Back to document

# Really Reading: What Does Accelerated Reader Teach Adults and Children?

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## Abstract (summary)

In summary, when schools participate in Reading Renaissance, students must choose and read books from specific reading zones based on personal standardized test scores for a specified number of minutes each day, take an Accelerated Reader test on the book, and then receive points based on their success with the AR test. The fact is, teachers must be their own public relations firms in this age of accountability and heavy mandates for reading achievement; share information about your classroom goals, methods of teaching and assessment, and strategies for individualizing instruction with parents and guardians in newsletters and at parent-teacher conferences.

## Full Text

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**Headnote**

An analysis of a computerized reading program used in over half the schools in the U.S. teaches adults and children that reading is more about numbers and efficiency than learning from or enjoying books.

My head snapped up in interest when I heard this brief exchange between a primary-aged child and his father in a bookstore recently. "Dad, I found a book."

"No, you can't have that one. It's not an AR book."

In this father's mind, heading off to the bookstore to choose a book on a Sunday afternoon was closely related to school reading assignments; this father wanted his son to pick a book that would fill two roles: pleasure and school reading. An AR book is a book tied to Accelerated Reader(TM), a computerized reading program popular in over half the schools in the United States (Paul, 2003). Exchanges such as this one point to the importance computer-managed reading programs play in shaping the world of reading (both at home and at school) and the ideas people (especially parents, students, and teachers) have about children's literature and reading. This dad may be simply trying to be a good parent, but in the process, he is also taking on a specific way of acting and being because his son's school uses this reading program. His behavior indicates that he believes reading books in school counts for something, and it is important for his son to participate in this practice.

ACCELERATED READER AND READING RENAISSANCE

Accelerated Reader (published by Renaissance Learning) is one of several commercial reading programs aimed at improving reading test scores (see http://www.renlearn.com/reading). When this parent arrived at the bookstore, he found a notebook filled with Accelerated Reader book titles; librarians and bookstore clerks report families pay attention to information such as this when it is provided as a resource. Unfortunately, most families do not realize that computerized reading programs like Accelerated Reader are commercial programs that offer an array of computer comprehension tests written for children's trade books; Accelerated Reader provides tests and a database for managing student scores on the tests.

Reading Renaissance was developed by Renaissance Learning as a way to ensure the successful use of Accelerated Reader (Paul, 2003). Essentially, Renaissance Learning identified "classroom strategies" that ensure success with Accelerated Reader, named them Accelerated Reader Guiding Principles, and made these principles the outline for Reading Renaissance. So, in schools that participate in Reading Renaissance, a standardized test score is used to determine each student's independent reading zone. Renaissance Learning actually recommends using the STAR(TM) Reading test (their own commercial product) because, "STAR Reading helps you determine the reading level of each student, measure individual and class growth, and forecast results on standardized tests. Students can complete the computer-adaptive assessment in less than 10 minutes, and you get accurate, reliable, norm-referenced scores immediately" (information located on the

Renaissance Learning website). Based upon the STAR(TM) score, students are then required to read titles from their independent reading level or "zone" for a specific number of minutes (20-60) each school day. After reading, students take AR tests and are rewarded with book points. These points may be compiled and used to purchase awards, toys, snacks, stickers, or other motivational rewards deemed suitable by individual schools. Teachers "monitor" or watch student performance and teach skills that will "enhance reading" based on observations and review of diagnostic reports provided by the software.

Until recently, AR sold reading comprehension tests compiled on floppy disks or CDs. Schools could request specific tests or buy pre-made compilations of tests. Librarians typically purchased tests for schools, but teachers also ordered specific test disks as regular classroom resources, similar to textbooks or consumable workbooks. Today, AR has created the Accelerated Reader Enterprise package, charging schools different fees depending on the AR version already in use. According to the website, schools that already own a "desktop version of AR" are charged one flat fee for access ($599 in 2007; see http://www.renlearn.com/ar/Ordering Information/); schools that own a "Renaissance version" are charged no additional fee, but all schools are charged "an annual student fee of $1000 for 250 students or $4 a student" to access "Accelerated Reader Software," (more than 100,000 AR quizzes), "9 hours of Web-based Professional Development," and other support materials listed as professional development or technical support systems.

In summary, when schools participate in Reading Renaissance, students must choose and read books from specific reading zones based on personal standardized test scores for a specified number of minutes each day, take an Accelerated Reader test on the book, and then receive points based on their success with the AR test. This is a very specific way of participating in the act of reading-a way not necessarily related to reading for enjoyment or learning, but rather reading more as "job," where completion earns a specific reward.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

As a fourth-grade teacher in a rural public school, I used Accelerated Reader (AR) and Reading Renaissance (RR) for reading instruction. In fact, I was initially part of a school adoption team recommending these materials for schoolwide use. Our team believed AR would give children more opportunities to read and help build a lifelong love of reading-practices supported by best practices in literacy research (Cunningham & Ailington, 2003; Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Gambrell, Morrow, Neuman, & Pressley, 1999). We were committed to offering children lots of time for reading during the school day, providing a plethora of good reading materials in our school and classroom libraries, and creating a risk-free environment for reading. We also believed computers would give students additional motivation for reading and believed the diagnostic reports provided by the AR management software would be helpful in assessing students and interpreting reading information with families.

As we began to use AR and RR, however, I started to question its effectiveness with my students. I wondered what else, if anything, my students were learning when they read from a limited selection of books and took multiple-choice comprehension tests made up of only basic, literal questions. In this article, I consider lifelong love of reading, social learning, management, and motivation as important facets in learning to read, and I discuss ways AR shapes ideologies about those elements in students, teachers, and parents.

## THINKING BACK

Reflecting on past teaching practices helps practitioners clarify actions and engage in praxis (Freire, 1970), so, in selecting sites for more systematic reflection (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998) on teaching practices involving AR, I chose my former school setting and another similar rural school setting in the Midwest. Since I had been a teacher at one of the schools, I was privy to the ways AR worked there; I used as data the interest surveys completed by students and parents in conjunction with my many observational notes from time spent teaching with AR. At the other school site, I interviewed teachers about how the program was adopted and how it worked at the school. These experiences allowed me both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) views (Merriam, 1998) of the AR program in two different yet similar elementary schools.

I was also interested in the language people used in speaking about children's books and reading, so I used critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 1996, 2006) in the study. While doing my analysis, I considered my own sociocultural beliefs about reading, reading materials, and reading instruction (Apple, 1991; Calkins, 2001; Cunningham & Allington, 2003; Pearson & Stephens, 1994; Shannon, 1994; Smith, 2004). I also examined how power relations and political views were embedded in what interested stakeholders said about school reading activities and children's literature (Allington, 2002; Cunningham, 2005; Edmondson & Shannon, 2002; Jordan, 2005; Shannon, 2001; Taylor, 1998).

Gee's (2006) ideas about cultural or discourse models involving ways of acting, thinking, believing, and speaking about reading were important as I reflected on AR. I was also interested in how the students and teachers in this district had internalized patterns of Discourse (Gee suggested "Capital D" Discourse for all the ways people enact different identities in the world) and constructed identities of themselves as good readers.

Cultural models are taken-for-granted assumptions about what is normal or typical in the world (Gee, 1999;

2006). Upon entering my former elementary school, I found most classroom desks arranged in rows, bells that announced the beginning and ending of classes and recess, and teachers following (for the most part) a transmission model of teaching (Freire, 1970). The transmission model fits the constructed cultural model of what school is for many U.S. residents because that's how most of them were taught. Oftentimes with this model, teachers enact "a banking concept of education," where the teacher stands in front of the room and fills the children with knowledge, like money in a bank (p. 53).

THINKING BACK

A Lifelong Love of Reading

I began my reflective journey by thinking back to the adoption committee's original goal: building a lifelong love of reading. We were searching for ways to involve and engage our students in reading and believed AR would help us do just that. We wanted children to spend more time reading and find both joy and knowledge in what they were doing. Indeed, we were persuaded by the advertisement on the AR homepage stating that AR would, "Turn every student into a successful and lifelong reader!"

As I used and observed the program over the course of seven years, I realized the kind of reading celebrated with AR was very different from the cultural or discourse model that I valued. Instead of thinking of a good reader as a learner who found both pleasure and knowledge in reading, good readers were students who read a lot of books, frequently scored above 80% on AR tests, and accumulated a lot of AR points. The emphasis on numbers and efficiency through test scores and point totals encouraged a positivist and more behaviorist way of reading.

As my concerns gradually increased, I returned to anecdotal notes I took as a classroom teacher and recalled the following two incidents happening within weeks of one another.

Becky had a dreamy look on her face the day she approached me hugging her copy o/Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. "I finished it, Mrs. Schmidt," she said. "I'm ready to take the test, but I wish it wasn 't over. I loved this book!" The test consisted of 20 literal multiple-choice comprehension questions, and she answered them all correctly. She chose another book in the library, but just could not get started reading it. She needed more time to think about Roll of Thunder.

And then another reader,

"Do you like snakes? This is a King Cobra!" Kurt smiled broadly, pushing the book in front of my eyes as he waited to take an AR test. I recoiled and he giggled. "Did you know they make nests for their babies and they like to eat mice?" The test consisted of five literal multiple-choice comprehension questions, and Kurt answered two correctly. His body slumped as the score came across the screen of the computer, but he recovered quickly and ran off to the library to check out another book. This time the topic was dolphins.

Becky was a voracious and self-motivated reader who did not need basic teacher instruction or encouragement to read, but she sometimes chose difficult texts that contained complicated issues like the racism and prejudice addressed in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor, 1976). She needed the help of someone who was a head taller than her (Vygotsky's [1978] term for a more experienced person) to talk about issues she did not understand. For Kurt, reading was more difficult; he attended Title I remedial reading classes and needed closer teacher attention to ensure his basic success in reading. Scoring 40% on any test typically indicates failure; in this particular case, it actually meant reading this book did not count for Kurt because he had not passed the AR test. Yet, Kurt's impromptu and enthusiastic discussion with me seemed to signal engagement with the text and at least some understanding of cobras. Even though these children represented two very different kinds of readers in my classroom, it was easy to see AR was not building a lifelong love of reading in either one of them. Instead, Becky and Kurt were learning to consume books quickly and move on to another after answering questions either successfully or unsuccessfully.

Social Learning

Every child comes to school with a unique knowledge base, and good teachers try to help expand it (Ruddell, 1995). Learning from one another is one way to extend individual thinking, but working with others was not encouraged by AR. Becky, for instance, would have benefited from time spent revisiting, rereading, and questioning parts of Roll of Thunder to deepen her understanding of what was happening in this historical story. Kurt also would likely have learned even more from his snake book if he had had the opportunity to share his knowledge with other students and hear their ideas-qualities of reading based on Vygotsky's (1978) thinking about social learning and development. Reading Renaissance actually used Vygotsky's ideas to discuss the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in their own descriptions of the program, but it is important to carefully examine how they explain ZPD. In RR, students are to read independently for a specified period of time daily. Student reading levels are determined through standardized test scores and a chart provided by Renaissance Learning, Inc. that places students in the zone of proximal development. That zone is described in company literature as an efficient and automatic reading place for students. In the RR interpretation of these

zones, point goals are set for each week based on that ZPD. Students are informed of their individual reading zones and the number of points that are expected for each week; they are also encouraged to keep individual reading logs, monitored daily by the teacher, in which they record titles, authors, dates, and reading levels of books. (See http://www.renlearn.com/goalsettingchart.pdf for the actual chart used by RR.)

Vygotsky (1978), however, valued language in the development of the mind, and believed children learn from interacting socially and inventing their own ways of saying things. He saw the zone of proximal development as an area of learning in which children are receiving "support and assistance from experts and more capable peers" on tasks that would be too difficult for them to accomplish on their own; he defined the zone as "those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" (p. 86). Vygotsky believed interaction with a more knowledgeable other helps learners acquire higher psychological functions intellectually. However, students placed in RR's "zone of proximal development" read books independently and receive guidance only in determining book selection. So while the ZPD according to Vygotsky might be considered the instructional level of the child, RR's zone of proximal development is the independent reading level, because it determines the appropriate reading level children will use to successfully negotiate books alone during independent reading time. AR test results are examples of completed learning, not the generative knowledge about mental capacity that Vygotsky referred to in his zone of proximal development. For Becky and Kurt, the opportunity to read the book with other students and talk about it with a more knowledgeable adult would have have resulted in experiences that more closely fit Vygotsky's ideas about the zone of proximal development.

Management

Just as limiting talk after reading shaped the learning of students during class reading time, it may also have been related to behavior management. During observations in both school sites, I noticed when children returned to classrooms after lunch, recess, or specials, teachers asked them to take out their "AR books" and read for a few moments. This worked in several ways. Teachers had time to organize materials for the next work period, children quieted down as they read, and their "docile bodies" became ready for school work time (Boldt, 2001; Foucault, 1978). Reading Renaissance had become an important part of how children were socialized into doing the quiet work of school. In other words, reading was meant to quiet children as a way to manage behavior, not to further knowledge or pleasure.

One librarian told me she thought AR was the "way for teachers to tell if students were really reading." As she more fully explained to me, "teachers didn't have time to read a lot of books," and AR helped them make sure children understood or comprehended the reading. Her comments were similar to the words Renaissance Learning used on their Web pages and in their promotional literature.

The ways books in the library were marked (Irvine & Gal, 2000) and sorted was also behaviorist in nature. To help students explore both the library and classroom book collections more quickly and easily, AR books were marked with reading levels and housed in a particular section of the library. Not only did this seem to make students more efficient with time during checkout, but it also privileged AR books as more desirable than non-AR books in both school and classroom libraries. NonAR books remained unmarked and became almost invisible to children who entered the library in search of new books to read, for students had an AR quota to fill and needed an AR book to fill it.

The AR quota shaped teachers' decisions as well. Because children did not receive credit for reading books that were not AR books, teachers did not assign or use them as frequently. Unmarked books were undesirable until the school librarian either purchased the AR test or a teacher created a test. Current books (often award-winning books such as the Caldecott and Newbery Award titles) were typically found on the non-AR shelves until tests were purchased. The money spent by school districts to keep the AR management software up-to-date was typically money that might otherwise have been spent for enriching library collections.

Motivation

One major component of AR is motivation; in using this component, some schools allow students to purchase items with AR points at a school store. Neither of the schools I visited used this overt motivational component of AR; however, it was clear that teachers on both faculties were unaware of the subtle connections between reading and the extrinsic motivation within the AR program itself. Teachers believed the use of the extrinsic motivators in the program were eliminated when they did not award children with toys or candy, but no one considered the idea that the bright screen colors and the strong appeal of using computers were, in fact, extrinsic motivators. Kohn (1996) referred to the Accelerated Reader software as a gameshow style computer program, and that is a reward in and of itself. In addition, children still received points for the books they were reading, a system that certainly acted as an extrinsic motivator for students. Ultimately, these rewards should be considered punitive because they try to manipulate behavior-not that different from the prizes that were so adamantly opposed.

When I asked teachers in the study if AR encouraged reading, several told me AR especially motivated

struggling readers. Cunningham (2005), however, challenged Accelerated Reader as a motivator for struggling readers, suggesting instead that read-alouds, classroom libraries with diverse genres, and teachers who monitor and encourage children through instruction are more effective motivators than AR's game-show format and points-to-prizes rewards. Building a lifelong love of reading requires intrinsic motivation, as Cunningham suggests, rather than AR's extrinsic motivation.

Reading in this study's RR classrooms was more like a competition than an academic subject or discipline. Children were very aware of who was reading what books and at what level. Different reading levels and the number of accumulated points created a way for students to identify the good readers in every classroom. Picturebooks were only worth .5 points because their length and level of difficulty diminished their value according to the readability formula, but novels like Charlotte's Web (White, 1952) or The secret Garden (Burnett, 1911) were worth 20-30 points. Students began to understand that the better readers were those who were reading books worth more points.

At one point when I was teaching, I assigned the book Dakota Dugout (Turner, 1985) as reading for a social studies unit. When a student asked me if he had to take the AR test because the book was below his reading level, I became concerned. Although the student admitted enjoying the book and learning new information from it, he did not want the average reading level of Dakota Dugout to decrease the reading level on his monthly AR diagnostic report. School reading had become so number-driven to him that his purpose for reading was not to learn something new or enjoy a book; his purpose was to amass points and increase the numerical value of his reading level.

Returning to texts for repeated readings had also become a luxury. Children did not want to reread books they had already read independently because they could not retake the test once it had been taken. If they reread a book related to a science or social studies theme, it would not count towards the total AR points for the week since the book had been previously read. These books became undesirable.

Reading books and answering literal comprehension questions about them is one way to determine if children comprehend what they read, and evaluating reading comprehension in this way is important in an NCLB world that measures student reading achievement with standardized test scores. The AR website claims that Renaissance progress-monitoring assessments (like AR and RR) are supported by a vast body of scientific research and meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind. However, much of this research has been financially supported by Renaissance Learning (the parent company of AR and RR) or conducted by researchers affiliated with the company. (A list of the current board of directors is located at the Renaissance Learning website.) For example, Accelerated Reader was developed and made available to schools by Judith and Terrance Paul in 1986. Since that time, Terrance Paul has been involved in a variety of research projects related to the study of AR and the development of RR (Paul, 2003). Paul and his wife, Judith, own 75% of the stock in Renaissance Learning, and he is the President and CEO of the company. This information, combined with his position as co-founder of the program, raises questions about his research.

A more in-depth review of the literature about Accelerated Reader indicated a mixed bag of results. Librarians often approve AR because circulation figures boom with the initiation of programs like these (Kirschenman, 1999). Some research found Accelerated Reader to be a potentially useful tool for increasing quantity and quality of reading practice for student reading achievement and praised the high level of teacher training and support that AR provided (Goodman, 1999; Topping, 1999). Other studies did not find a significant increase in reading comprehension scores with students who used AR (Mathis, 1996; Pavonetti, Brimmer & Cipielewski, 2003). Pavonetti, Brimmer and Cipielewski noted that although AR encouraged students to read more books and therefore increased reading achievement, middle school students who had used AR in sixth grade scored lower on reading achievement tests than students who had not.

A recent study by Mallette, Henk, & Melnick (2004) suggested that AR positively influenced attitudes toward academic reading but not recreational reading, a factor often associated with increased levels of reading achievement (Anderson, Wilson, Fielding, 1988; Taylor, Fry, & Maruyama, 1990). Findings from the study also suggested that AR may actually contribute to lowering the affective orientations of low-achieving males since the public nature of student performance in AR and its focus on social comparative information could be detrimental to those who do not have high perceptions of themselves as readers. Motivating low-achieving males is one reason many districts purchase AR.

Krashen (2003) extensively reviewed experimental research on reading management programs to study four aspects of AR: access to books, time devoted to reading, tests, and rewards. Although Krashen's review suggested that AR allowed access to books and more time for reading, he also noted that teachers do not need to use AR to provide children with more books or more time to read. He found no evidence that supported the idea that quizzes and prizes have a favorable and lasting effect on how much children read or how well they read. He also noted that research typically supports the thinking that Accelerated Reader could likely have the opposite effect on a student's reading achievement and motivation to read.

REVISITING MY FORMER STUDENTS

As my fourth-grade students continued into middle school, I wondered how students like Becky and Kurt interpreted AR once they were a year older. I knew that teachers at their middle school (grades 5-8) had decided to implement RR, and I wanted to see how my students were managing. When I entered the classroom, I found the students engaged in a reflective discussion about themselves as readers while their teacher recorded their words on the board.

* It makes you feel good when you can read.

* You can feel like you're in a different time and lifestyle.

* When you read a lot, you get better at other things, too.

* Now I understand words that I never heard before.

* I think reading stimulates my mind.

The ease and willingness my former students displayed in talking about themselves as successful readers pleased me, but I also realized many of these students knew me well and were aware of my passion and beliefs about reading. They had spent a year in my classroom, and words I used to talk about reading were now being used by my former students. The likelihood that this talk was meant to please their teacher and me did not lessen my positive impression, but it did encourage triangulation of information in my study.

The attitude surveys distributed to students and their parents (see Figure la & b) provided another look at the language children and parents used to describe Reading Renaissance. I asked children to tell me three important things about Accelerated Reader.

* We log-in and log-out and put down the page you started and the page you stopped.

* We have reading levels to check out the right books for us.

* We have weekly and quarterly goals that we try to meet.

* Don't wander around at reading time.

* You need to know that reading hast [sic] to be long like an hower [sic].

* Makes you feel good after you take a test and it makes you happy for getting a good percentage.

* We get our level highered [sic] if we're doing good [sic] and understanding our books.

These responses had a behavioristic and traditional feel, and there was nothing in the survey responses about "feeling good" or "traveling to a different time and lifestyle." Students quantified reading in their descriptions by mentioning reading levels, length of reading time, percentages, and goals related to points. These were not the same qualities of reading that children verbally expressed the day I visited their classroom.

When asked what they knew about AR, parents' responses also mirrored the official language of the program.

* Children have goals and each book has a number of points. A test is given on each book via the computer.

* Children are reading books of their own choice, at their own level, and are progressing at their own individual pace. They take computerized tests to check their comprehension.

* It is a program to challenge young readers to become better readers, at a level they are capable of. They set goals to achieve higher levels.

Specific phrases such as "individual pace," "challenge young readers to become better," and "a level they are capable of are all words related to progress. When parents mention setting goals to achieve higher readings levels, they borrow from discourses often used in business and industry. While I wondered if students and parents felt constrained by the AR book choices or by the concept of reading levels, neither group mentioned these factors. I wondered if parents and students appreciated and valued the 60 minutes of reading time every day, or if they felt students needed more time to respond to literature in a variety of ways. They did not mention this either. Their answers talked about the benefits of the program in numerical terms, but nothing pointed to deeper involvement with books. I realized we were teaching adults and children something other than what we claimed to believe were the intrinsic qualities that build lifelong readers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

Influential teachers matter in the literacy lives of their students (Ruddell, 1995); so do parents. Teachers who advise parents and guardians about ways to help children become lifelong readers create partnerships to strengthen that influence and create even better readers. As long ago as 1978, Rosenblatt discussed the function of the text (or poem) in the reading process. According to Rosenblatt, as the reader focuses on a text, the words (or picture, drama, music) stimulate prior knowledge and experience, but also regulate what is possible or sensible in meaning making (p. 11). The author and reader are both important as meaning is created because the reader transacts with the text as it is read. When another party (such as a teacher or a

company like Accelerated Reader) writes comprehension questions, another meaning maker becomes involved in the reading process, thereby complicating the site of transaction through an increase in prior knowledge and life experience. Meaning making or transaction is compromised by power and is no longer personal for the individual reader when the questionasker regulates what is important about the text. If, as Rosenblatt said, a text is only "a set of black marks on ordered pages or a set of sounds vibrating in the air waiting for a reader to interpret them" (p. 13), then comprehension questions asked by any third party (e.g. teacher, parent, or publisher) are problematic.

Different kinds of literature response are important for deep meaning making (Calkins, 2001; Cullinan & Galda, 2006; Samway & Whang, 1996; Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 2002). Writing about reading, sketching about reading, and dramatizing what was read are just a few of the suggested responses that can help children envision and expand meaning garnered from books (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). Question asking is also an important part of that process. Who should be asking the questions, however? Researchers (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Simpson, 1996) discovered children were capable of asking questions that led to important critical thinking; empowering children in this way will lead to higher interest in reading (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Cunningham & Allington, 2003). Listening in on student literature discussions gives teachers access to what is important to every student in their classrooms. AR advertised itself as a tool to help teachers "manage individualized reading," and their advertisements asked such questions as, "How could a teacher know whether students comprehended what they read?" Persuasive phrasing such as this carries the implication that teachers are not capable of determining whether or not students understand reading materials. This is quite an assumption, given that methods of reading instruction and assessment are part of every teacher education course, and certified teachers are professionals who use a variety of methods to ascertain a child's comprehension and understanding of reading materials. It demeans the teaching profession to imply that teachers need help with managing student reading. The fact is, teachers must be their own public relations firms in this age of accountability and heavy mandates for reading achievement; share information about your classroom goals, methods of teaching and assessment, and strategies for individualizing instruction with parents and guardians in newsletters and at parent-teacher conferences.

The father and son in the bookstore at the beginning of this article can teach us a lesson about reading instruction if we let them. They helped me remember and reflect on my own past literacy teaching and critically consider how these practices shaped the learning of children. Although teachers are ultimately responsible for encouraging readers to read for many purposes, we must also work hard to make sure we are not sending messages about reading that we do not intend. When schools use reading to quiet children and create silent classrooms, when schools teach children long books are worth more points than short books, and when schools teach children to consume books and regurgitate answers, we are doing parents and students a grave disservice.

Preparing children to be the kinds of readers they will need to be in the 21st century will require a blend of reading done in different situations at home and in school. If we continue to let AR ask the questions, we may very well lose the interest of our students and create literal readers who only want to "get points" and be done with reading. That's not teaching and that's not reading. Let us not forget what we do and what we want for our students.

**Sidebar**

Reflecting on past teaching practices helps practitioners clarify actions and engage in praxis.

**Sidebar**

Becky and Kurt were learning to consume books quickly and move on.

**Sidebar**

Non-AR books remained unmarked and became almost invisible to children who entered the library in search of new books to read, for students had an AR quota to fill and needed an AR book to fill it.

**Sidebar**

School reading had become so number-driven to [this student] that his purpose for reading was not to learn something new or enjoy a book.

**Sidebar**

Meaning making or transaction is compromised by power and is no longer personal for the individual reader when the question-asker regulates what is important about the text.

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