk.edu. If you have questions regarding your child's rights as a research participant in this study, you may also contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at utkirb@utk.edu or by phone at (865) 974-7697.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I give permission for my child to participate in this research study.

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Student Name _____

If you give permission for your child to participate in the study, please refer to the attached page that is about the independent interview. Please make sure that you read it and discuss it with your child. If your child is willing to participate in an interview, please have them print and sign the student interview agreement form that is attached.

Appendix B – Student Assent Phase I

Student Survey Agreement:

Hello, my name is LaDonna Boone. If you have a survey packet in front of you, it is because your mom has agreed to let you take a reading survey. For those of you taking the survey, all you have to do is complete a survey about reading. I will read the reading survey out loud to everyone, and you will choose the answer that best describes you and how you feel about reading. I would also like to ask your teacher for your latest STAR scores so I can find out about the reading progress you have made. If you decide not to participate in this survey, you may turn past the survey to the blank sheet of paper provided. You can draw on the blank sheet of paper. If you do not have your parents' permission to complete the survey, you have a blank sheet of paper for drawing also.

Make sure to draw quietly until I finish giving the survey to others. Please keep the cardboard screens up during the survey. The screens are there for your privacy.

For those of you taking the survey, I think you will find that the questions are easy to answer. If you do not wish to continue taking the survey once we've started, all you have to do is on your own, turn to the last page where you will find the blank sheet of paper for drawing

If you are willing to participate in this survey, print and sign your name below.

Print Your Name: _____

Sign Your Name: _____

Appendix C – Motivation to Read Profile Survey – Revised

Name: _____ Date: _____

Teacher: _____

A. I am in _____.

- ☐ **2nd grade**
- ☐ **3rd grade**
- ☐ **4th grade**
- ☐ **5th grade**

B. I am a _____.

- ☐ **boy**
- ☐ **girl**

1. My friends think I am _____.

- ☐ **a very good reader**
- ☐ **A good reader**
- ☐ **An OK reader**
- ☐ **A poor reader**

2. Reading a book is something I like to do.

- ☐ **never**
- ☐ **Almost never**
- ☐ **Sometimes**
- ☐ **Often**

3. When I come to a word I don't know, I can _____.

- ☐ **almost always figure it out**
- ☐ **sometimes figure it out**
- ☐ **almost never figure it out**

☐ **never figure it out**

4. My friends think reading is _____.

☐ **really fun**

☐ **fun**

☐ **OK to do**

☐ **no fun at all**

5. I read _____.

☐ **not as well as my friends**

☐ **about the same as my friends**

☐ **a little better than my friends**

☐ **a lot better than my friends**

6. I tell my friends about good books I read.

☐ **I never do this**

☐ **I almost never do this**

☐ **I do this some of the time**

☐ **I do this a lot**

7. When I am reading by myself, I understand _____.

☐ **everything I read**

☐ **almost everything I read**

☐ **almost none of what I read**

☐ **none of what I read**

8. People who read a lot are _____.

☐ **very interesting**

☐ **sort of interesting**

☐ **sort of boring**

☐ **very boring**

9. I am _____.

☐ **a poor reader**

☐ **An OK reader**

- ☐ **A good reader**
- ☐ **A very good reader**

10. I think libraries are _____.

- ☐ **A really great place to spend time**
- ☐ **A great place to spend time**
- ☐ **A boring place to spend time**
- ☐ **A really boring place to spend time**

11. I worry about what other kids think about my reading _____.

- ☐ **a lot**
- ☐ **sometimes**
- ☐ **almost never**
- ☐ **never**

12. I think becoming a good reader is _____.

- ☐ **not very important**
- ☐ **sort of important**
- ☐ **important**
- ☐ **very important**

13. When my teacher asks me a questions about what I have read, _____.

- ☐ **I can never think of an answer**
- ☐ **I almost never think of an answer**
- ☐ **I sometimes think of an answer**
- ☐ **I can always think of an answer**

14. I think spending time reading is _____.

- ☐ **really boring**
- ☐ **boring**
- ☐ **great**
- ☐ **really great**

15. Reading is _____.

- ☐ **Very easy for me**
- ☐ **Kind of easy for me**

- ☐ **Kind of hard for me**
- ☐ **Very hard for me**

16. When my teacher reads books out loud, I think it is _____.

- ☐ really great
- ☐ great
- ☐ boring
- ☐ really boring

17. When I am in a group talking about books I have read, _____.

- ☐ **I hate to talk about my ideas**
- ☐ **I don't like to talk about my ideas**
- ☐ **I like to talk about my ideas**
- ☐ **I love to talk about my ideas**

18. When I have free time, I spend _____.

- ☐ **none of my time reading**
- ☐ **very little of my time reading**
- ☐ **some of my time reading**
- ☐ **a lot of my time reading**

19. When I read out loud, I am a _____.

- ☐ **poor reader**
- ☐ **OK reader**
- ☐ **good reader**
- ☐ **very good reader**

20. When someone gives me a book for a present, _____.

- ☐ **I am very happy**
- ☐ **I am happy**
- ☐ **I am unhappy**
- ☐ **I am very unhappy**

Appendix D – Student Assent Phase II

Student Interview Agreement

Hello, my name is LaDonna Boone. I would like to interview you about how you feel about reading. All you have to do is talk with me about your experiences with reading. During the interview, I would also like to ask you some questions about your reading experiences. During the interview, I will audio record our conversation because I need to remember the things you say about reading.

I think you will find that the questions will be easy to answer. If you decide during the interview that you don't want to continue the interview, all you have to do is tell me. You can just say, "I don't want to do this anymore."

If your parent has read and discussed this page with you, and you are willing to participate in an individual interview, print and sign your name below.

Print Your Name: _____

Sign Your Name: _____

Appendix E – Interview Protocol

Warm-Up Questions

Tell me about yourself.

I understand that you have a lot of experiences with reading. Can you tell me about some of your experiences with reading?

Interview Questions to Further Explicate Survey Findings

Tell me about how you feel about reading.

Tell me what reading is like at your school.

When you come to a word you don't know, what do you do?

Tell me what your friends think about reading.

Tell me about how you share and talk about books with your friends.

Tell me what you think about people who read a lot?

Tell me how you feel about libraries.

Tell me about reading in front of other kids in your classroom.

Tell me about how your teacher teaches reading.

Do you think reading is important? Why?

Additional Questions about Reading Motivation

Tell me about what makes you excited to read at school.

What kinds of things do you like to read?

What are your favorite things to read about?

What do you think makes someone a great reader?

Imagine you are in your favorite place to read. Describe it to me.

What can your school do to make reading more exciting to you?

Is there anything your school does to make you dislike reading?

Prompts/Probes that may be used to elicit deeper responses

Would you please tell me more about...

I'm not quite sure I understood clearly ...Could you tell me more about...?

I'm not certain what you exactly mean by... Could you give me some examples?

Would you please tell me more about your thoughts on that?

You mentioned.... What stands out in your mind about that?

This is what I think I heard you say...Did I understand you correctly?

Can you give me an example of...

What makes you feel that way?

You just mentioned.... I'd also like to know about...

Concluding the Interview:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about reading?

Appendix F – Chapter 4 Tables

Table 4.1 *Descriptive Statistics: Fairfax Elementary (School A)*

Category	N (Male/Female)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Self-Concept		23	35	27.37	2.81
Value of	52				
Reading	(26/26)	25	35	30.5	2.98
Total Score		51	69	59.13	4.97

Table 4.2 *Descriptive Statistics: Mountain Ridge Elementary (School B)*

Category	N (Male/Female)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Self-Concept		22	33	28.69	2.64
Value of	35				
Reading	(20/15)	20	34	29	3.44
Total Score		45	65	57.69	5.24

Table 4.3 *MRP-R Average Score by Proficiency Categories and School*

STAR Proficiency Category	Mountain Ridge (n)	Fairfax (n)
High	59.45 (11)	61 (24)
Average	58.18 (11)	57.7 (20)
Low	57.2 (9)	57.78 (5)
SPED	51.25 (5)	56.67 (3)

Table 4.4 *Levene's Test and t-Test Results*

	F	Sig.	t	df	t-test for Equality of Means		95% CI	
					Mean Difference	SE Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	0.07 1	0.7 9	- 1.305	85	-1.449	1.11	- 3.656	0.75 8
Equal variances not assumed			- 1.291	70.39 2	-1.449	1.122	- 3.686	0.78 9

Table 4.5 *Analysis of Variance: SC, VR, and Combined*

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
SC	Between Groups	0.055	1	0.055	0.007	0.932
	Within Groups	639.601	85	7.525		
	Total	639.655				
VR	Between Groups	47.069	1	47.069	4.679	0.033
	Within Groups	855	85	10.059		
	Total	902.069	86			
Combined	Between Groups	43.917	1	43.917	1.703	0.195
	Within Groups	2191.601	85	25.784		
	Total	2235.517				

Table 4.6 *Self-Concept Explanatory Survey Table*

SC Question	Mountain Ridge	Fairfax
When I come to a word I don't know, I can . . .	1 (3%) most positive 0 (0%) 2nd most positive 15 (43%) 2nd most negative 19 (54%) most negative	0 (0%) most positive 2 (4%) 2nd most positive 28 (54%) 2nd most negative 22 (42%) most negative
I read . . .	13 (37%) most positive 20 (57%) 2nd most positive 2 (6%) 2nd most negative 0 (0%) most negative	21 (40%) most positive 29 (56%) 2nd most positive 1 (2%) 2nd most negative 1 (2%) most negative
Reading is . . .	16 (46%) most positive 14 (40%) 2nd most positive 5 (14%) 2nd most negative 1(3%) most negative	31 (60%) most positive 15 (30%) 2nd most positive 5 (10%) 2nd most negative 1 (2%) most negative
When I read out loud, I am a . . .	6 (17%) most positive 19 (54%) 2nd most positive 7 (20%) 2nd most negative 3 (9%) most negative	9 (17%) most positive 17 (33%) 2nd most positive 25 (48%) 2nd most negative 1 (2%) most negative

Table 4.7 *Value of Reading Explanatory Survey Table*

VR Question	Mountain Ridge	Fairfax
Reading a book is something	13 (37%) most positive 21 (60%) 2nd most	24 (46%) most positive 25 (48%) 2nd most
I like to do.	positive 1 (3%) 2nd most negative 0 (0%) most negative	positive 2 (4%) 2nd most negative 1 (2%) most negative
My friends think reading is . . .	6 (17%) most positive 15 (43%) 2nd most positive 13 (37%) 2nd most negative 1 (3%) most negative	11 (12%) most positive 27 (52%) 2nd most positive 12 (23%) 2nd most negative 2 (4%) most negative
People who read a lot are . . .	17 (49%) most positive 14 (40%) 2nd most positive 1 (3%) 2nd most negative 3 (9%) most negative	36 (62%) most positive 16 (31%) 2nd most positive 3 (6%) 2nd most negative 1 (2%) most negative
I think libraries are . . .	10 (28%) most positive 21 (60%) 2nd most positive 3 (8%) 2nd most negative 0 (0%) most negative	24 (46%) most positive 24 (46%) 2nd most positive 4 (7%) 2nd most negative 0 (0%) most negative
I think becoming a good reader is . . .	23 (66%) most positive 7 (20%) 2nd most positive 4 (11%) 2nd most negative 1 (3%) most negative	34 (65%) most positive 15 (29%) 2nd most positive 2 (4%) 2nd most negative 1 (3%) most negative
I think spending time reading is . . .	11 (31%) most positive 17 (49%) 2nd most positive 7 (20%) 2nd most negative 0 (0%) most negative	23 (44%) most positive 23 (44%) 2nd most positive 2 (4%) 2nd most negative 4 (8%) most negative
When my teacher reads books out loud,	1 (3%) most positive	2 (4%) most positive

Table 4.7 *Value of Reading Explanatory Survey Table* (continued)

VR Question	Mountain Ridge	Fairfax
I think it is . . .	3 (9%) 2nd most positive	5 (10%) 2nd most positive
	13 (37%) 2nd most negative	24 (46%) 2nd most negative
	18 (51%) most negative	21 (40%) most negative
When someone gives me book for a present, . . .	4 (11%) most positive	4 (8%) most positive
	12 (34%) 2nd most positive	12 (23%) 2nd most positive
	15 (43%) 2nd most negative	24 (46%) 2nd most negative
	4 (11%) most negative	12 (23%) most negative

Table 4.8 *Individual Interview Participant Profiles at Fairfax Elementary*

Student	STAR Proficiency	MRP-R Total Score	Self-Concept Score	Value of Reading Score
Lisa	High	65	30	35
Rita	High	65	32	33
Darin	High	62	30	32
Ron	Average	66	34	32
Kamie	Average	58	30	28
Nathan	Average	51	24	27
Katie	Low	63	30	33
Clark	Low	56	29	27
Amy	Low	51	23	28
Cindy	SPED	59	27	32
Nolan	SPED	59	29	30
Ethan	SPED	52	25	27

Table 4.9 *Individual Interview Participant Profiles at Mountain Ridge Elementary*

Student	STAR Proficiency	MRP-R Total Score	Self-Concept Score	Value of Reading Score
Alan	High	45	25	20
Cathy	High	65	33	32
Tina	High	60	29	32
Abby	Average	63	31	32
Alexis	Average	59	32	27
Jacob	Average	54	29	25
Sandra	Low	56	27	29
Nile	Low	56	25	31
Jade	Low	64	31	33
Reggie	SPED	52	26	26
Tanner	SPED	50	22	28

Table 4.10 *Reading Enjoyment*

Reading Enjoyment	Count	Student Response Examples
	10	I love it. Reading is something that I wanted to do when I first went to kindergarten. (Darin)
	H (3)	I love reading, I really do! Most of my
	A (3)	friends like it too. (Lisa)
	L (2)	At this school, no one can't like reading...
	S (2)	(Ron)
		Almost everybody likes reading. (Kamie)
		I think it's great! (Nolan)
		I like to read. (Ethan)

Table 4.11 *What Students Like to Read*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Fiction	12	...fantasies, adventures, and fiction. (Darin)
		I like to read <i>Harry Potter</i> , <i>Percy Jackson</i> , and adventures. (Lisa)
	H (3)	
	A (3)	I read fantasies. (Rita)
	L (1)	
	H (2)	I really like graphic novels and series books too. (Kamie)
	A (2)	
	L (1)	I like to read mystery and thriller books. (Nolan)
		I like to read series books like <i>Jedi Academy</i> , and the <i>Zodiac Legacy</i> series. (Ron)
Nonfiction		I like the <i>Shiloh</i> books and <i>The Weird School</i> books. (Clark)
	9	
	H (1)	Nonfiction like math and science and history. (Rita)
	A (4)	I mainly read sports books. (Ron)
		I normally pick nonfiction books because when you make an 80 or better on the AR quiz, you get candy. (Kamie)
	L (2)	
	S (2)	I like to read sports books. (Nathan)
		I like reading books about sports and animals. (Nolan)
		I like reading about sports and frogs. (Ethan)

Table 4.12 *Access to Text*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Class Library	10	It's good to have a class library. You don't have to go
	H (3)	to the school library for books. (Darin)
	A (3)	There's really a lot of books here in my class, and
	L (2)	there's many to choose from. (Lisa)
	S (2)	You have books all around you. (Nathan) We have thousands of books in our class library! There's tons of choices...(Ron) ...in my class, we have a whole bunch of books. (Cindy)
School-Wide Library	3	My teacher has baskets full of fiction and nonfiction books... (Katie) We have big libraries in our school and in our classes. Our class is full of fiction and nonfiction books...
	H (1)	(Rita)
	A (1)	In the library, you have to check out the books, but in the class library, you just pick up the books you want. (Cindy)
	L (1)	Our library teacher will help you find any book you want. (Katie)

Table 4.13 *Time Allocated for Independent Choice Reading*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
In-School Reading	10	Reading every day is important here. (Darin)
	H (3)	...We read all the time here. You read a lot in
	A (3)	kindergarten and all the way to fourth. (Ron)
	L (3)	Most of my friends read a lot here and they like
	S (1)	it. (Katie)
Out-of-School Reading	7	I only read at school. (Amy)
	H (3)	I mostly read at school, but I will read at home sometimes if I get bored. (Nathan)
	A (3)	...when my mom went to the grocery store. I was like, "Can we just stay here" (Ron)
	L (1)	I like reading at home. I read at home a lot. (Katie)

Table 4.14 *How Students Like to Read*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Technology	4	I like to read sometimes on myOn.
	H (1)	because it shows me math books. (Rita)
	A (1)	There's Storyworks magazines, and we use our iPads to answer questions. (Ron)
	L (2)	I read stuff on the iPad. I like reading on the iPad the best. (Amy)
		I like reading on my iPad because you can make your character look cool. (Clark)
Books	8	I prefer to read real books, but in class, we read on myON and with iPads, too. (Lisa)
	H (2)	...One whole side of our class library is fiction and the other is nonfiction. (Kamie)
	A (2)	You have books all around you. There's more than a thousand. (Nathan)
	L (2)	I prefer to read real books because when you read in iPads, it dies. Books don't die. (Ron)
	S (2)	I like reading books in my hand better. (Cindy)
Books and Technology	2	
	A (1)	It doesn't matter to me whether I read a book or one on a tablet. (Kamie)
	S (1)	It's fun to read on the iPad because you just swipe the screen to turn the page, but I like reading books a lot, too. (Nolan)

Table 4.15 *Oral Reading*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Negative Feelings About Oral Reading	11	I feel like I mess up more when I'm reading in front of other people. (Darin)
	H (2)	I get nervous when I read and stutter on my words. (Nathan)
	A (3)	It kind of makes me nervous. If you miss a word, you'll embarrass yourself. (Ron)
	L (3)	I don't like it. I get nervous when I read out loud and I stutter on my words. (Nathan)
	S (3)	I just don't like it. (Cindy) I get nervous because I don't talk in front of people. (Katie)
Limited Decoding Strategies	10	I just sound it out. (Darin)
	H (3)	Sometimes I look for clues. (Lisa)
	A (3)	I try to sound it out or ask my teacher. (Rita)
	L (2)	I skip it if I can't get it. (Nathan)
	S (2)	I usually like cut it up into a few words and put them together. (Ron) I sound it out and pronounce it as good as I can. (Katie) My teacher helps me figure it out. (Ethan)

Table 4.16 *Value of Reading*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Adult Influence	2	Reading is pretty important here because our principal loves reading. She has lots of favorite books. (Ron)
	H (1)	
	A (1)	My Mom is a great reader and is always buying me books I am interested in reading. (Darin)
New Information and Words	7	Reading is really good for you to learn vocabulary and the about the world...(Darin)
	H (3)	If you don't read much, you won't know much. (Lisa)
		It helps me really learn stuff that we don't really learn in school sometimes. (Kamie)
	A (2)	It gives you information. If you read a lot, you will figure out words...(Rita)
	L (2)	Reading helps me learn things that I don't always learn in school. (Kamie)
		The more reading that you do, the more you know. (Katie) You can get to know words that you don't know. (Amy)
Current and Future Success	9	If you are going to be a doctor, you need to read about diseases. You can't just guess. (Ron)
	H (2)	Reading is important because reading is going to be a thing throughout your whole life. (Clark)
	A (3)	
	L (2)	It makes you be a better reader. (Cindy)
	S (2)	Reading helps you get smarter. (Nolan)

Table 4.17 *Traits of Students Who Read Often*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Ability	3	People who read a lot figure out words easier than people who read less. (Rita)
	H (2)	It depends of what kind of reader you are. He needs smaller books, so I help him find... (Darin)
	S (1)	Good readers in my class are smart. (Nolan)
Speed	5	Lisa and Darin read like big, heavy books. They can read a chapter book in a day. (Rita)
	H (2)	Lisa finishes books in about one or two days. (Katie)
	A (2)	Greta is a really fast reader. (Ron)
	L (1)	There is a boy in my class who is a speed reader. (Kamie)
Volume	2	Keisha is the best reader I know. She reads a lot. (Amy)
	A (1)	Good readers here read a lot. (Katie)
	L (1)	Darin is the best reader because he had the most AR points last year. (Lisa)
AR Points	5	...one kid reads really fast. He mostly makes 100 on AR tests. (Ron)
	H (1)	Lisa reads chapter books worth a lot of points. She gets more AR points. (Katie)
	A (3)	
	L (1)	Most of my friends have more AR points than me. (Clark)
Interests	1	...A great reader in my class reads a lot of Harry Potter books.
	H(1)	(Nathan)

Table 4.18 *Social Aspects*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Teacher Planned Events	2	...We write books and stand up and read the books. (Ron)
	H(1)	We sit in a circle and my teacher lets us share books. (Rita)
	A(1)	My brother wasn't much of a reading fan, but I brought him to a new series of books. He's into it now. (Ron)
Student Created Collaborations	13	My friends told me about some good books, but I didn't have my AR points... (Clark)
	H (3)	Me and my friend like to swap books together. (Cindy)
	A (3)	When we look at books, I like to help people
	L (3)	pick out books. (Darin)
	S (4)	Sometimes at recess and during snack, we talk about books...(Lisa)
		On the playground, some of us bring our books and talk about them. (Rita)
		...I talk about books at lunch or when we have a 'shake break'. (Kamie)
		You can join up at recess or at indoor recess...(Ron)
		...During lunchtime, I sit beside my friends and talk about books. (Nolan)
		I like to read books with my friends at the same time like a club. (Ron)

Table 4.19 *Instructional Practices*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Teacher Read-Alouds	6	Our math and science teacher used to read aloud to us for a reward when we got to eat in the classroom for a treat. (Ron)
	A (3)	...We read books after we do our morning work. We read nonfiction books at night and take tests on them in the morning. (Cindy)
	L (3)	Sometimes my teacher reads aloud and sometimes we listen to the books on tape. (Amy)
Accelerated Reader	17	Here you have to make your AR goal or you have to stay inside. (Kamie)
	H (4)	
	A (5)	We have AR tests and get points. The school is mostly build on reading, quizzes, and points. (Ron)
	L (4)	You are expected to read a lot and meet your AR goal. (Amy)
	S (4)	We take different kinds of AR tests, and some books are worth a lot of AR points. (Clark)
Student-Initiated Creative Writing		They give you a level but sometimes when you meet your AR goal, you can read a level above or just a tiny bit below if you ask. (Rita)
	2	
	A (1)	In my class, we get to write about books. (Ron)
	L (1)	I like it when we read and write something and then type is up like a story. (Katie)

Table 4.20 *Environmental Influences*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Comfort	6	“I like reading in my beanbag chair. That’s where I read when I got the most AR points.” (Darin)
	H (2)	
	A (2)	
	L (1)	
	S (1)	
Quiet	5	“I can’t read in loud places; I like a quiet room.” (Nathan)
	A (2)	
	L (1)	
	S (2)	
	2	
Outdoors	H (1)	“I like to read outside.” (Lisa)
	L (1)	
Lighting	1	I like reading when it is a little bit dark but nit too dark.
	S (1)	

Table 4.21 *Current Motivational Contexts*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Teachers Read-Aloud	4	My teachers read aloud and it is good because it helps people with their AR goals. (Darin)
	H (3)	Every day before we go to specials, my teacher reads aloud. You can take a test when my teacher is done. (Lisa)
		My teacher reads all the time for fun. (Rita)
Writing	S (1)	My teacher reads aloud for fun. (Cindy)
	1	I like it when we read and write something and type it up like a story. I like doing that. (Ron)
Book Choice and Organization	L (1)	
	5	There are just so many different kinds of books to choose from in our room. (Lisa)
	H (2)	There's lots of different series books to get. We have tons of books and they are in bins...(Rita)
	A (2)	There's really a lot of books in our class. Our class library books are in baskets. (Darin)
	S (1)	
Imagination	4	When we read...we visualized what we thought it looked like there. (Rita)
	H (2)	There's some things you can't do in life, but you can in a book! (Lisa)
	A (2)	It's just fun to imagine the funny fiction books... (Ron)
		...like when you read a scary part and get scared. It gets exciting! (Nathan)
AR Tests, Points, Prizes, and Feedback	7	I'm just glad that I have the points! (Darin)
	H (3)	One kid got 1,000 AR points last year! You get prizes and a trophy for points. (Lisa)
	A (1)	If it is a big book, you have twenty questions. If you read the book, you should get 100 and get your points. (Lisa)
	L (2)	...If you get 100 on AR tests, it's an automatic 100 in the grade book. (Kamie)
	S (1)	You get rewards and stuff like trophies and medals. (Clark)
		My teacher gives us candy if we make a 100 on AR tests. (Clark)
		You get to know if you are right or wrong. (Amy)

Table 4.21 *Current Motivational Contexts* (Continued)

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Content Areas	2	I really like reading about the seasons. We've been studying the seasons in science. (Rita)
	H (1)	It excites me to learn about new things. (Nolan)
	S (1)	I love series books. I have bought five sets of
Book Fair	2	series books at the book fair! (Ron)
	A(2)	There's a book fair right now. It makes it more interesting. (Nathan)

Table 4.22 *Suggestions to Increase Motivation*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Book Clubs	2	... we need to organize a book club. (Lisa)
	H (1)	If you are reading a book at the same time.
	A (1)	It could be like a club. Now, kids have to wait to you finish the book. (Ron)
Read to Students	3	I would like to be able to read to the
	A (1)	autistic kids here. (Kamie)
	S (2)	Let the big kids read to the younger kids. (Nolan)
Increase Time	3	They could give us a little more time to read. (Ron)
	A (2)	We need more time to read. (Katie)
	L (1)	They could get more series books like Who Would Win animal books and more sports books.
Books	2	I want some shorter books. (Amy)
	A (1)	Our library teacher lets us do projects on certain things. I would like to do this in my class. (Rita)
	L (1)	
Topics and Projects	1	I'm glad I'm getting out of school so I can just relax and read books that are not AR. (Darin)
	H (1)	
AR Testing		I would like to read just for fun. It's not hard to get the points, but I don't want to have to read for tests and points. (Kamie)
	4	I don't want to use percentage correct. If you do good, it goes up, but if you make a bad grade, it goes down. (Nolan)
	H (1)	
	A (1)	I don't think we should lose our playtime and be punished when we don't meet our AR goal. (Nolan)
	S (2)	

Table 4.23 *Reading Enjoyment*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Reading Enjoyment	10	I like reading books that are my taste. (Cathy)
	H (3)	I think reading is fun. (Tina)
	A (3)	I like reading a lot. I read when I get bored. (Abby)
	L (3)	Reading is a good way to spend time. (Alexis)
	S (1)	Reading is pretty fun. (Nile)
		Reading is fun. I will read a lot when I am an adult. (Reggie)

Table 4.24 *What Students Like to Read*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Fiction	12	I like to read action and adventurous books and comics. (Alan)
	H (9)	I like animal books that are fiction. (Alexis)
	A (1)	...books without pictures so I can use my
	L (1)	imagination. (Sandra)
	S (1)	I liked the book <i>Sadako</i> ; it made me want to read more. (Reggie)
Fiction Series	1	I like the <i>Harry Potter</i> and <i>Judy Moody</i> series. I've read all of them.
Nonfiction	H (1)	
	12	I like reading scientific books and math books.
	H (4)	(Cathy) ... <i>All About Frogs</i> is a book and it's really cool!
	A (3)	(Jacob)
	L (3)	I like books about wars, especially WWII. (Sandra)
Varied Genres		I like nonfiction books about trains and space.
	S (2)	(Reggie)
	1	
	H (1)	I really like to read poetry and dramas too. (Cathy)

Table 4.25 *Access to Text*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Limited Class Library	8	...my teacher has a few shelves of books. (Cathy)
	H (2)	We don't have a classroom library. (Abby)
	A (3)	We do not have lots of books that you can read
	L (2)	during free time. (Alexis)
	S (1)	My teacher has a shelf. Sometimes I pick up books. (Tanner)
School-Wide Library	7	The school library has a lot of books. (Alan)
	H (2)	If you want a lot of book selection, you will want to go to the school library. (Alexis)
	A (2)	Our librarian has all kinds of books. (Sandra)
	L (2)	I like to pick out books in the library. It's really cool with books everywhere. (Reggie)
	S (1)	We get books when we go to the library. (Nile)

Table 4.26 *Time Allocated for Independent Choice Reading*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Limited In-School Reading	9	We don't have very much time to read. (Abby)
	H (2)	In my class, we have a lot to do, but we would read if we had spare time. (Tina)
	A (4)	We all read the same book during reading. (Nile)
	L (3)	I don't read my books often. (Tanner)
		If we get done with our work, our teacher lets us read. (Sandra) I checked out a <i>Harry Potter</i> book. I didn't have time to finish reading it, so I had to take it back. (Nile) I read more at home because we don't have time at school. (Sandra)
Out-of-School Reading	9	I'm working on a chapter book at home. (Alan)
	H (3)	I'm going to reread a lot of my favorite books at home this summer. (Tina)
	A (3)	I read more at home because I have a bookshelf at home. I read my library books at home, too. (Abby)
	L (3)	I don't read the books at home we are reading at school, but I read books like them at home. (Alexis)
		I read my devotions at home. (Jacob) I read at home. (Jade)

Table 4.27 *How Students Like to Read*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Technology	3	At home, I read stories on my laptop. (Jade)
	H (1)	At home, I read on the iPad. (Reggie)
	L (1)	Books are the best. (Tina)
	S (1)	Some people walk around with books in their hands all the time. (Jacob)
Books	8	In the library, books are everywhere. (Nile)
	H (3)	If it's a book, that's my taste. (Cathy)
	A (3)	
	L (1)	I read books at least three inches thick. (Cathy)
	S (1)	

Table 4.28 *Self-Concept Oral Reading*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Positive Feelings Oral Reading	5	It's fine, I don't mind at all. (Alan)
	H (3)	I think it's really easy. (Cathy)
	A (1)	... everybody gets to hear me read. (Alexis)
	L (1)	I feel really good because they get to hear me read. (Jade)
Negative Feelings Oral Reading		I feel embarrassed about reading out loud because I stutter on words. (Jacob)
	5	
	A (1)	I don't like it; I forget what the words are. (Sandra)
	L (2)	I am horrible at reading out loud. (Nile)
	S (2)	I get scared. People look at you when you're reading. (Tanner)

Table 4.29 *Self-Concept: Decoding Strategies*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Sound it out	8	I just try to sound it out. (Alan)
	H (3)	I sound it out. (Sandra)
	A (2)	I space it out and try to say those sounds. Then I
	L (2)	connect it and sound it together. (Jade)
	S (1)	I usually try to sound it out. (Reggie)
Skip it	2	
	A (1)	I just skip it. (Abby)
	L (1)	I sometimes skip it. (Nile)
Ask someone	2	I try to ask someone the word (Tina)
	H (2)	My teacher gives me the word. (Alexis)
Context Clues	1	
	A (1)	I try to look for context clues and study the words around it. (Jacob)

Table 4.30 *Value of Reading*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Daily Life Skills	3	You use reading everywhere you go like reading signs or posters. (Alexis) Reading is important because you can learn better words to say in writing. You have to say big words in college. (Abby) You need to be able to have fun with words, too. (Alan)
	A (2)	
	S (1)	
New Information and Words	4	Reading can help you learn new stuff and help you with your 4H presentation. (Cathy) It is important because you have to learn more words. (Sandra)
	H (2)	
	A (1) L (1)	
Future Success	5	Reading is one of the most important things in life. If you can't read, you won't be able to do a lot of things throughout your life. (Jacob) ...you can get a job if you can read the application. (Nile) When you get older and interview to get a job, you need to be able to read. (Alan) You have to know how to read to get a job. (Jade)
	H (2)	
	L (2)	
	A (1)	
	1	
Testing	S (1)	You have to read on tests; you have to read the directions. (Nile)

Table 4.31 *Traits of Students Who Read Often*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Volume	9	My good friends are good readers and they read every
	H (6)	chance they get, and they read at their house. (Alan)
	A (1)	My friend Alisa reads all the time. She literally has books everywhere. She reads outside and even during math class. (Tina)
	L (1)	Some kids carry books everywhere they go and they are always reading. One girl even sneaks and reads during math... (Jacob)
	S (1)	I think some people in my class really like books and they don't ever want to stop reading. (Tanner)
Interests and Genres		One girl reads everything adventurous. Some girls like to read about singers, and some people like to read about sports. (Cathy)
	8	
	H (5)	Jerry sits beside me. He likes to read all about sports and people who play sports. (Tina)
	A (2)	One girl in my room loves <i>Black Beauty</i> , the <i>I Survived</i> series. (Nile)
	L (1)	Alec in my class, he reads a lot of both fiction and nonfiction books. (Jade)
Ability	3	Deanna is a good reader and reads with lots of
	H (1)	expression. (Jade)
	A (1)	One boy really knows what to do when he comes to a big word. He says it slow and I hear him. It helps me
	L (1)	know what the word is. (Jade)
		Alisa is one of the smartest people I know! (Jacob)
Speed	2	
	A (1)	Good readers in my class read pretty fast. (Alan)
	L (1)	One girl in my room reads really fast. (Nile)

Table 4.32 *Social Aspects*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Teacher-Planned Events	1 H (1)	We talk about the books we read before and after chapters. (Alan)
Student-Created Collaborations	6 H (2) A (2) L (1) S (1)	Sometimes we talk about books at lunch. We talk about books when we are waiting to go to the bathroom, too. (Tina) I like to go to the library with my friends and talk about reading. (Abby) ... only if I am interested in the book. Right now, we are reading <i>The Cricket in Times Square</i>, and I really like it! I talk to my friends about sports books, too. (Jacob) ...I see my friends talk about books all the time. (Jade) I give them information about my books outside. (Reggie)

Table 4.33 *Instructional Practices*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Teacher Read-Alouds	9	Our teacher reads aloud. She does voices for the characters which really gets everybody's attention. (Alan)
	H (3)	
	L (2)	She reads to all of the students, and we love it. (Reggie)
	A (3)	
	S (1)	Our teacher reads to us for fun. She really acts out the story good. (Nile)
Novel Studies	7	The whole class reads a book. (Alan)
		Everybody reads the same book. (Cathy)
		We have read <i>Trumpet of the Swan</i> , <i>Chocolate Touch</i> , and <i>Tales of the Fourth Grade Nothing</i> . (Cathy)
	H (4)	Every month, we start a new book. We have done Charlotte's Web, <i>Trumpet of the Swan</i> , and <i>Fourth Grade Nothing</i> , and Thomas.
	A (2)	(Tina)
	S (1)	My teacher teaches with fiction and fiction books. She uses chapter books to teach us. (Alexis)
		I thought it was not going to be a good book, but <i>Cricket in Times Square</i> is really, really good! (Jacob)
		We read <i>Skinny Bones</i> , and <i>The Mouse and the Motorcycle</i> . (Tanner)
Whole Group and Small Group, and Independent Reading	6	We have all kinds of reading. We read in whole group and small group. (Cathy)
	H (3)	My teacher reads it once, then we read it in groups. (Jade)
		The teacher reads some of the book, we read some of it in groups, and we read some of it by ourselves. (Tina)
	A (2)	When we read our chapter book, everyday my teacher reads some of it out loud, we read in groups, and we read a chapter by ourselves. (Abby)
	L (1)	We read in groups and by ourselves, but my favorite way is to read in groups. (Alexis)
Nonfiction	1	We use the textbook only sometimes when we are learning about nonfiction. (Tina)
	H (1)	

Table 4.34 *Environmental Influences*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Comfort	5	I like to read in the school library because I can sit in a big chair. (Abby)
	H (1)	
	A (3)	I like reading on my bed because it is comfortable. (Alexis)
Quiet	L (1)	I like to read on my bed because I like to lay down when I read. (Sandra)
	4	
	H (1)	I like to read in the school library because it is quiet and you can think and concentrate. (Reggie)
	L (1)	
	S (2)	I like to read in my room at home because it is quiet in there. (Tanner)
Outdoors		I like bedroom quiet. When people talk in the library, it distracts me. (Alan)
	3	
	H (1)	I have to read in a really quiet place. (Jade)
	L (2)	I prefer to read outside. (Tina) I like to read outside with my Papa. (Nile)

Table 4.35 *Current Motivational Contexts*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
Environment	1 S (1)	I like going outside to read. (Reggie)
Social	1 L (1)	Reading with my friends. (Jade)
Choice	2 H (1) L (1)	There's lots of books in the school library. (Alan) I really like reading by myself too. (Jade)
Books/Book Fairs	2 A (1) L (1)	...having great books! (Jacob) Book fairs in the library are fun. Books are laid out everywhere. (Sandra)
Novel Studies	2 H (1) A (1)	I love the events in the books we read in class. Like in Pacific Rim, giant monsters come up out of the sea. (Cathy) I get excited when we start a new book unit. (Tina)
Projects	1 A (1)	We can do projects with books that we read. We did project with Charlotte's Web, The Island of the Lost, and The Civil War. (Jade)
Rewards	L (1)	In second grade, we got a pizza party for like reading 50 books. (Abby)

Table 4.36 *Suggestions to Increase Motivation*

Category	Count	Student Response Examples
More Books	6	I would like more challenging books. (Cathy)
		We need to get books so people won't have to wait for someone to give it to other students, but we would have to raise the money. (Tina)
	H (2)	
	A (3)	They could get more stories that kids would like. (Abby)
	L (1)	The school needs to get more funny, fiction books. They need to get books about real people, too. (Nile)
Time	3	I want more time to read by myself and with my group.
	H (3)	(Alan)
		...more time independent reading. (Cathy)
		We have a lot of work to do, if they would give us spare time, we would read. (Tina)
Book Recommendations	1	Do a voting thing on which books we should read. (Abby)
	A (1)	
Teacher Read-Alouds	1	Teachers should read little books every day, not chapter books and not the book that we are reading for the lesson.
	A (1)	(Jacob)
Eliminate Homework	1	Stop the reading passages for homework. It is boring and not interesting. (Jacob)
	A (1)	
Projects	1	I did a project on The Isle of the Lost and wrote about it.
	L (1)	They need to do more projects. (Jade)
Dramatize Stories	1	They should do more plays based on the fiction books that students like. (Abby)
	A (1)	
Technology	1	It would be more exciting if they could let us read on iPads and tablets. (Cathy)
	H (1)	
Quiet Environment	L (1)	They could keep the library quieter. (Alan)

VITA

LaDonna Stout Boone was born in Carter County, Tennessee. She spent her childhood, adolescent, and adult years in Carter County. She obtained a B.A. in Early Childhood and Elementary Education from East Tennessee State University in 1995. In 2006, LaDonna received a M.S. in Elementary Education from Tusculum College. In July 2009, LaDonna earned an Ed.S. in Principal and Leadership from Lincoln Memorial University. She received National Board Teacher Certification in the area of Reading, in 2009, and in 2010, LaDonna received her reading specialist endorsement from Appalachian State University. LaDonna received her Ph.D. in Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville in 2017.