

TO READ OR NOT TO READ: WHAT ARE HIGH  
SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF ACCELERATED READER?

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore ninth through twelfth grade students' perceptions of Accelerated Reader and how the program has impacted their literacy practices in and out of school. This study explored students' perceptions of AR through a mixed-method approach. The first form of data collection was a twenty-question reading survey. The second form of data was collected qualitatively through focus group discussions and individual interviews. The results of the study show that the level of implementation of AR does affect overall reading interests of students, attitudes toward reading, and reading practices.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to many people that have helped me through this journey. First of all, it is dedicated to my parents, Houston and Lana Windle and my brother, John. They have been the guiding force throughout this journey and there is no way that I could have made it without them. Secondly, this dissertation is dedicated to my cousins, Karen, David, Veni, Kiah, and Joanne and my other extended family such as my Aunt Jane and Aunt Bobbie, and Uncle Don who have been such an influence in me finishing this project. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my grandmothers, Inez Boyett and Mina Windle, who believed in the power of education and to my grandfathers, who believed in educating their children starting with my aunts in the 1940s to my parent in the 1970s and then extending this wish to their grandchildren, who all have received college degrees.

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CHAPTER I:  
INTRODUCTION

**Background**

After spending eight years as a school librarian, I decided to continue my graduate studies by pursuing a doctorate in adolescent literacy. Since I was a toddler, reading has always been my passion. When I became a librarian, I quickly fell in love with young adult literature and adolescent literacy. The following narrative describes why I have chosen to explore my interests in adolescent literacy.

I began my career as a school librarian in the late 1990s. It was from my experience as a school librarian that I developed a love of literature and a passion for encouraging and motivating students to read for pleasure as well as for academic purposes. I have seen firsthand that when students are engaged with books they love, they are more apt to read for pleasure, to gain self-confidence as readers, and to become life-long readers.

During my first year as a school librarian, my school district implemented the computerized reading program, Accelerated Reader. Since my career first began in the elementary grades, I worked with the same students who participated in the program in kindergarten through eighth grade. Since both the elementary school and middle school were housed in the same building, the middle school librarian and myself worked closely together to implement an Accelerated Reader program that carried students from kindergarten through eighth grade.

However, it was during my fourth year at my school that I began to question Accelerated Reader. During that year, I began to see a change in many students' attitudes toward the program. Since I worked with the majority of these students since kindergarten, I knew their interests and reading habits. Therefore, I began to have many conversations with students in third, fourth, and fifth grade about the program. Many of these students were disgruntled about reading because of the program. Therefore, I began to question the program myself. Many of my students were becoming complacent readers because they were annoyed with having to read certain books based on their reading levels. It was on one such occasion that I had a third-grade student come into my office crying because he could not read a book about dinosaurs because it was not in his reading range. It was at this particular moment that I really started to pay attention to my students' perceptions toward Accelerated Reader and how the program was affecting their reading habits.

They also did not like the notion that the majority of their reading grade was based on their point goals. Many, not all, of their teachers would only let them read books that were in their reading range when they wanted to read books that they found interesting. Because of these expectations, many students became frustrated and began to have a negative attitude toward reading. I found that many students were not motivated to read because they wanted to or if they were interested in a particular topic, but they would only read to make a certain grade or get a prize at the end of the grading period.

After eight years as an elementary librarian, I spent three years in a high school as a teacher and a librarian. It was during my years in high school that I noticed that many adolescents continued to have a negative attitude toward reading for both academic and recreational purposes. They were not motivated to read for pleasure. Therefore, I began to

question many of my students about their reading practices. Many of them possessed a negative attitude toward reading because of their elementary and middle school experiences with Accelerated Reader.

### **Statement of the Problem**

One of the current “hot topics” in the domain of literacy is adolescent literacy (Alexander & Fox, 2011). The importance of this topic is apparent in many venues across the country, especially in secondary schools. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2008), the nation’s report card, over two-thirds of all eighth graders read below grade level. Over half of these students are so far behind that they score below the basic level of reading and read at least two equivalent grade levels below their peers. In total, more than six million students in the secondary grades are struggling readers (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009).

Federal, state, and local government entities are struggling with ways in which to address the literacy concerns of adolescents in schools. One concern that consistently emerges in research studies is keeping adolescents engaged in school activities and in literacy practices (Appleman, 2010; Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009).

Research has shown that many adolescents have negative perceptions of school in general (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Since 2004, the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at Indiana University has conducted survey research with over 300,000 students in 29 states to investigate student motivation to participate in school activities. One-third of the students reported that they spend no time in school activities; 40% of them spend one hour or less per week on written homework; 55% spend only a little more time than an hour on reading and studying in class; and only 17% of students devote more than five hours per week to written

work. Only 9% spend at least five hours of time reading and studying in class (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009). These results have made educators across the country realize the need to, not only create school environments that are engaging, but to continuously promote literacy activities that motivate students to want to become more involved in school and to develop literacy practices that will allow them to advance to the post-secondary level and into the workforce (Beaufort, 2009).

Another concern of adolescent literacy is that research continues to show that current curricular practices in today's classrooms do not match the needs of today's adolescents. Today's adolescents, known as Generation X, are technologically savvy and are known as digital natives. They have been born into a world of new literacies that encompass cellular phones, iPads, iPods, digital media, and advanced technical skills that far surpass their teachers and parents (Lei, 2009; Miller, 2010; Appleman, 2010). However, research shows that the majority of current curriculum practices do not engage the interests of today's adolescents (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009).

Therefore, many school communities are scrambling to find motivational tools that not only engage students in literacy activities which allow them to promote literacy skills, to motivate students to read more, to increase literacy practices in and out-of school, to create life-long readers, and to increase student achievement but also to merge these literacy practices with technology. To address the concerns of technology savvy adolescents as well as the crisis in adolescent literacy practices, many school communities have turned to computerized reading programs such as Accelerated Reader to motivate students to increase their literacy practices and to also pique their literacy with technology (Toppings & Fisher, 2003).

There are many computerized reading programs to meet the needs of technology savvy adolescents, but the Accelerated Reader Program is the most widely used and is the most popular. Since the late 1990s, Accelerated Reader has been implemented in over 65,000 schools across the United States, Europe, and Australia (Renaissance Learning, 2011). This computerized reading program was created to motivate students to read large quantities of books based on their individualized reading levels. The overarching purpose behind the program is that the more students read, the likelihood that they will be engaged in reading for pleasure and therefore become lifelong readers increases (Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipelewski, 2000). The premises of the program are that students are motivated to read by setting individualized reading goals and passing computerized quizzes that test comprehension. The approach of the model is a comprehensive framework that allows for educators to individualize and improve learning outcomes for every student. The framework is designed to support any curriculum and focuses on developing informational technology, professional development, consulting, and support to help educators integrate information in all areas of instruction (Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 2007).

With this in mind, research does show that the Accelerated Reader (AR) framework has been effective in motivating students to read (Florida Center for Reading Research, 2007; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2007). However, the research is inconsistent on how students' perceive the computerized reading program (Nunnery, Ross, & McDonald, 2006; Biggers, 2001; Krashen, 2001). Another aspect of this problem is the limited amount of empirical research (Krashen, 2001; Luck, 2010) that has studied the long-term effects and perceptions of AR on students when they leave elementary school and enter the secondary grades (Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipelewski, 2003). A third aspect of this problem is the lack of empirical research that

explores the framework of Accelerated Reader and how it shaped adolescents' perceptions of themselves as readers and how they value reading. Therefore, more valid and empirical research is needed to explore high school students' perceptions of Accelerated Reader and how it influenced their in-and-out of school reading practices.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore AR's impact on students in grades 9-12 who participated in the program as elementary and middle school students. Because of the lack of empirical research, this study adds to current research in determining how AR has affected adolescent literacy practices.

First, the study was a mixed-method study from the students' perspectives. Research shows that a strong complaint with adolescents is that they feel that their voices are not heard (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009). Therefore, this study solely explored students' experiences with Accelerated Reader. Secondly, the study explored AR's long-term effectiveness on students in grades 9-12 who participated in the program in the elementary and middle school grades as they transitioned into high school. Finally, this study explored all the parts of the program to determine the program's overall effectiveness.

Most importantly, this study allows members of the school community an inside perspective on how students feel about not only their participation in Accelerated Reader, but attitudes toward reading and their literacy practices in and out-of school. This will help them to adjust their curriculum as well as their classroom literacy practices.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the study:

1. What are high school students' perceptions regarding Accelerated Reader; and

2. What are high school students' perceptions in how Accelerated Reader has impacted their in and out-of-school reading habits?

### **Research Design**

In order to examine these questions, mixed methods research was utilized with a strong emphasis in qualitative research. Mixed methods research utilizes the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative research, which is a component of mixed methods research, is a means of testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2009). In order to examine how AR has impacted students' reading practices, questions from the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) will first be distributed to participants in the data collection process. This reading profile explored a sample of the population through 20 questions; 15 multiple choice based on a 4-point scale and 5 open ended questions.

Another form of research within mixed methods is qualitative research. According to Hatch (2002), "qualitative research is utilized when the intent of the researcher is to explore human behaviors within the contexts of their natural occurrence and to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it" (p. 7). Qualitative data collection was in the form of the focus groups and one-on-one interviews from the perspectives of students in grades 9-12 who participated in Accelerated Reader in grades K-8.

The study took place in the southeastern region of the United States. The participants in the study were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Participants must have participated in the Accelerated Reader program in grades K-8; and
2. Participants must be students in grades 9-12

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations that occurred during this study. First, the population was limited. The population for this study was very small and served only one type of population that included three small, rural K-12 schools. In order to gain further insight on students' perceptions of AR and how the program has affected their reading practices, it would have made the study stronger if a sample of an urban and suburban population could have been used to compare the results.

Secondly, my time was very limited within the schools. I only had a certain time period assigned to me by the district administration that I could have access to students. I would have liked to have more individual interviews, especially from Vinemont School and Southmont School. Because of the hardship of cooperation from administration, I felt like I had to collect data very quickly. Therefore, I do not feel that I saturated my data as well as I could. Based on some of the students' responses in the focus groups, I would like to have conducted more follow-up interviews.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I is an introduction to the study. Chapter II provides a review of the current literature that is pertinent to the study. Chapter III is an explanation of the methodology and research design. Chapter IV discusses the results of the study. Finally, Chapter V discusses the implications of the findings and recommendations for future research.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of the study, the following terms are critical.

*Accelerated Reader (AR)* – A computerized reading program designed to motivate students to read large quantities of books (Renaissance Learning, 2007).

*Adolescence* – A series of transitions that involve the emergence of cognitive capacities for more abstract and advanced thought; plus the transitions into new institutions and social situations (Alexander & Fox, 2011).

*Adolescents* – Students in secondary schools within grade levels 6-12 (Latrobe & Drury, 2009).

*Developing Reader* – Students who possess a lack of learning activities or who had inadequate reading experiences in earlier grades (Miller, 2009).

*Dormant Reader* – Students who read in order to pass their classes or do well on state assessments but never embrace reading as a worthwhile pursuit outside of school (Miller, 2009).

*Engagement* – To occupy the attention or efforts of a person (Guthrie, Alo, Rhinehart, 1997).

*Extrinsic Motivation* – Refers to motivation that comes from outside the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Guthrie, Alo, Rhinehart, 1997).

*High School Grades* – Grades 9-12

*Intrinsic Motivation* – Personal motivation derived from self-initiated achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Guthrie, Alo, & Rhinehart, 1997).

*Literacy* – Encompasses reading, writing, and a variety of social and intellectual practices that call upon the voice as well as the eye and the hand. The definition also extends to new media which includes nondigitized multimedia, digitized media, and hypertext or hypermedia (Appleman, 2010).

*Motivation* – The beliefs, values, needs, and goals that individuals possess (Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, & Seunarinesingh, 2007).

*Reading* – The use of product and principles of the writing system to get at the meaning of the written text (Rueda, 2011).

*Self-Efficacy* – A person's judgments of his or her ability to perform an activity and the effect this perception has on the future conduct of the activity (Henk & Melnick, 1995).

*STAR Reading* – A software component of Accelerated Reader that administers reading tests to determine the Grade Equivalent (GE) scores that the ZPD range is used to determine the levels of books in which a student can select (Florida Center for Reading Research, 2007).

*Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)* – A specified block of time set aside everyday for students to read for recreational and academic purposes (Florida Center for Reading Research, 2007).

*Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* – The belief that practice considered too easy does not improve skills and practice considered too difficult frustrates the learner (Vygotsky, 1978).

CHAPTER II:  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

**Overview**

This chapter will review the literature that is pertinent to this study. First, there is a lack in empirical research focusing on AR's effectiveness in grades 9-12 (Krashen 2001; Biggers, 2001; Luck, 2010). In order to understand why there is a gap in the literature, it is imperative to take a broad look at how today's adolescents have given the definition of literacy new contexts, which include multiliteracies, and how their literacy practices relate to current research on adolescent literacy. Then, there is a rationale for why it is important to merge literacy practices with technology in order to pique students' interests in literacy practices and why educators have chosen Accelerated Reader as a means to increase student achievement.

Once this was determined, then literature was reviewed on the Accelerated Reader program. An historical overview of the program was given along with the components of the program, the philosophy behind the program, and how it is utilized in the classroom. Following an overview of Accelerated Reader, studies only focusing on Accelerated Reader and the secondary grades were reviewed.

Finally, a rationale will be drawn based on the current literature that identified the implications for this research study, why there are mixed reviews concerning the overall effectiveness of AR on grades 9-12, and why there is a need for this study.

## **Adolescent Literacy**

### **History of Adolescent Literacy**

Historically, literacy has been defined in different ways (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009). Resnick and Resnick (1977) defined literacy as an evolution of four stages that describes the different types and the levels of performance (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009). The first stage is the signature stage. This phase occurred during the 1930s during the initial voting process in the United States, which was simply the ability to write one's name on a voting ballot.

The next stage is known as the recitation phase. During this phase, literacy proficiency was known not only as the ability to read and write, but also the recitation of passages from memory. The recitation of passages did not require understanding or comprehending the words (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009). The third stage of literacy can be defined as the comprehension stage. This stage requires not only reading, writing, and recitation, but also a literal understanding of text (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009). The final stage of literacy is known as the analysis stage. This stage recognizes how a reader engages with text. This engagement involves both higher levels of critical comprehension.

As the 21<sup>st</sup>-century approached, literacy educators began to realize that literacy is much deeper than just reading, writing, and comprehending text as was previously thought. Therefore, other approaches to literacy began to evolve. According to Vacca, Vacca, and Mraz (2011), "Literacy is a dynamic concept that is continually evolving and can fluctuate from one social culture to another" (p. 7). "Literacy has now come to represent a synthesis of language, thinking, and contextual practices through which people come to make meaning" (p. 7). Because of this, the concept of literacy has expanded in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century to include adolescent literacy.

Today, adolescence can be defined as “a series of transitions that involve the emergence of cognitive capacities for more abstract and advanced thought; plus the new transitions into institutions and social situations” (Alexander & Fox, 2011). According to the 2010 Census Bureau, over 43 million people are adolescents aged 10-19 with a population that is more racially, ethnically, and diverse. Historically, literacy research solely focused on the literacy development and practices of young children, but with the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, standardized testing has increased and educators have come to realize that there is a decrease in the literacy practices of adolescents (Appleman, 2010). In order to address the decrease in overall adolescent literacy practices, adolescent literacy research has slowly evolved into a new way of thinking that not only broadens the definition of literacy to include multiliteracies, but also to include the context (how, where, and when) (Christenbury, 2009; Appleman, 2010). Therefore, in order to understand today’s adolescents, the contexts of literacy must be extended in order to understand the transition into new institutions, the social situations of adolescents, and multiliteracies must be addressed.

### **Physiological, Psychosocial, and Cognitive Development**

The first context of adolescent literacy is understanding the physiological, psychosocial, and cognitive development of adolescents. These contexts are key in understanding adolescent literacy practices. Alexander and Fox (2011) took a closer look at these contexts. They reported that the physiological, psychosocial, and cognitive development of adolescents affect their reading practices in and out of school because their identities are formed through their desire to read about their transition into adolescence through literature. Plus, as they transition into adolescence, the neurological changes affect their cognitive capacities in reading for comprehension. Furthermore, these cognitive, physiological, and psychosocial changes do cause

conflicts between their existing knowledge and the content of the text that also impacts comprehension. These conflicts that occur also affect students' ability to regulate their reading for maximum performance and apply strategies that aide in not only comprehension, but also in their reader identity. Therefore, as adolescents make the transition into the secondary grades, many of them have different physiological, psychosocial, and cognitive development levels that impact their literacy development. Furthermore, adolescence can be a "tumultuous time in which the changes in their physiological, psychosocial, and cognitive development is a fast and furious transition in searching for identity becomes more pronounced" (Letcher, 2011, p. 90).

Nevertheless, Appleman (2010) also examined the physiological, psychosocial, and cognitive development of adolescents. She believes that the physiological, psychosocial, and cognitive development of adolescents is still shifting as they transition from elementary school to middle and high school. Her research has shown that even though the majority of adolescents have learned a number of the basic processes of reading and writing, they still need to master literacy practices that are unique to different levels, disciplines, and situations.

Like Appleman (2010), Deshler, Pailnscar, Biancarosa, and Nair (2007) also reiterated in their research that the transition from the familiar to the unfamiliar presents academic and social difficulties for many students and because of the time restraints, effective literacy instruction decreases and it becomes difficult for teachers to assess students' literacy needs. The physiological, psychosocial, and cognitive development of adolescents also weighs heavily on how they perceive themselves as readers. The way in which adolescents identify themselves as readers affects their success in school achievement and in and out-of school literacy practices (Alexander & Fox, 2011; Appleman, 2010).

**Reader Identities.** According to Lewis and DeValle (2009), the way in which students' identify themselves as readers shape their perceptions of adolescent literacy. Historically, reader identity has been theorized in three different ways. In the 1970s and 1980s, identity was seen as stable and unified. In the 1990s and 2000s, identity was theorized as negotiable and performative. Currently, identity is seen as improvisational, metadiscursive, and hybrid. They further argued that identity does relate to adolescent literacy depending on how it is conceptualized.

With this in mind, Miller (2009) also examined the conceptualization of reader identities. Through years of action research as a teacher, she identifies three different concepts of reader identity. The first type of reader that she conceptualized is known as the struggling reader or developing reader. This type of student struggles in understanding material in everyday capacities and has already experienced reading interventions in elementary and middle school. The majority of these students scores low on assessments and often have already failed a grade. Because of inconsistencies on their cognitive development, many of these students lack the basic skills to comprehend text. They do not possess the confidence or the perception that they will never become a strong reader.

The second type of reader described is a dormant reader. A dormant reader is the majority of students in secondary classrooms. These types of readers pass assignments and assessments with flying colors but are not motivated to read material that is not required of them. The students categorized as dormant readers tend to “fall between the cracks” of teachers and school personnel and view reading as a chore instead of as pleasure.

The third type of reader described is known as an underground reader. Underground readers love to read and can be found reading during lunch, after a test, and sometimes during

classroom instruction. These students are those that are gifted and avid readers. They perceive the reading and literature they are asked to read for assignments as totally disconnected from their individual reading preferences.

Furthermore, Henk and Melnick (1995) also examined reader identities in their study in which they created the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS). The framework behind the survey is based on the theory of self-efficacy, which is how a person judges him or herself on the ability and the future conduct of the ability. The study focused on intermediate students and results from the study show that students who make positive identities with reading tend to read more often, for longer periods of time, and with greater intensity. In other words, the deeper engagement a reader has with a text in turn translates into superior reading achievement.

**Student Voices.** A second context of adolescent literacy that influences the transition into new institutions is the concept of student voices. Adolescents today want their voices to be recognized through their literacy experiences. Intrator and Kunzman (2009) explored this concept in their research on today's adolescents and youth voice by examining the role of student voices in different contexts of adolescent literacy. In their research, they discovered that schools have been struggling with engaging adolescents in curriculum. This lack of engagement has transpired from years of adolescents feeling tracked, sorted, and labeled and without their voices recognized. The overwhelming response from students is that they think school is boring. Even though research has explored this issue, educators still tend to ignore this context that contributes to the cost of adolescent engagement and motivation. (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009) Furthermore, the researchers conclude that educators need to listen more carefully to adolescents concerning what matters to them in the classroom and understand the broader contextual forces that shape

their identity toward learning. Therefore, it is imperative that students' voices be heard (Deshler, Palinscar, Biancarosa, & Nair, 2007).

**Motivation and Engagement.** The lack of student voice within the classroom affects students' motivation and engagement in not only literacy experiences, but school in general (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Alexander & Fox, 2011; Intrator & Kunzman, 2009). Research has shown that many students are unmotivated to read and perform other literacy tasks such as writing because many of these practices look the same. They read to complete chapters in a book, take a test, and repeat the process all over again (Miller, 2009). With this in mind, many secondary students have a lack of interest and motivation in reading and possess a negative attitude toward school in general (Ivey and Broaddus, 2001).

According to Gambrell (1996), when students are engaged, learning becomes a deeper, richer experience that is not only cognitive, but also aesthetic. Once this level of engagement increases, students develop into mature and effective readers that possess both the skill and the will. Once students possess the skill and the will, then they are engaged not only in motivation, but also to become more knowledgeable about a particular subject, strategically develop their own mechanisms to decode text, and are socially interactive in sharing their knowledge with others.

Nonetheless, Guthrie, Alo, and Rhinehart (1997) also explored the meaning of engagement in their study. They concluded that once a student becomes an engaged reader, then they are deeply motivated intrinsically to become committed to the subject matter, a desire to learn the content, increase their self-confidence as a reader, and possess a drive to share their knowledge with their peers. Furthermore, they examined that there are two types of motivation that drives students to read. The first type of motivation is intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic

motivation is linked with deeper cognitive and aesthetic strategies that motivate students to read a text. A second type of motivation is extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is often perceived as negative motivation. Students who are motivated to read extrinsically desire to obtain grades, prizes, and social approval. This type of motivation tends to consist of competition and employs a use of weak strategies of decoding and comprehension (Guthrie, Alo & Rhinehart, 1997).

Research conducted by Pitcher, et al (2007) also examines the meaning of engagement and motivation. Through their development of the Adolescents Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP), they devised survey and conversational interview protocol that examines adolescents' motivation to read. In their study, they administered the AMRP to 384 students across five regions of the United States and the Caribbean. Out of the 384 participants who took the survey, 100 were interviewed. Results of the study showed five main themes:

1. *Students' perceptions of themselves as readers.* Students' view of reading did not include the reading of magazines, email, games, or other leisure reading for pleasure and did not include any academic reading. Students' identities as readers coincided with their reading choices and overall enjoyment of reading (p. 381);
2. *Multiliteracies.* Students' use of multiliteracies included newspapers, magazines, and the frequent use of computers (p. 382);
3. *Family and Friends.* Students' use of multiliteracies involving family and friends had a considerable influence on what they read. These influences occurred through recommendations of books and informal talk;
4. *Teachers and Instructional Methods.* Teachers' use of reading materials in instructional settings weighed heavily on piquing student engagement (p. 383);

5. *Choice.* Students identified the importance of choice in their literacies along with the positive impact of when teachers gave them choices in selecting their own preferences in assignments (p. 383);

They further concluded that once students become deeply engaged, they become motivated with a text that allows them to use their own strategies to make connections and share their knowledge by socially interacting with their peers.

In order to understand how motivation affects reading achievement, Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) investigated how students' reading motivation related to the amount and breadth of their reading. In their study, the reading components assessed were self-efficacy, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, goals, and social practice. The participants in the study were intermediate students (n=105). The students completed the MRQ (Motivation to Read Questionnaire) twice during the school year. The students' reading amounts were measured through personal diaries and questionnaires. The results of the study show that reading is multidimensional and that reading motivation predicted reading amount and breadth even when previous amounts and breadth were controlled. The component of extrinsic motivation predicted that students who are motivated to read, read more than students that are extrinsically motivated.

Finally, Rueda (2011) also investigated motivation in reading achievement. Like the previous studies (Pitcher et al., 2007; Guthrie, Alo, & Rhinehart, 1997; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), this study also concluded that motivation does impact reading achievement and that the central components of motivation include active choice, persistence, and mental effort. One theory that focuses on two key components of motivation theory is Expectancy X Value Theory. This theory includes two key components of motivation: 1) expectancy, which is how well someone expects to do on a task; and 2) the value placed on the task. He also discussed other

generalizations of this theory that affect reading motivation: 1) adaptive self-efficacy and competence beliefs; 2) adaptive attributions and control of beliefs; 3) higher levels of interest and intrinsic motivation affect motivation; 4) higher levels of value motivate students; and 5) goals motivate and direct students.

Broaddus (2001) also studied the motivation behind adolescent reading achievement. In the study, the researchers surveyed sixth graders (n=1765) in 23 different schools in order to investigate the motivation behind their in and out-of-school reading habits. The center of the research was student voices. The results of the study provide information in three areas:

1. what students valued most in language arts classes;
2. what motivated students to read; and
3. how classroom instruction measured up to students' expectations.

In the area of what students valued most, 63% preferred free reading time in class and 62% liked when the teacher read aloud to them. In the area of motivation, 42% said they were motivated to read by finding good books and having a choice in book selection. In the area of how classrooms measured up to student expectations, 74% of students bring books from home or buy books.

**Social Situations.** Students' engagement in reading and their identities as readers not only affects their overall school achievement, but also their social experiences with their peers (Intrator and Kunzman, 2009). As adolescents make transition into the secondary grades, their contexts of social situations change. Therefore, their literacy practices change in and out-of school (Applemann, 2010; Alexander & Fox, 2011). Hopper (2005) investigated adolescents' reading habits and reading choices in an action research project. In order to frame his study, he broadened the context of reading to include genres other than fiction. The framework included

the theory that even though there is a decline in the reading habits of adolescents, adolescents are still reading, but in different genres other than fiction and electronic texts. The participants in the study (n=30 student teachers and n=707 students) were student teachers from Exeter University in England. Data was collected from a convenience sample based on the student teachers' placements and was collected through self-assessment questionnaires that included structured responses and semi-structured responses. The age of the student participants ranged from 11 to 15 years. The results from the study prompted three main themes: 1) choosing to read from home, popular texts, and authors; 2) reasons for choosing books; and 3) reading preferences. These are expanded as follows:

1. *Choosing to read from home.* In this theme, gender and age difference also emerged. Sixty-one percent of girls were reading more than boys (54%) and reading at home was less for older adolescents than younger ones. Ninety-three percent of students reported that they liked to read materials other than books;
2. *Popular texts and authors.* There were distinct differences among the selection of texts based on authors; and
3. *Reasons for choosing books.* Clear categories emerged within this theme. The categories include: prior knowledge of book or author, appearance of book, recommendation, television or film, and genre.

The researchers concluded from the results that there was no decline in reading habits, but adolescents were choosing to read materials other than books; book choices differed in terms of authors and titles but in essence; adolescents wanted to read about the world they inhabited. Results further concluded that since 93% of the sample group was reading something other than a book, it was significant that what students were reading outside of school was different than

what they were reading in school and there was a significant difference between students' reading practices in and out-of-school. Ultimately, students' use of multiliteracies weighed heavily on their literacy practices, their reading preferences, and their social situations with their peers.

Within the context of social situations, adolescents want more social interaction. Knoester (2009) investigated students' reading habits based on the framework of Gee's Theory of Discourses (Gee, 1996). Gee's Theory of Discourses, as applied to independent reading, is a conglomerate process based on components such as identity and interest, but especially in the social interaction with others, which included peer groups and adult relationships. Knoester's investigation included case study research among 11-13 year olds (n=10) in a small school in the eastern United States. Data was collected in the form of interviews from students, teachers, and parents. Questions were closed and open-ended that focused on the connection between the social relationships of adolescents, reading interests, and identity formation. Results of the study showed that independent reading is a social practice, that the students still enjoyed being read aloud to by their teachers and parents, and that the development of reader identities has an impact on adolescent reading habits and interests.

Likewise, Creel (2007) examined early adolescents' reading habits by surveying 226 adolescents between the ages of 11-14 to determine their reading interests. Forty-four percent reported reading more than once a week. Twenty-two percent reported only reading once a week. The results of the study further showed that adolescents thought of reading as boring and not interesting and preferred computers, computer games, television, or movies. Fifty-seven percent read books for fun. Thirty percent read magazines. The two main genres that were the

most popular are realistic fiction (32%) and fantasy (21%). Students only identified “reading” as reading books and not other multiliteracies as the Internet.

Furthermore, Warrican (2006) conducted a small-scale study in a high school located in the Caribbean. The focus of the mixed-methods study was to examine reading habits of students who were considered as non-readers. First, he surveyed students to gauge their initial reading interests. The program lasted for the duration of six weeks in English Language Arts classes. Data was collected through surveys, observations, and interviews with students and teachers. As the study progressed, it became apparent that the lack of interest was linked to reader identities. By administering the QRI (Qualitative Reader Interest) survey, he concluded that the class consisted of frustrated readers, that reading abilities affected reading amounts, and the greatest factor affecting the students was the curriculum restraints.

The students preferred reading magazines because they assumed them to be less difficult. Ultimately, the lack of interest in the students produced a lack of reading skills. The results showed that the school must have curriculum materials that match reader interest and reading levels, students must be allowed to make their own decisions when selecting reading materials, time must be set aside for daily leisure reading activities, and most importantly, the school should provide students with direct instruction to assist them with reading skills.

In addition, Moje’s research on adolescents’ in out-of-school time (Moje, 2000, 2004; Moje & Tysvaer, 2011) indicated that adolescents’ out-of-school literacy practices was in informal networks and that even though their practices were closely related to their skills required of them in school, these practices did not easily transition into school settings and that teachers did not recognize the skills and practices that adolescents bring with them to school. (p. 42).

**Multiliteracies.** As adolescents transition into the secondary grades, they bring with them an innate sense of comfort with technology, which has forced educators to broaden the context of literacy to include new literacies or multiliteracies (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009; Applemann, 2010). This new literacy or multiliteracies constitutes viewing, creating, and critiquing multimodal texts which can include spoken, written, visual, aural, and interactive aspects (Callow, 2006). Today's adolescents are digital natives. This current generation, Generation X, is a term used to differentiate this generation for their parents and teachers. They have grown up with technology and are considered to be more comfortable with digital technology than older generations (Lei, 2009; Applemann, 2010). Moreover, according to Moje and Tysvar (2011), the advancement in digital technologies have expanded into advanced reading and writing skills in which being literate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is now encompassing the emergence of literacy practices in such a way that a reader must make meaning of print combined with other sources of material.

The new literacies that adolescents bring to the classroom have caused educators to grapple with the idea of how to incorporate new literacies into pedagogical practices and have begun to redefine the context of what it means to be literate. According to Handa (2004), "to be deeply literate in a digital world means being skilled at deciphering complex images and sounds as well as the syntactical subtleties of words. Above all, it means being at home in a shifting mix of words, images, and sounds" (p. 25). Therefore, as adolescents make the transition into the secondary grades, it is important for educators to re-conceptualize the context of literacy and merge former literacy practices with new literacies (Appleman, 2010).

In hoping to spark students' interest in reading, many educators are scrambling to find motivational ways to engage students in literacy activities which allow them to promote literacy

activities, to motivate students to read more, to increase student achievement, to increase literacy practices in and out-of school, and to merge new literacies that include digital technology with old literacy practices (Toppings & Fisher, 2003).

Many school communities have looked to a plethora of ways to increase reading achievement among adolescents, especially those that are technology-based reading tutorials that use software to encourage, direct, and assess students' independent reading (Hansen, Collins, & Warschauer, 2009). These computerized reading programs are for students to not only read independently and read more quantities of books in order to extend their reading strategy skills, but for teachers to easily progress monitor students in order to differentiate instruction.

In order to do this, many educators have turned to online reading programs such as Accelerated Reader, which is a computerized reading program that motivates students to read large quantities of books (Florida Center for Reading Research, 2007; Hansen, Collins, & Warschauer, 2009). Furthermore, research has shown that schools that utilize reading management programs tend to have more books in their libraries, allow time for more sustained silent reading in class, and have students who read more books than schools that do not use the programs (Hansen, Collins, & Warschauer, 2009).

### **Overview of Accelerated Reader**

It is important to closely examine the Accelerated Reader program and how it historically played a role in literacy instruction. In order to holistically examine the Accelerated Reader program, I first presented a historical overview of the program. Next, examined the components of Accelerated Reader and the philosophy behind the program. Then, I examined how the program is utilized in classrooms and finally, AR's relationship with adolescents.

## **History of Accelerated Reader**

In order to motivate adolescents to read more, many schools look to computerized reading programs to pique student motivation and interest (Toppings & Fisher, 2003). One computerized reading program that is popular in the United States as well as Europe and Australia is the Accelerated Reader Program. Renaissance Learning, the parent company of Accelerated Reader, began in 1984 by Judi Paul. In order to encourage her own children to read more, she invented a pencil and paper system of about 100 books with a multiple-choice quiz. With help from her husband, she developed a point system and reading level for each book. It was during this time that Paul observed that her children were extrinsically motivated to read by earning points and taking quizzes (Renaissance Learning, 2010).

In 1992, Judi and Terry Paul began research efforts to identify and study teachers using best literacy practices. These efforts led to the development of Reading Renaissance, a school-wide motivational reading model that supplements reading instruction. In 1996, twelve years after the development of the prototype program, Reading Renaissance, along with the component, Accelerated Reader (AR), was introduced in professional development seminars for teachers (NWREL, 2003).

The first wave of schools to implement AR began in the late 1990s before the implementation of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in 2000. It was during the implementation phase of NCLB that the federal government began to emphasize scientifically-based research, especially quantitative research in reading instruction. Although there is an insignificant amount of research concerning the scientific research on the development and theoretical framework of AR, the program does align with NCLB's support of Reading First, which is the component that

provides funding to support scientifically-based classroom reading instruction in K-3 (Reading Renaissance, 2007).

### **Principles of Accelerated Reader**

Accelerated Reader/Reading Renaissance is implemented in over 65,000 schools in the United States and is described as “The World’s Most Popular PreK-12 Reading Software” (Biggers, 2001; Nunnery, Ross, & McDonald, 2006). The School Renaissance Model was first introduced by Advantage Learning Systems, a software company that is currently known as Renaissance Learning. The Renaissance Model, which is currently known as Accelerated Reader Best Practices, implements Accelerated Reader, STAR Reading, and Reading Renaissance (Renaissance Learning, 2010; NWREL, 2007). However, in the majority of the literature, the program is still referred to as Reading Renaissance (Hodgins, 2009; Deshler, Palinscar, Biancarosa, & Nair, 2007).

The general approach of the Reading Renaissance/Accelerated Reader Model is a comprehensive framework that allows educators to individualize and improve learning outcomes for every child. The framework is designed to support any curriculum. School Renaissance/Accelerated Reader focuses on developing information technology, professional development, consulting, and support to help educators integrate information in all areas of instruction (NWREL, 2007).

The Reading Renaissance/AR framework is based on the following six principles of best practice:

1. The first principle is that students need time to become better readers. A 30- to 60-minute block of time is suggested for reading practice every day;

2. The second principle is that students will benefit from reading practice at a high level of success. Success is defined by Reading Renaissance/AR as 85% correct and above on AR quizzes;
3. The third principle is that all students should read materials that are matched to their individual abilities;
4. The fourth principle is immediate feedback of information on students' comprehension of books they have read allows for differentiated instruction;
5. The fifth principle is that students are encouraged to set their own personal goals for independent reading, book level, and quiz performance; and
6. The sixth principle is that teachers provide students with individualized instruction based on daily assessment reports and progress monitoring (Renaissance Learning, 2010; Florida Center for Reading Research, 2007).

The most popular and widely used component of the Reading Renaissance Model is the guided reading practice component known as Accelerated Reader (AR) (Biggers, 2001; Nunnery, Ross, & McDonald, 2006). The purpose of AR is designed to motivate students to read large quantities of materials. It is a computerized guided reading program that is designed to supplement existing literacy instruction in Pre K-12 classrooms (Florida Center for Reading Research, 2007). According to Mallette, Henk, and Melnick (2004), Accelerated Reader's philosophy is

that by using the system, students are motivated to read more and better books. Because reading is a foundational skill, other academic domains will improve in conjunction with reading skills. Since successful readers appreciate reading and school more than struggling students, attendance rates will improve along with overall achievement and self-esteem. Accelerated Reader gets students excited about books. With AR, you build life-long readers and life-long learners. (p. 73-74)

## **Research Behind the Accelerated Reader Framework**

In the initial years of the Accelerated Reader program, the program began with founder of the program, Judi Paul's observations of her children's teachers and how they taught children to comprehend books as well as motivating them to read (Renaissance Learning, 2007). But, as the program grew and more and more schools started to utilize it in their classrooms and with the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the Renaissance Learning company began to look more closely at what research says about best practice in reading instruction and motivating students to read.

One of the frameworks that Renaissance Learning began ten years later to implement was Put Reading First, a program from the National Institute for Literacy is an agency of the federal government which is authorized to strengthen literacy across a lifespan. (Renaissance Learning, 2009) The National Reading Panel (NRP), which published Put Reading First created a report in 2000 by the request of parents, teachers and policy makers to help identify the necessary skills and methods for reading achievement. The Panel reviewed more than 100,000 research studies in order to identify the necessary methods and reading skills (NRP, 2000, p. i).

The first two principles in the Accelerated Reader framework are that students need a time to be better readers and students will benefit from reading practice at high levels of success. These two principles correlate within the NRP framework of fluency instruction. Since a portion of the AR program is centered around silent reading time everyday for students, the NRP reports that "when fluent readers read silently, they recognize words automatically which allows them to read aloud effortlessly with expression and that fluency provides the gap between word recognition and comprehension" (NRP, 2000, p. 19). However, even though the NRP promotes silent reading and an important part of fluency they go on to state that "no research evidence is

currently available to confirm that instructional time spent on silent, independent reading with minimal guidance and feedback improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement. In other words, research on the effects of silent reading is still unproven” (NRP, 2000, p. 22).

Moreover, the NRP promotes direct instruction in the area of comprehension. This allows for students to “improve reading instruction by developing specific comprehension strategies and students that are good at monitoring their comprehension know when they understand what they read and what they do not read” (NRP, 2000, p. 41-42). Even though the AR program does not focus on direct reading instruction provided by the teacher, the program does emphasize direct instruction of individual students based on the progress monitoring of their daily assessments; which is discussed in principles four and six. Principle four discusses that immediate feedback on students’ comprehension allows for direct instruction and principle six discusses teachers’ direct instruction with individual students based on their daily assessment reports and progress monitoring.

Although four of the six principles are based on the framework of reading established by the National Reading Panel, the other two principles are based on learning theories. One theory that the Accelerated Reader framework is based on is the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which was developed by Lee Vygotsky in 1978; this lends itself to the third principle of the framework which states that all students should read materials that are matched to their individual abilities. The ZPD is defined as practice that is considered too easy does not improve skills and that practice that is considered too difficult, frustrates the learner. The ZPD range is situated in the middle range determined by the score on the STAR Reading test (Vygotsky, 1978). STAR Reading, which was created by Renaissance Learning, is a test that students take to determine their ZPD range (Renaissance Learning, 2007).

A second theory that is in the Accelerated Reader framework is based on motivational theory of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When a student's ZPD range is established, then they are encouraged to set their own goals for reading, which is the fifth principle in the Accelerated Reader's framework. This principle discusses that students are encouraged to set their own personal goals for reading performance and that the establishment of these goals motivates students to become better readers and read more materials.

### **Goal of the Program**

The goal of AR is to motivate students to read using an individualized goal and point system. The purpose of the program is to not only to motivate students to read more, but to challenge them to read large quantities of books that contribute to meeting their own individualized goals. The ultimate goal is *the more students read, the more they will be motivated to read for pleasure*. Accelerated Reader supports the reading development for all students. Because the program is individualized, all readers such as struggling, average, above average, and English Language Learners are able to find materials and resources in different genres. Currently, over 120,000 AR quizzes are available to students (FCRR, 2007).

Student reading goals consist of a set number of books on their ZPD range. Each student is assigned a ZPD range based on reading ability. The ZPD range is determined by the STAR Reading test. STAR Reading is a software component of AR that administers reading tests to determine the level of books from which a student can select (FCRR, 2007).

Students select books from a school's selection of books that derive from AR's book lists. Books are assigned a point value based on the number of words and its reading difficulty. Reading difficulty is derived for the ATOS (Advantage Open Standard Readability Formula), which is based on the Flesch-Kincaid readability index (FCRR, 2007).

## **Research on Accelerated Reader**

Currently, there is limited in the research on Accelerated Reader and adolescents, especially in grades 9 through 12. Historically, these studies have mixed reviews and the majority of them have solely focused on grades K-6 (Krashen, 2002; FCRR, 2007; NWREL, 2007; Renaissance Learning, 2003). Therefore, in this section, previous studies focusing on adolescents and AR will be explored. This section will be arranged by the following themes that emerge in the literature: student reading achievement, student motivation, and student attitudes.

### **Student Reading Achievement**

One theme that emerges throughout the literature is student achievement. Studies show that Accelerated Reader does increase student achievement. Moyer (2006) conducted a three-year action research study to explore the effects of AR in special education classes in a high school in New Jersey. During the first year of implementation, the study began with ninth and tenth graders (n=69) in special education classes. The district purchased both STAR Reading and 400 quizzes to match books already housed in the library. Since the teachers wanted focus more on comprehension, they lowered quiz scores from 80% to 70%.

During the first marking period, all students were required to read only one book. But after this marking period, goals were individualized to meet students reading levels. Each marking period incentives such as pizza parties and field trips to a bookstore were used to entice students to keep participating in the program. The first year of implementation showed mixed results. Cumulatively, the average reading score was only 59% but teachers did see growth in individual students. During this first year, teachers noticed that a community of readers began to evolve.

In the second year of implementation, teachers began to tweak the program in order to meet the reading needs of individual students as well as motivate them to participate in the program. During this year, students were given more autonomy of the program. Reading log sheets were adapted to give students the choice of the type of questions they wanted to answer and they were asked to set their own reading goals. Students were also given the choice of being able to write questions to books that were not found in the library or from the list of quizzes. Student opposition in taking the tests decreased because they felt more comfortable in taking quizzes. Again, students were given incentives to participate in the program. The results of the second year of implementation showed only a 4% growth.

During the third year of implementation, AR was utilized with all students. The study does not report any results to show the implications of the overall impact of students' participation in AR. However, results from the first two years of implementation do show an increase in overall reading achievement.

Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipiieski's (2003) study also explored AR's effectiveness in reading achievement. In this study, the authors explored AR's continued reading achievement with students after they stop participating in the program. The researchers based their study on the notions that students are not given enough time after Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) to discuss books, books are only purchased or checked out from the library because they are on the AR quiz list, wide-spread cheating occurred on AR quizzes, lack of quizzes for new-release books, the program's start-up cost is expensive, and the limitations of AR's site license.

In order to draw from these concerns, the researchers used a Title Recognition Test (TRT) to compare the recreational reading habits of students in middle schools who were exposed to AR in elementary school to students who were only exposed to AR in middle school.

The participants in the study were from three school districts (n=1536). The TRT contained 25 items that included actual titles of books and phrases that were not book titles.

The results of the study show mixed results. The first analysis compared students in all three districts by dividing them into two groups. A t-test compared students who were exposed to AR in elementary school to those not exposed. The t-test resulted in no significant difference between the groups (mean=.008, df=1536, t-value=1.025, p=.31). The district conducted the second analysis of the TRT score. The results from this analysis showed mixed results. District 1 did not show significant difference between those exposed to AR in elementary school and those who were not. However, a trend in the data showed more reading by those who were not exposed to AR (mean=.02, df=295, t-value=1.56, p=.12). The analysis of the results suggest that just because students participate in AR in elementary school does not mean that they will continue to increase in overall reading achievement when they enter the secondary grades.

Other studies also show mixed results. In 2007, Rodriguez conducted a causal comparative design study that compared five groups of 8<sup>th</sup> graders' scores (n=180) on the English Language Arts California Standardized Test (CST). Data from the students' records were collected because of their CST scores and their participation in AR. A comparison of students' scores on the CST was examined using a two different one-way ANOVA for reading comprehension and literary analysis. Results from the study show that strong participation in AR can be effective in improving reading comprehension and literary analysis and that teachers should promote high AR participation rates from all students as a way for preparing for the CST. However, the majority of students' records showed a low participation rate and indicated that increasing the number of AR points to 100 might prove to be too difficult to achieve and motivating students to participate in the program proves to be a significant challenge.

Nunnery, Ross, and McDonald (2006) conducted a randomized experimental study to evaluate the impact of AR on reading achievement in grades 3 to 6. The students (n=978) were randomly assigned as the implementation or control group. A three-level hierarchical linear model was used to estimate the impact of AR on student reading growth on STAR. The results showed a significantly higher growth in reading achievement of students in the implementation groups rather than the control groups. Implementation ratings also tended to be higher in the lower grades (3-4) than the upper grades (5-6). Results further showed that AR proved to be a positive correlation of growth in reading achievement of students with disabilities.

Even though there are studies that show the positive impact AR has had on student achievement (Nunnery, Ross, & McDonald, 2006; Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipieleski, 2003), there were studies that prove AR could be counterproductive in student achievement.

Thompson, Madhuri, and Taylor (2009) conducted a small-scale qualitative study to explore students' perceptions of AR. The participants in the study (n=144) were students in a low-performing high school in Los Angeles County. Data was collected from the perspectives of the students in the form of questionnaires and focus groups. The results of the study showed that

1. The implementation of the program was tied to students' grades which in turn, made some students who formerly loved to read develop a negative attitude toward reading;
2. The program led to wide-spread cheating;
3. Students were not given enough time in class (SSR) to meet the requirements of AR;
4. Book selection was limited; especially books that focused on multiculturalism;

5. Students felt like they were being “forced” to read. Because they felt pressured, their motivation to read decreased;
6. Students expressed their dislike over the quality of the quizzes and the fairness of taking them; and
7. Some students did not consider themselves to be good test takers, which caused them to do poorly on the quizzes. (pp. 554-557)

Like Thompson, Madhuri, and Taylor (2008), Borman and Dowling (2004) also investigated AR’s effectiveness by conducting a multilevel analysis of how the Reading Renaissance program theory affected student and classroom reading achievement. The data and sample for this study was collected from the Reading Practice Database (RPD), which was maintained through the Research and Evaluation Department of Renaissance Learning. The RPD is a large database that houses information on customer records.

The variables in the study were classroom-level aggregates of student data. Hierarchical Linear Analysis were conducted from the cluster of three grade levels (2-5, 6-8, and 9-12). The dependent variable (dv) in the study was the normal curve equivalent (NCE) posttest scores from STAR reading. The scores from STAR in the study ranged from an NCE of 1 to 99. The remaining variables of the three clusters were grade-level, percent correct, and zone of proximal development range (ZPD). The HLM approach distinguished between student level and classroom level effects of a greater amount of reading, high success rate, and the use of reading material within the students’ ZPD range.

Results showed that outcomes for students and classrooms in grades 9-12 produced an average reading achievement score of 47.50 NCEs, which was slightly below the national average of 50. The estimate of the classroom correlation revealed that 28% of the total variance

of reading achievement resided between classrooms. This variance was statistically significant ( $df=349$ ,  $N=350$ ). Furthermore, the researchers drew the following conclusions from the results:

1. Student performance on a spring reading achievement test is predicted by both students' individual reading behaviors and by the guided independent reading program and by classroom –level features of AR implementation;
2. Results suggest that a high success rate over an entire school year predicts better outcomes at the end of the year; and
3. If students' success rates are not diminishing, teachers should modify their implementation of the program and assign material that is above their baseline ability (ZPD). (p. 25)

Although the results are mixed, the studies exemplify that Accelerated Reader does effect student achievement. From these studies, (Borman & Dowling, 2004; Nunnery, Ross, & McDonald, 2006; Thompson, Madhuri, & Taylor, 2008) student achievement is impacted by the level of implementation, the amount of time reserved for reading in classrooms, and reader identity.

### **Student Attitudes**

Furthermore, a second theme that emerges in the literature is student attitudes toward reading. Anderson (2001) conducted a small-scale qualitative study in order to investigate the effects of AR in the high school where she served as a media specialist. Initially, the participants in the study were only a special education class. The researcher and the special education teacher first used the STAR reading test to determine the students' reading levels. Then, the teacher established SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) in the class to give students daily reading time with AR books. By midyear of the initial implementation, most students' STAR scores

increased by two grade levels. In addition, the researcher and the teacher began to see a change in student attitudes toward reading. Some of the students who were formerly nonreaders found a new interest in reading. After the first year of implementation, the program extended to all special education classes and ninth and tenth grade English classes. Ultimately, the results of the study show not only a change in students' attitudes toward reading but also an increase in their overall reading achievement.

Another study, which focused on AR in the secondary grades, was the Milford School District study conducted in 2000 by Renaissance Learning. The study was implemented in Milford High School. Results showed that the most notable difference was the change in student behavior toward reading. Library circulation statistics tripled with almost 21,000 books checked out during the 2002-2003 school year.

Ganter (2000) also conducted a small-scale qualitative study in a department of corrections facility in Illinois in order to investigate if AR changes students' attitudes toward reading. The media center located in the facility received a grant to implement the Accelerated Reader program with students in the facility as a possibility in motivating students to become better readers and increase their enjoyment in reading. The participants (n=80) were all males aged 13-18. The goal of the program was to use technology to motivate students to read quality books at an increasingly higher level of understanding and instill a greater enjoyment of reading. Results showed that the goal of the program was achieved in 1) increasing student overall usage of computers and knowledge of the program; 2) students read quality books based on their interest and grade level; 3) students who were considered poor readers reading level increased as their quiz scores increased to 90 and 100%; and 4) students' attitudes toward reading shifted to a more positive one.

## **Motivation**

A third theme that merges in the literature is motivation. Everhart (2005) conducted a study that investigated how levels of implementation affect student motivation and extent of reading. The study took place in three schools in England and Scotland (n=148). The participants in the study were from primary and secondary schools. Data collection was mixed methods, which involved observation, structured interviews, focus groups, and the MRQ (Motivation to Read Questionnaire). The results indicated that the majority (66%) liked AR; 21% percent do not; and 13% had no opinions. Because no motivational style could be identified with each particular student, the researchers assumed that students are motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically. However, there was significant gender difference in opinions of AR. From a social aspect, boys scored significantly higher in competition and girls were higher in sharing books with their peers. In the extent of reading, the results did not show a correlation between number of books read and number of AR points earned. In the area of implementation, the school with the medium level of implementation, which is based on the highest volume of reading per student, reported the highest volume of reading per week (Toppings & Fisher, 2003).

## **Summary of Literature**

This chapter focused on reviewing current research that pertains to this study. First, it is important to note that the definition of adolescent literacy is widening to include other contexts such as multiliteracies as well as other literacy practices that include different social contexts as students make a transition into the secondary grades (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009; Appleman, 2010). Next, it can be determined from the review that students are digital natives and have an innate sense of technology that historically has not been embraced into classroom literacy practices (Lei, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to merge the technological skills of students and

literacy practices that pique student interest and motivates them to increase their reading practices (Toppings & Fisher, 2003).

Next, it can be determined from the literature that Accelerated Reader is the most widely used reading program utilized by schools as a means to increase achievement. From the current studies on AR and the secondary grades, it can be determined that AR effects student achievement, reading attitudes, and motivation to read (FCRR, 2007; NWREL, 2007).

However, we know from the literature review that there is a need for more empirical research focusing on AR's overall effectiveness in grades 9-12. Because of the large gap in the research, AR's actual effectiveness can be questioned. Krashen (2002) investigated the components of AR by exploring the studies that solely focused on adolescents' reading practices. In his review of the literature, he concluded that two aspects of AR did prove successful: 1) comprehensible and interesting books; and 2) Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). The study further concluded that quizzing students on books did not have a positive effect and there was no real evidence that supports AR and that the reward system did not have a long-term effect.

Biggers (2001) also formed an argument against the overall effectiveness of AR by conducting a review of the literature. In her review, she concluded that there was not enough empirical evidence to determine the overall effectiveness of the program. Furthermore, she drew on the conclusions that 1) AR restricts students from higher level of comprehension; 2) there is no literacy instruction that allows for differentiation; and 3) there is no evidence to support the role of the teacher in providing direct instruction.

Presently, in order to support the need for further empirical research, Luck (2010) conducted a literature review of the overall effectiveness of AR in increasing reading achievement and student motivation. In this review, she explored five aspects of Accelerated

Reader: 1) the definition and components of AR; 2) studies which prove the effectiveness of AR and studies that do not; 3) what research does and does not reveal; 4) AR's impact of incentives and rewards; and 5) the impact of reading motivation. The results of the review showed that of the 155 studies posted on the Renaissance Learning website, only 25 are experimental or quasi-experimental and the studies were conducted by the parent company of AR, Renaissance Learning. Furthermore, results show that more rigorous research is needed to determine if it is the program itself that has produced a significant difference or if the positive results are due to other extraneous variables such as modifying the program to fit the needs of various schools or if students are only motivated to read and participate in the program because their grades are dependent on it or for incentives.

In conclusion, from these studies, (Krashen, 2001; Biggers, 2001; Luck, 2010), it can be determined that there is a need for more rigorous research in which the components of the program are tested. After presenting this review of the literature, it can be determined that the effectiveness of AR is inconclusive, especially from students' perspectives. Because of this, there is a need for this study to look at how students perceive the AR program and how their perceptions have affected their in and out of school reading practices.

CHAPTER III:  
METHODOLOGY

**Overview**

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology of this study. The first section describes the framework and discusses why mixed methods research is employed. The next section discusses the context of the study that includes a discussion of the participants selected. Section three discusses data collection methods. Then, researcher positionality is presented and includes the philosophical assumptions of the researcher as well as the methodological considerations of the researcher. Finally, the conclusion of Chapter III provides a summary of the information.

**Mixed Methods Framework**

According to Creswell (2009), mixed methods research is an approach that is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. It involves both forms of research in order to make the overall quality of the study stronger than using either qualitative or quantitative approaches.

In order to shape the procedures of mixed methods research in this study, a sequential transformative strategical approach is utilized. This approach has two distinct data collection phases in which one form of data collection follows another form of data collection phase in which a theoretical lens governs the sequential procedures. The first phase of data collection, which is quantitative, is followed with a qualitative phase that builds upon the first phase.

The first phase in this mixed methods study was survey research, which is a form of quantitative research. According to Creswell (2009), survey design is an “approach that provides a quantitative or numeric description of the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of a population by studying a sample of the population” (p. 145). From the results, the researcher generalizes about the population. In case of this study, the survey will be cross-sectional in which data will be collected at one point in time (Creswell, 2009).

In the second phase of the study, qualitative methodology was employed. According to Hatch (2002), qualitative research can be defined in numerous ways, but simply stated, it is a form of research that is not arrived by the means of statistical concepts or other means of quantification (Hatch, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Other researchers (Hatch, 2002; Anderson, 1987) have defined qualitative research as a paradigm that places emphasis on the inductive, interpretive methods applied to the everyday world and is seen as subjective and socially created. Qualitative research is important in literacy because it allows researchers to get a deeper understanding of the inner experience of participants, to determine how meaning is formed through and in culture, and to discover that the inner experience of participants is fluid, evolving, and dynamic (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Qualitative research has multiple characteristics (Hatch, 2007). One characteristic is to observe participants in their natural settings. In essence, the ultimate goal of qualitative research is to understand the lived experiences of participants and how participants make sense of their lived experiences (Rosaldo, 1989; Geertz, 2000). Another characteristic of qualitative research is to seek understanding of the world from the perspective of the participants. Finally, a third characteristic of qualitative research is understanding that unlike quantitative research which

gathers data from instruments such as questionnaires and checklists, qualitative researchers directly gather data usually in the form of observations, field notes, and interviews (p. 7).

### **Research Design**

In order to design a mixed method study, it is important to select certain tools to determine students' perceptions of Accelerated Reader and their perceptions of how the program affected their reading practices in and out-of school. Since the study is designed to highlight students' voices, I selected three forms of research that ensured rich data for this study. The first form of research was survey research and the second form of research was focus groups and individual interviews.

### **Instrumentation**

#### **Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile**

The first form of design that was utilized in this study is the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP). Since the primary philosophy behind AR is motivating students to read, (Renaissance Learning, 2010) the survey was used to describe participants' perceptions about themselves as readers and what motivates them to read.

Once participants were selected, the researcher administered the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP). This survey was adapted from the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) created by Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni (1996) for elementary school teachers to assess their students' motivation to read. From this profile, 11 researchers (Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarinesingh, Mogge, Headley, Ridegway, Peck, Hunt, and Dunston, 2007), revised the MRP to be used with adolescents. Thus, creating the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP), which is a survey instrument that secondary teachers can use to understand their students' motivation to read.

**Background of the Profile.** In 1996, Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni created the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) to explore elementary students' motivation to read. This profile consists of two parts. The first part is a survey instrument that focuses on two dimensions of motivation: self-concept as a reader and value of reading and the second part is a conversational interview (p. 52). The first part, the reading survey, consists of two sub-scales that measure two dimensions of motivation: self-concept as a reader and value of reading. The survey portion of the profile consists of two questions based on the Likert scale (p. 8). In order to analyze the survey, the researchers conducted descriptive statistics in several ways. First, the means and standard deviations were conducted for the subscales (self-concept and value of reading). Next, the means and standard deviations were calculated for each item on the subscales. Finally, multivariate analysis of the procedures were conducted with the self-concept subscale and the value of reading subscale as the dependent variables and the grade level was the independent variables. When appropriate, the researchers conducted a Tukey HSD (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996).

In 2007, Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunariningsingh, Mogge, Headley, Ridgeway, Peck, Hunt, and Dunston revised items in the MRP to develop the AMRP by using recommendations from research on adolescent literacy and their experience with working with adolescents. By reviewing the literature, the researchers were able to revise the language appropriate for adolescents. Some of the language that was changed by the researchers were questions that were worded: "When I grow up" to "As an adult" (p. 380). In the demographics section of the survey, an item was inserted on race or ethnicity to help better understand the population (p. 380).

## **The Survey Instrument**

### **Construction of the Instrument**

According to Duke and Mallette (2004), the researcher must construct validity in order to “best measure the underlying psychological, behavioral, social or educational topic under consideration.” (p. 296) Therefore, since the MRP (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996) and the AMRP (Pitcher et al., 2007) are instruments that have already proven to be valid and reliable survey instruments. With permission from Pitcher, the researcher behind the AMRP, I selected 23 survey questions to measure students in grades 9 through 12 perceptions’ of reading after they have participated in the Accelerated Reader program in grades K-8. These questions were selected because they corresponded with the AR framework. Questions 1-15 are stem questions with four possible responses. Like the MRP and AMRP, the survey questions were divided into two subscales that are based on self-concept as a reader and value of reading. Questions 1, 3, 5,7,9 are items in the subscale, self-concept as a reader. Questions 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10-15 are items in the value of reading subscale. The responses were scaled on Likert’s, which allowed for the summation and averaging of scaled responses in which numbers were attached to the responses for levels of meaning (Henk & McKenna, 1995; Duke & Mallette, 2004). The subscale of self-concept as a reader is on a four-point value scale of (1) being the least positive to (4) being the most positive. On the other hand, other responses (value of reading) are reversed with (4) being the least positive and (1) being the positive. Table 1 provides an example of the questions in the AMRP.

Table 1

Example Questions in the AMRP

Subscale	Sample Question	Number of Questions
Value of Reading	Knowing how to read well is _____. <input type="checkbox"/> Not very important <input type="checkbox"/> Sort of important <input type="checkbox"/> Important <input type="checkbox"/> Very important	10
Reader Identity	I am a _____. <input type="checkbox"/> a poor reader <input type="checkbox"/> an OK reader <input type="checkbox"/> a good reader <input type="checkbox"/> a very good reader	5

The questions of the survey measure students' value of reading and reader identity.

Table 2 explains which questions relate to reader identity and which questions relate to reading value. The survey instrument used in this study measured adolescents in grades 9-12 perceptions of themselves as readers after participating in the Accelerated Reader program in grades K-8.

The results of the 15 multiple-choice questions were entered into SPSS and analyzed by descriptive statistics that consisted of an Independent t-test that compared the two subgroups. An Independent t-test was chosen because it is a test that establishes whether two means collected from independent samples differ significantly. (Field, 2009) Table 2 explains the questions as they relate to the sub-categories, Reader Identity and Reading Value. The responses to the five open-ended questions were also coded according to the MRP in which the researchers' coded for patterns that emerge in the participant responses.

Table 2

## Questions as Related to Reader Identity and Reading Value

Questions	Reader-Identity	Reading Value
#1 My friends think I am...	X	
#2 Reading is something I like to do.		X
#3 I read...	X	
#4 My friends think reading is...		X
#5 When I come to a word I don't know...	X	
#6 I tell my friends about good books I read.		X
#7 When I am reading to myself, I understand	X	
#8 People who read a lot are...		X
#9 I am a...	X	
#10 I think libraries are...		X
#11 Knowing how to read well is...		X
#12 I think reading is...		X
#13 Reading is...	X	
#14 I would like for my teachers to read aloud in my classes.		X
#15 When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel...		X

### Methodological Framework

The framework used for this study is the principles of the Accelerated Reader program. Since there is a large gap in the research, the literature review in Chapter II shows that only some of the principles have been evaluated in studies (Krashen, 2001; Biggers, 2001; Luck, 2010).

Therefore, the framework behind this study was based on the following AR principles of best practice (Renaissance Learning, 2003, 2010; Nunnery, Ross, & McDonald, 2006). The

Accelerated Reader principles are as follows:

1. Students need time to be better readers;
2. Students will benefit from reading practice at a high level of success. Success is defined at 85% correct or above on AR quizzes;
3. All students should read materials that are matched to their individual abilities;
4. Immediate feedback of information on students' comprehension of books they have read allows for differentiated instruction;
5. Students are encouraged to set their own goals for independent reading, book level, and performance. The establishment of the goals motivates students to become better readers and read more materials; and
6. Teachers provide students with individualized instruction based on their daily assessment and progress monitoring.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants in the study were from one school system located in the southern portion of the United States. This school system is located in a rural area that houses three secondary schools. All of the schools employed the Accelerated Reader program for the last twelve years in grades K-8. In order to assure anonymity, all participants and the school system were given pseudonyms.

Participants for the study were selected on availability and their willingness to participate as well as certain characteristics that are important in the study. Participants had the choice to

terminate their participation at any time during the study. Participants were selected based on the following characteristics:

1. Availability for the study;
2. Participants must have participated Accelerated Reader during grades K-6; and
3. Participants must be students in grades 9 -12.

### **Sample**

The research sample for the survey consisted of (n=84) students in grades 9-12 from a rural school system in west Alabama. The sample was distributed among three schools in the system. The survey was administered three times, once at each school. The participants were surveyed by pen and paper.

### **Demographic Data**

The participants (n=84) were organized by three different demographic categories based on the school districts' identification of demographic categories. Table 3 explains the demographic categories.

Table 3

Demographic Categories

Category	Type	Total # of Students
Grade Level	9	18
	10	29
	11	13
	12	24
Gender	Female	54
	Male	30
Race/Ethnicity	African-American	9
	Asian/Asian American	0
	Caucasian	71
	Hispanic	3
	Native American	0
	Multi-racial/ Multi-ethnic	1
	Other	0

**Site Selection**

The sites were chosen because they all employed Accelerated Reader and their willingness to participate. All sites are located in a rural school system in West Alabama. The school system houses five schools that serves 2,346 students in grades K-12 and spends approximately \$8,617 per pupil. Fifty-seven percent of the current expenditures are on instruction, 35% on support services, and 9% on other elementary and secondary needs (NCES, 2011). The district employs an average of 16 students per full-time equivalent teacher. In 2008, 9-12 grades had a dropout rate of 5% with 1% of students having an IEP (Individual Education Program) (NCES, 2011).

Fifty-two percent of the student population is on free or reduced lunch. The unemployment rate within the area is 18% (ALSDE, 2011). All sites within the school district are given pseudonyms in order to maintain privacy of the participants.

#### **Site A**

Site A was known as Southmont (pseudonym) School and is a Title I school. Southmont School is a K-12 school and has an average population of 540 students with 96% of the student population on free and reduced lunch (ALSDE, 2011). Out of the 540 students, one student is Asian, 90 are African American, and 440 are White.

#### **Site B**

The second site in the study was known as Vineyard (pseudonym) School and is a Title I school that houses grades 7-12. The total student population is approximately 662 students. Out of this population, 105 are African American, 9 are Hispanic, and 548 are White. 370 out of 662 are on free or reduced lunch (NCES, 2008).

#### **Site C**

The third site was known as Sullivan School. This site, Sullivan School (pseudonym) is also a K-12 school. In this school, there are approximately 809 students. Out of the total population, 155 are African American, 8 are Hispanic, and 642 are White. Over 500 students in this school are on free or reduced lunch (NCES, 2008).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This section discussed the procedures for data collection. The procedures include a timeline for data collection, the procedures for administering the AMRP, forming focus groups, initial interviews, and follow-up interviews. Before data collection began, an IRB was written and presented to the Internal Review Board of The University of Alabama. Once the IRB (see

Appendix C) was approved, the school system superintendent was notified and participants were selected within their districts. Since permission was already given from the school district, parents and students were asked to sign a consent form explaining their rights as research participants (see Appendix D and E). During the research process, the researcher kept a reflective journal that showed a record of events, but also the thoughts and feelings as the events happened.

In order to assure sufficient data collection for all three sites, the time needed for the data collection procedures was estimated before the study began. Data collection took approximately six weeks. The first site for data collection was Southmont School. After previously meeting with the principal, I met with all of the students in grades 9-12 to explain the process. In the appointed time provided by the superintendent, I discussed the data collection process with all of the students in the library and passed out permission forms. An assistant principal agreed to collect the forms and I returned the next week and proceeded with the data collection. Also in Week 1, I visited Sullivan School. After explaining the process with the principal and guidance counselor, they agreed that permission forms would be administered through the 9-12 English teachers and I returned the next week to collect the forms and begin the data collection process. On Week 2, I returned to Sullivan School. The students returned approximately 45 permission forms and I began the data collection process. The data collection process for Sullivan School lasted for 3 days. During Week 3, I returned to Southmont School and collected 20 permission forms from students in grades 9-12. When I returned to this site, I was only given two days to collect my data from the principal. Therefore, data collection took place for two days during Week 3 at Southmont School. The data collection process for Vineyard School took approximately three weeks. On Week 4 of data collection, I visited Vineyard School. After

meeting with the principal, the guidance counselor was designated as my school contact. She agreed to administer and collect the permission forms to all students in grades 9-12. After this initial meeting, I returned to Vineyard to collect the permission forms and administered the survey in three days. During Weeks 5 and 6, I visited the site three times before study was completed at Vineyard School. (See Appendix G for more explanations) Subsequently, it was during the last visit, that I learned I would only had one day for data collection. Table 4 explains the timeline for data collection procedures.

Table 4

Data Collection Timeline

	Permission Forms	AMRP	Focus Groups	Interviews
Southmont School	Week 1	Week 3	Week 3	Week 3
Vineyard School	Week 4	Week 5	Week 5	
Sullivan School	Week 1	Week 2	Week 2	Week 3

### Focus Group Interviews

The second form of design utilized in this study was focus groups because it gave helpful insight and allowed the observation of the emotions and expressions of the participants with each other as they react to one another’s responses. Focus groups can be defined as “a group of individuals selected and assembled by the researcher to discuss and comment on, from personal experiences, the topic that is the subject of the research” (Gibbs, 1997, p. 1). Focus groups are important because the main purpose is to draw upon participants’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions in a ways that are not feasible by other means (Gibbs, 1997). In this study, focus groups were utilized as a preliminary stage to complement interviews and as a

means of triangulation (Gibbs, 1997; Hatch, 2002). In the focus groups process, my aim was to elicit multiple perspectives and emotions within a group context and to explore the culture of the groups as well as the degree of consensus on the research topic (Gibbs, 1997).

Therefore, I conducted this form of qualitative research as a way to not only bring participants together who have participated in AR in grades K-8, but also to observe the dynamics of their emotions, feelings, and actions with each other. Participants in the focus groups held similar characteristics relevant to the study's topics and questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The aim of the focus groups was to promote the participants' expressions, emotions, and attitudes of a supportive environment instead of participants framing their responses on the opinions of others within the group (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

During this time, the researcher gave instructions for the focus group discussions and discussed the protocol of answering and responding to participants' and researchers' questions. Focus group sessions were audio recorded. Questions were asked by the researcher in order to examine participants' perceptions of Accelerated Reader and how Accelerated Reader impacted their literacy practices in and out-of school (see Appendix B). The questions were based on AR's six principles of best practice.

Focus group interviews are a useful insight in observing participants reaction to each other as they talk about their Accelerated Reader experience. The number of focus groups was formed based on the number of participants available within the study. One focus group was formed from each site and was based on participants' willingness to volunteer. Vineyard and Southmont had six to seven participants respectively, in their focus groups. Sullivan School had 5 participants. Table 5 describes the focus group from Sullivan School. Out of the five

participants, three were female and two were male. Four out of the five students were in grade twelve.

Table 5

Focus Group at Sullivan School

Name	Grade Level	Gender
Amanda	12	Female
Jana	11	Female
Lisa	12	Female
Bart	12	Male
John	12	Male

The second focus group was formed at Southmont School. The focus group from this site consisted of seven participants. Out of the seven participants, four were male and three were female. Two out of the seven were from grade twelve, two from grade eleven, and two from grade nine. Only one student was in the tenth grade. The following table explains the participant demographics from Southmont School.

Table 6

Focus Group at Southmont School

Name	Grade Level	Gender
Alan	12	Male
Craig	12	Male
Lynn	11	Female
Clyde	10	Male
Scott	9	Male
Mindi	11	Female
Natalie	9	Female

Like Southmont, Vineyard also had seven participants. Out of the seven participants, only one male volunteered to participate in the discussion. The rest of the participants were female. Two of the participants were in grade ten, two in grade nine, two in grade twelve and one in grade eleven.

Table 7

Focus Group at Vineyard School

Name	Grade	Gender
Holli	10	Female
Michelle	12	Female
Robin	10	Female
Ginger	9	Female
Jane	11	Female
Cole	9	Male
Laura	12	Female

The focus group discussions at each site lasted approximately 60 minutes. This research process allowed me to identify emergent patterns and themes as well as discrepancies of participant responses that lead to the formation of the initial interview questions. The focus group interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The focus groups were formed after the distribution of the survey.

**Interviews**

Once the AMRP was completed, focus group interviews were conducted and the transcripts were analyzed, focus group participants from each site were asked to participate in

individual interviews. Sullivan School yielded the most interviews. After the focus group discussion at this site, all of the participants wanted to participate in the individual interview process (n=5). However, the other two sites proved to be unsuccessful. Since the interview process was also voluntary, only one participant agreed to be interviewed from Southmont School and no one volunteered to be interviewed from Vineyard School. Interview questions were formed based on the results of the AMRP and focus group discussions. Interviews allowed for more elicited insider information from participants and for more exploration of topics that arise from focus group discussions (Duke & Mallette, 2004). Interviews captured a deeper meaning of the Accelerated Reader experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

These interviews gave further insight into the participants' literacy experiences with AR as well as their current literacy practices. The interviews were audiotaped. The interview questions derived from the focus group discussions. (See Appendix C) In order to create a comfortable environment for my participants, the individual interviews were semi-structured based from the focus group discussions. Based on the comfort level of the participants, a brief explanation by the researcher was given of why the interview was conducted.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

This study utilized a mixed method design. The process of data analysis involves making sense out of the data in order to move into a deeper understanding (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, different procedures were used to analyze and interpret data as it was collected. Once student focus groups and interviews were recorded, then transcripts of these collection processes were created. Since this study did contain a quantitative portion, an adapted version of the AMRP was distributed to participants before focal group discussions began. Once the surveys were collected,

and transcripts from the focus groups and interviews were completed, then the data was coded in order to detect themes and patterns that emerge.

Coding, which is the process of organizing material into chunks or segments into categories that evolve into themes (Creswell, 2009). In order to do this, the researcher used highlighters to color-code themes on the typed pages and wrote notes in the margins. Once the coding process was complete, then the patterns that emerged were compared to the framework of the study, AR's six principles of best practice.

### **Triangulation of Data**

In order to ensure the validity of the data, triangulation must occur. According to Purcell-Gates (2004), triangulation is the gathering of data from different sources to confirm the validity of the data. In order to triangulate the data from the focus groups and interviews, the data was coded by three different persons, consisting of the researcher and two other doctoral students at The University of Alabama. Once the data was coded, the codes were compared in order to determine the themes.

### **Researcher Positionality**

As a researcher, it is my aim to connect my philosophical assumptions concerning adolescent literacy practices with my position as a qualitative researcher. Therefore, as I thought about the process of this connection, I realized that I had to enter the study as a co-participant. I considered the culture and experiences of my participants as valuable because it was their learning experiences and culture that shape their voice in this study. Since my philosophical assumptions were strong, I was aware to not let my emotions interfere with my participants' willingness to participate in the study. The goal of my position as a researcher was to investigate

how AR influenced high school students' literacy practices in and out-of-school and their thoughts and feelings concerning the program.

My evaluation of myself as a researcher forced me to consider my positionality as multifaceted; which includes the aspect that I am a doctoral student and Caucasian female from a middle to upper middle class family that continues to place heavy emphasis on the importance of education. These issues or ethical dilemmas made me step into a deeper understanding about myself in the research process that not only involved my ethical concerns with literacy research, but also the role my participants played in the research process. With this in mind, I realized that I must consider myself as a co-participant in the study. Ultimately, this made my relationship with my participants as reflexive. In order to fully establish reflexivity, I first detached myself from my own literacy and cultural experiences that included the emergence of my gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Secondly, I predicted hidden dangers and snares that resulted from decisions that I made in the study. Third, I re-entered the research as a co-participant that used subjective and objective processes in which I imaginatively placed myself into the minds of the participants as they went through the research process.

### **Methodological Considerations**

Philosophical considerations and researcher positionality are very important areas in literacy research. These two considerations allow a researcher to dig deeper into the research process by questioning the “how “ and the “why” a phenomenon happens. But, methodological considerations are important to consider because it ties researcher positionality and philosophical considerations together. Methodological considerations molded the entire research process and allowed me to take my philosophical assumptions one step further in order to think through the study and define how my philosophical assumptions played an underlying role in creating the

methodology for my study which forced me to tie multiple perspectives together for myself as a researcher as well as for my participants. Since one of my main goals as a researcher was to capture my participants' literacy experiences with Accelerated Reader in a way that minimizes harm, then it was important for me to think about how to collect my data in a way that would make the experience pleasant and sufficient for me as well as for my participants.

### **Participant Voices**

My first methodological consideration was how I expressed my participants' voices in my writing. In order to do this, I first looked at myself as a writer. Since organizing my thoughts as I write is a problem for me, I first looked at myself as a writer and developed a method that helped me to collect my thoughts in a way that would help me to maximize my participants' voices to show activity as well as reflexivity instead of the traditional passive voice. Lutrell (2009) validated this idea of writing as reflexive practice. She argued that the art of memoing is a way to "chrySTALLize" your thoughts or conversations with yourself after taking field notes, observing participants in their settings, and for recording the time and day events occur either in interviews or observations). She continued to argue that memoing helps not only to organize thoughts, but also to describe a researcher's identity in the research process, establish criteria for validity, and identifying and establishing participant voices in the writing process.

### **Embodiment**

The idea of reflexive writing lead to the practice of embodiment, which was my second methodological consideration. Emobodiment is a reflexive practice of both the researcher and the participants. In order for me to be totally aware of my participants' efferent and aesthetic experiences while they participate in the research process, I had to be aware of the embodiment process for myself and how its relationship to the act of reading. For me, reading is an

experience that happens on different cognitive levels that must connect the text with the reader. However, since I am an avid reader, I had to remember that some of the participants I encountered may or may not have this experience with reading in which they transact with the text. This experience is known as the Reader Transactional Theory (Rosenblatt, 1995), which can be defined as how students bring not only the human side of reading, but also their experiences, their purpose for reading, and how they make meaning of the text. Ellingson also talked about the science of embodiment and how it plays apart in the efferent and aesthetic process of reading. According to Ellingson (2006),

The body is a property of mind-self. Instead of the body being positioned as a bar of knowledge, knowledge is passed through the body and embodied ways of being in the world and not a possession of higher mind to be manipulated and controlled to serve the brain, but the body and person-self are one. (p. 298)

With this in mind, the aesthetic experience was not only apparent in the initial stages of the research process, but can appear as the process continues for the participants and the researcher as they develop a relationship with each other that shows a certain level of comfort and trustworthiness.

### **Relationship**

I wanted my data collection to be relatively easy for my participants. I hoped that I collected data in ways that lessened the anxiety levels for all parties involved. Therefore, my fourth methodological consideration was the establishment of a good working relationship with my participants. Participants should play an active role in the research process, especially in how their stories and experiences are represented through narrative texts. Narrative texts aid the researcher in understanding how participants experience, live, and tell about their world. Narratives are able to act as both a means of knowing and telling (Keats, 2009).

## **Narratives**

To me, narrative writing is powerful and I collected data in two narrative forms: written and spoken. I wanted to give my participants choices in the way in which their experiences were collected. It was my wish that they chose both forms. I hoped with a wide variety they would be more at ease in the research process and not choose to terminate their participation. Keats (2009) discussed in her research on narrative writing “with a variety of options available for constructing stories, the narrator’s identity, perspectives, and choices form each text and deepen the meaning that participants are attempting to convey” (p. 181). I hoped that with the use of multiple narrative texts that I could bring together a bigger picture of my participants reading experiences that tied in the efferent and aesthetic experience, which tied in my philosophical belief that readers must have a true efferent and aesthetic experience in order to make meaning.

## **Process**

Finally, my fourth methodological consideration was that research is a process that unfolds rhizomatically rather than in a linear process. In order for me to understand this process in my study, I rethought traditional ethical practices in writing in qualitative research (St. Pierre, 1997). With this in mind, I routed the way in which I approached subjectivity in my study. In order to do this, I adopted the notion that “writing is thinking” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 1). I worked through complications in my research process such as ethical concerns that address less harmful possibilities to represent my participants’ life experiences. I knew that as I studied my participants in their own cultural settings, then I needed to be careful not to “lose” myself in the research but to carefully adopt subjective and objective personifications that will allow me not only to respect the differences in my participants’ reading experiences, but also to be able to walk away from the research process when the time comes (St. Pierre, 1997).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter described the methodology for this study that includes the research design as well as the framework, research positionality, philosophical assumptions, and methodological considerations. An overview of the framework of qualitative and quantitative research is presented as well as a description of the participants and data collection.

## CHAPTER IV:

### RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the results of the mixed method study are presented. The data is presented in relation to each research question. The form of data collection for question one is presented qualitatively. In order to answer research question two, the data is first presented quantitatively and then qualitatively. In this portion, data collection results yielded from the AMRP, focus group discussions and individual interviews.

#### **Question One:**

##### **What are high school students' perceptions of Accelerated Reader?**

Focus group discussions and individual interviews were coded extensively in order to understand the perceptions high school students have of Accelerated Reader. From these methods of data collection, six major themes emerged that describe their perceptions. The themes that emerged were 1) Mismatch of Reading Interests and Reading Range; 2) STAR Reading; 3) Motivation to Read; 4) Goal Setting; 5) Classroom Implementation; and 6) Reading Time.

Even though there were themes that emerged in the coding process, there were also comments from the participants in the focus group discussions and individual interviews that voiced their perceptions in general of Accelerated Reader. These general comments provided mixed results concerning the overall perceptions of the program. The following illustrates the

participants' general perceptions about AR after I asked the question in the individual interviews, "What are your general thoughts, as a high school student, on the Accelerated Reader program?"

### **Overall Perceptions**

Overall, the students' perceptions regarding AR were mixed. The majority of the overall responses were positive. Some students thought that it actually helped them to comprehend better, introduced them to different genres, and made them an overall better reader because the program encouraged them to read more. On the other hand, some of the students perceived the program to have a negative influence on them as an adolescent reader. Some of the students perceived the program as a "turn off" from reading because they did not see the point in it or that too much emphasis was placed on being a good reader but not enjoying reading.

### **Mismatch of Reading Interests and Reading Range**

The first theme to emerge in the coding process is a mismatch between reading interests and reading range. From the discussions of the students in the focus groups and individual interviews, there was evidence of disconnect between students' reading interests and their reading ranges. The students' comments in the portion of the discussion that focused on reading interests and ranges became emotionally surged as they discussed their dislike of STAR testing as well as the constraints of reading in a certain reading level range when they wanted to read books not included in their range. Therefore, from the discussion, two sub themes emerged in the coding process, STAR Reading and Constraints of Reading Range.

**STAR Reading.** Throughout the focus group discussions, it was apparent that many of the participants were frustrated at having to take the STAR test, which is a reading test in AR that determines reading levels. Two participants from Southmont, Alan and Craig viewed the test as "quite boring." Another participant from Southmont admitted that "... the STAR test, I

actually didn't do very well on it because if you didn't do very well on it, you had more books to read."

The participants from Sullivan School and Vinemont did discuss their feelings toward STAR testing. Through their discussions, they just viewed STAR Reading as more of a bothersome aspect of AR and felt like it was just something they did because their teachers' required them to be tested. However, the students from Southmont revealed the highest level of frustration than any other school concerning STAR testing. Two of the students, Alan and Craig perceived the test to be boring. While the others purposefully admitted to scoring low on STAR so they could have more books that were easier to read to choose from in their reading range to meet their goals quicker. One student (Clyde) felt that is was "unfair to base your total reading score on one test."

**Constraints of Reading Range.** The discussions from the three schools revealed different levels of frustration of being constrained to read in a specific reading range. Michelle, a student from Vinemont revealed that because, "I was on a lower reading range, I really didn't like the books. We had to read in our range." Robin, Holli, and Ginger, who were also from Vinemont, did admit that it was easier to find books when they were younger, but as they got older, it became more difficult. Robin went on further to say that because she always felt constrained to read in a certain range by saying, "I don't like to read anymore, I only do it when I have to."

While some of the participants did voice their thoughts about how they felt the constraints of their reading range as they advanced in grade level, some of the participants voiced their frustrations with the constraints of their reading range from their elementary years.

Amanda, a participant who admitted to being on a 12<sup>th</sup> grade reading level in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade voiced her frustrations of feeling confined in her reading range. She voiced,

When I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I was basically reading on a 12<sup>th</sup> grade level. That's basically where I stayed from 4<sup>th</sup> grade on. Everybody else had this big section of books and I had this tiny section...I wanted to read *Goosebumps* like everybody else and I couldn't because they (teachers) made me read books that I had to read on certain levels and I couldn't read anything else. It was frustrating because I could never find anything that I wanted to read.

Moreover, Jana also voiced her level of frustration of being confined to a high reading range in a lower grade. She voiced, "I wanted to read about animals and adventures so I scored a lower reading level. (STAR) a lot of times the librarian would direct me to one shelf. I remember that I did not like it at all. They had nothing. It was really bad. It made me not want to read. I held a grudge in my heart." Mindi also voiced her frustration at reading on a higher level in a lower grade. She expressed her frustrations at how the constraints of a higher reading level made her hate reading by saying, "They had plenty of books, but my reading level was so high that I wasn't interested in the stuff they had to read. I mean, that's the reason why I didn't like reading in elementary school."

Even though many of the participants felt constrained because of their reading levels, some of the participants did talk about being satisfied with the books in their reading ranges. Alan did find plenty to read within his reading range. "They had plenty of books that were interesting. Plenty for girls...boys. Anything...high levels...low levels. You just had to go do it."

### **Motivation to Read**

With this in mind, the second theme, Motivation to Read, emerged in the coding process. Throughout the discussions from all three schools, the students voiced what motivated them to read for Accelerated Reader.

**Extrinsic Motivation.** Participants from Southmont School and Vinemont School vividly discussed their perceptions of being extrinsically motivated to read for Accelerated Reader. During the discussions, the focus group participants candidly discussed their reasons for reading for AR centered on prizes for achieving their point-goals at the end of each marking period and end of the year for reading the most books. Many of them admitted that getting prizes was the only reason why they were motivated to read.

With this in mind, a student from Southmont, Lynn, talked about how the library had a prize closet for motivating students to reach their point goals by stating, “If you met your goals...the library would have a prize closet.” Craig, also from Southmont, voiced, “In the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade, we would get pizza parties at the end of the six weeks. While everyone who didn’t get it had to sit in class and read books. Then we would get an award ceremony and whoever had the most points would get a \$100 savings bond, \$50 savings bond, or a \$25 savings bond.”

Like the participants at Southmont, the participants at Vinemont also admitted that prizes motivated them to read for AR. Holli admitted this by saying, “I mostly read just to get the party at the end.” Robin, another participant from Vinemont agreed by voicing, “We always read to see who was going to read the most. If we read 10 books, we always got ice cream that year.”

While the participants from Southmont and Vinemont admitted the only reason why they were motivated to read for AR was because of the prizes, the participants from Southmont considered the prizes to be bribery. In the focus group discussion from Southmont, Alan viewed the prizes for reading as bribery. At one point in the discussion, two of the students also mentioned the word “bribe” when describing their motivation for reading. Furthermore into the discussion, Alan went on to say that he perceived the prizes as bribery by saying:

If we did good on our quizzes and met our goals, they gave us prizes. It got better when they tried to bribe us. It got more interesting... They (teachers) wanted us to push ourselves to meet our goals. To do that, they would bribe us at the end of the six weeks.

Craig, another Southmont participant also perceived the prizes to be a form of bribery by commenting, "The teachers would bribe us with pizza parties at the end of the year.

Furthermore, Clyde, another participant from the Southmont focus group discussion perceived the prizes at the end of the marking period to be unfair. He discussed the disadvantage of students who read lower point books over those who read in a reading range that has higher point books. He illustrated this by saying,

I think AR is not fair because the black dots are a lot more points and I understand they have more points, but it would take the other kids millions of other books to get the points they need. When we have a contest, the people that had the higher point books always won because they only had to read 3 or 4 books. I think its kinda fair, but not fair at the same time.

Not only were the participants extrinsically motivated to read for prizes, they were also motivated to read for grades. At Vinemont School, the participants discussed their reading grade being influenced by the results from AR quizzes and that they would get in trouble for making a 70% or below on quizzes.

Moreover, the participants from one focus group discussion admitted that the only reason why they read for Accelerated Reader was just to get out of class and go to the library to either take a quiz or check out an AR book. The following conversation from the transcripts between a participant and me elicited a collective response from the participants in the group.

Cole: I just thought it was fun because we got to get out of class and go take a test on the computer.

TW: Did you go to the library and take the test?

Collectively: Yes, Some teachers had it in their rooms and you could take it in their rooms. So where did you get most of your books? Did you get them from the library? Your teacher 's classroom?

Collective: Library. We wanted to get out of class so we told them (teachers) we read all of the books in their class.

**Intrinsic Motivation.** All of the students in the focus group discussions commented being externally motivated to read for different reasons such as prizes, grades, or to get out of class. However, none of them discussed being intrinsically motivated to read. Some of the participants did discuss that that reading was more fun to read in the lower grades, but all perceived reading to be a chore, as they got older. One participant, Holli, from Vinemont sums this up by saying, “ “When I sitting at the computer, I though it was something that I had to do. I didn’t think it was fun or not fun.” Natalie, a Southmont participant, came the closest to being intrinsically motivated to read, but it was out of fear. This is evident in her response, “...I just wanted my test taken so I wouldn’t have a bad grade.”

### **Goal Setting**

Furthermore, goal setting was a third theme that emerged in the coding process. A large part of the AR program is the idea that students are motivated to read by setting goals for themselves. The participant discussions varied within this theme. Some of the participants’ responses indicated they were able to reach their goals. However, some of them voiced they were not able to reach their goals. Scott and Natalie were two students from Southmont that admitted they always had time to read, but because their reading range was too high, they could not reach their goals. On the other hand, some of the participants’ comments indicated they always finished their goals.

### **Implementation**

Moreover, the fourth theme that emerged in the coding process was how teachers implemented the program. Through the three focus group discussions, it was apparent that all

three sites implemented the program differently. Vineyard and Southmont had similar implementations of the program. But, Sullivan School did not. During the focus groups discussion at Sullivan School, it was evident throughout the participants' comments that they really did not understand the process of AR, especially points and goals. On the different points in the discussion about AR, I had to explain the procedures for points and goals. The participants kept reverting back to asking the question, "Is the point system just to see how good readers we are?" The following comments from the Sullivan School focus group discussion illustrate this point. Amanda stated,

As far as I felt about it, it was just something you did. We all knew what was expected. We all knew it was routine. I don't remember having a goal set, either the teacher setting a goal or me setting my own goals. I never knew we had goals and points to be honest. They would just tell us when and that way our goals were met. We never knew we had a goal. I never knew we had points. When I achieved my points, nothing happened because I didn't know I did it.

Furthermore, Lisa and Bart also agreed with Amanda's comments by saying, "We really didn't have goals or knew about points." Bart perceived the lack of not knowing about goals and points by saying, "I don't ever remember the teachers doing anything with the point goals because they didn't care."

Besides not understanding points and goals, the participants from Sullivan School also felt like their teachers never really cared about AR and only implemented the program because it was a requirement of the administration. Lisa illustrates this by saying, "...we did what we had to do to get done. Our teachers never cared that much about it." Bart also felt that his teachers never cared by commenting, "It just kind of turned me off from reading. Because if they didn't care, what was the point in me caring."

Moreover, when these students were discussing taking AR quizzes, they also described what happened in the classroom after they took quizzes. Amanda felt that if she had not been

given the print out of the quiz grade immediately after taking a quiz, then she would not have ever known her grade. Lisa also felt that her teachers never adjusted anything and they never told them to take a quiz, it was just something they had to do on their own.

The other two schools, Vineyard and Southmont, had programs that followed closely to AR 's six principles. From the participants' discussions, it was evident that the students knew exactly how the program worked, taking the STAR test, reading in their reading ranges, silent reading time in the classroom, and the point and reward system.

### **Reading Time**

The final theme that emerged from the coding process is based on the amount of reading time the participants had to read their AR books. From this discussion, several sub themes emerged.

**Designated Reading Time.** It was apparent throughout the discussions that the only designated reading time was mentioned was from the participant responses at Vineyard School. The students at this school did discuss that not only did they have designated reading time, but they also had designated places to read within the classroom. Holli indicated through her comments that her teachers usually gave her enough time to read after morning work. Ginger, another participant from Vinemont also agreed that she had enough time to read in class and that her teachers let her and her other classmates spread out in the room to read throughout the day.

Even though Vineyard School was the only focus group to mention a designated reading time and reading space in the classroom, the participants in the focus group discussion from Southmont School did discuss that they did have enough time to read and that they had the freedom to go to the library and read. However, comments from the participants in the focus

group discussion from Sullivan reveal that the students did not get enough reading time at school, but found other places like home or in the car to finish their AR books.

**Question Two:**

**What are high school students’ perceptions of how Accelerated Reader has impacted their in-and-out of school reading habits?**

In order to understand how high school students’ perceptions of how AR impacted their in-and-out of reading habits, data was gleaned from the adapted Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile, focus group discussions, and individual interviews. Since the results of the profile show a large population (n=84) of students’ reading habits who participated in AR in grades K-8, these results are revealed first. Next, the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions and individual interviews are discussed.

Each participant in the focus group and individual discussions talked candidly about their reading interests as high school students and how AR affected their reading habits. Because each participant was unique and brought an array of thoughts and emotions to the discussion, different themes emerged to show how AR affected their reading practices.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

Table 8

Group Statistics

	Reading	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Self-Value	Self Concept	5	2.9740	.68178	.30490
	Value of Reading	10	2.5820	.62232	.19680

Because of the design of the questions and responses, a university statistical research professor reviewed the data in the statistical program SPSS. In order to determine if there were

variances in how students' identified themselves as a reader to how they valued reading, a Levene's Test for Equality of Variance was conducted. The results ( $F=.163$ ,  $p=.693$ ) show no significance between the two groups. Therefore, the assumptions were met.

Table 9

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			
		F	Sig.		
Self-Value	Equal variances assumed	.163	.693		
	Equal variances not assumed				

  

		t-test for Equality of Means			
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Self-Value	Equal variances assumed	1.116	13	.285	.39200
	Equal variances not assumed	1.080	7.452	.314	.39200

  

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			Lower	Upper
Self-Value	Equal variances assumed	.35120	-.36673	1.15073
	Equal variances not assumed	.36290	-.45567	1.23967

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare Self Concept as a Reader and Value of Reading. There was no significant difference between Self Concept as a Reader ( $M=2.97$ ,  $SD=.681$ ) and Value of Reading ( $M=2.58$ ,  $SD=.622$ ), conditions  $df=13$ ,  $p=.285$ .

Therefore, these results suggest the way in which students conceptualize themselves as readers does not affect the value they place upon reading. In order to further discuss the participants' responses to questions 1-15, Table 10 was created.

Table 10

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (n=84)

Question	Vineyard (n=22)	Southmont (n=21)	Sullivan (n=41)
#1 My friends think I am...	7% very good reader 10% a good reader 5% an OK reader 2% a poor reader	10% Very good reader 8% A good reader 5% An OK reader 0% A poor reader	12% Very good reader 31% A good reader 6% An OK reader 1% A poor reader
#2 Reading a book is something I like to do.	4% Never 8% Not very often 9% Sometimes 3% Often	6% Never 6% Not very often 12% Sometimes 6% Often	5% Never 10% Not very often 20% Sometimes 15% Often
#3 I read...as my friends.	4% Not as well 14% About the same 6% A little better 1% A lot better	1% Not as well 14% About the same 7% A little better 0% A lot better	2% Not as well 25% About the same 14% A little better 8% A lot better
#4 My friends think reading is...	0% Really fun 1% Fun 12% OK to do 12% Not fun at all	0% Really fun 2% Fun 13% OK to do 7% Not fun at all	0% Really fun 4% Fun 25% OK to do 21% Not fun at all
#5 When I come to a word I don't know, I can...	10% almost figure out 15% Sometimes 1% Almost never 0% Never	12% almost figure out 10% Sometimes 1% Almost never 0% Never	33% almost figure out 14% Sometimes 1% Almost never 1% Never
#6 I tell my friends about good books I read.	6% Never do this 7% Almost never 10% some of the time 4% Do this a lot	6% Never do this 6% Almost never 10% some of the time 4% Do this a lot	11% Never do this 6% Almost never 27% some of the time 6% Do this a lot
#7 When I am reading to myself, I understand...	18% Almost everything 6% Some 1% Almost none 0% none	19% Almost everything 2% Some 0% Almost none 1% None	38% Almost everything 7% Some 1% Almost none 1% None
#8 People who read	6% Very interesting 15% Interesting 1% Not very	1% Very interesting 14% Interesting 8% Not very	13% Very interesting 26% Interesting 5% Not very

are...	4% Boring	0% Boring	6% Boring
#9 I am a...	2% A poor reader 6% OK reader 13% Good reader 5% Very good reader	0% A poor reader 4% OK reader 12% Good reader 7% Very good reader	2% A poor reader 6% OK reader 26% Good reader 16% Very good reader
#10 I think libraries are...	1% Great place 8% Interesting place 10% OK place 9% Boring place	0% Great place 5% Interesting place 13% OK place 5% Boring place	6% Great place 11% Interesting place 29% OK place 5% Boring place
#11 Knowing how to read well is...	0% Not very 1% Sort of important 7% Important 18% Very important	0% Not very 4% Sort of important 10% Important 10% Very important	1% Not very 4% Sort of important 4% Important 42% Very important
#12 I think reading is...	8% Boring way 8% OK way 9% Interesting way 1% Great way	1% Boring way 13% OK way 4% Interesting way 5% Great way	7% Boring way 17% OK way 15% Interesting way 11% Great way
#13 Reading is...	14% Very easy 8% Kind of easy 4% Kind of hard 0% Very hard	18% Very easy 4% Kind of easy 1% Kind of hard 0% Very hard	37% Very easy 11% Kind of easy 2% Kind of hard 0% Very hard
#14 I would like for my teachers to read aloud in my classes	2% Every day 8% Almost every day 12% Once in a while 4% Never	4% Every day 2% Almost every day 12% Once in a while 4% Never	7% Every day 11% Almost every day 21% Once in a while 11% Never
#15 When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel...	6% Very happy 8% Sort of happy 7% Sort of unhappy 5% Unhappy	4% Very happy 10% Sort of happy 6% Sort of unhappy 4% Unhappy	11% Very happy 31% Sort of happy 2% Sort of unhappy 6% Unhappy

In Table 10, the first column states the questions in the AMRP. Columns two, three, and four compare the data of the three schools (Vineyard, Southmont, and Sullivan). In Question 1, the students' responses indicate that their friends perceive them to be good readers. Likewise in question 9 (I am a...reader.), the students' perceive themselves to also be good readers. Question 3 also addresses how the participants' perceive themselves as readers by asking the

question: I read... as well as my friends. The response to this question indicates that the participants' perceive themselves to read about the same as their friends. Question 13 also discusses the participants' view of reading by asking, "Reading is..." The responses indicate that none of the participants perceived reading to be "very hard." Furthermore, the results from Question 4 show that when the participants were asked, "My friends think reading is..." the participants perceive this as "OK to do" or perceive this as "Not fun at all." Question 2 discusses how the participants perceive spending their time reading on an individual basis. The participants' responses indicate that they only spend some of their time reading. Moreover, the results of this question further show that the participants perceive spending their time reading as something they "never" do or "not very often."

Whereas the responses to Questions 11 and 12 discuss the value the participants place on reading. Overwhelmingly, the participants from the three schools perceive knowing how to read well as "very important", but perceive reading an "Okay way" to spend time. In Question 8, when the participants were asked, "People who read are..." The majority of them perceive people who read as "interesting" while a small percentage view people who read as "boring." Furthermore, Question 10 discusses the participants' perceptions of libraries. Some of the participants' responses view libraries as "OK places to spend time" while others view libraries as a "boring." Furthermore, when the participants' were asked, "When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel..." (Question 15) only a small response indicated them to be "very happy" while the majority of the responses seem to be "sort of happy" if they received a book for a present.

Questions 5 and 7 discuss reader comprehension. In Question 5 (When I come to a word I don't know, I can...), the majority of the students' responses indicate they either "almost figure

it out” or “sometimes figure it out.” On the other hand, Question 7 discusses silent reading by asking the question, “When I am reading to myself, I understand...” The majority of the participants’ responses indicate they understand “almost everything” when they read silently.

Questions 6 and 14 discuss reading as a social action. When the students were asked if they told friends about good books they read (Question 6) their response of “some of the time” is consistent among the three schools. Question 14 also discusses reading as a social action and is the only question that discusses the teacher’s role in reading. When the participants’ were asked if they wanted their teacher to read aloud to them in class, the responses from the three schools indicate that the students do want their teachers to read aloud to them “once in a while.”

The AMRP also contained five open-ended questions. Questions 16-20 were open-ended questions that were coded according to categories that emerged from the students written responses (see Appendix H for further explanation). In Question 16 (What activities do you like to do after school?), seven categories emerged. The participants listed “sports” (51) as their number one activity with subcategories of dance, cheerleading, football, baseball, and softball emerged. The next two categories were “music” (47) which included listening to music and playing instruments, and “recreational” (45) which included activities such as hunting, fishing, and riding all terrain vehicles. The other four categories that emerged were leisure, friends, family, and significant others, movies/television, and other which included religious activities, work, and school.

Furthermore, Question 17 discussed, “What type of materials do you like to read?” The number one category that emerged was magazines with fifty-one responses, the second category was books with fifty responses, which included genres such as comic books, young adult literature, fantasy, and horror, and the third category was Internet resources with 24 responses.

Social Media was another category that emerged with only six responses. This category included Facebook, Twitter, and texting.

With this in mind, Question 18 discussed, “What are some of your favorite books you have read?” The genre of Fantasy/Science Fiction (89 responses) was the number one genre read by the participants. This category included specific titles such as *Twilight*, *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson*, *Hunger Games*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The second genre that emerged was Drama. This category included titles such as *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, *Crank*, *Burned*, and *An Abundance of Katherines*. The third category was Adventure and listed titles such as *The Hatchet*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Brian’s Winter*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and *The Boxcar Children*. Other genres that participants listed as their favorites were the Classics which included titles such as *Moby Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter*, Biography/Historical Fiction which included titles such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and Mystery which included titles such as *The DaVinci Code*, *The Lovely Bones*, and *The Wrong Number*.

Question 19 discussed, “What authors do you like to read?” The participants responded with seventeen authors they classified as their favorite. The number one author listed was Gary Paulsen. Other authors listed by the participants were J. K. Rowling, Stephanie Meyer, C. S. Lewis, Sarah Dessen, Eoin Colfer, and Ellen Hopkins.

Furthermore, the last question, Question 20 discussed, “What really gets you excited about reading?” Some of the participants’ responses were “The suspense in books;” “When you read, you can escape to other worlds;” “Being able to get sucked into a storyline and feeling like you are practically living in a book;” and “Learn about different things.” On the other hand, other participants responded openly about not being motivated to read. Some of these responses include “Nothing” and “Nothing really. I have to be in the mood to find a book.”

## **Focus Group Discussions**

### **Reading Interests**

The first theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was how the students wanted to read materials and genres that were interesting to them. They all discussed that even though they felt like the amount of school assignments and extra-curricular activities now required much of their time, they do find time to read here and there. Several of the students' commented that they enjoy reading anything they found interesting. While others were more specific about the types of materials they like to read and valued reading. Mindi, a student from Southmont commented, "If the books is interesting, I like to read it, but if it is not, then I don't like to read it." Clyde another student from Southmont indicated by his comments that he really doesn't like to read books or magazines, but Internet resources. Craig on the other hand, likes to read magazines about his hobbies, specifically, *Newsweek*.

Furthermore, John, a student from Sullivan School commented specifically about what he liked to read by saying, "I like to read books based on real life. Like biographies and history books. My interests have changed since I have gotten older." However, Lisa another student from Sullivan and Ginger a Vinemont participant only like to read fiction books because the stories can be possible and because they find nonfiction boring.

### **Lack of Reading Time**

A second theme that emerged through the focus group discussions was that some of the students felt like they do not have enough time to read because of changing classes and the required schoolwork. Laura's comment in the discussion makes this point. She stated, "When we were younger, we had 10 times more time to read. As we got older, reading got harder."

### **Forced to Read**

A third theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was that students grew to dislike reading because they felt forced to read for AR. Several of the students commented that they felt pushed by their teachers to read more and on a higher range than their designated reading range. Which in turn, made them feel burned out. Laura illustrates her feeling of being forced to read by stating, “I just remember being forced to read outside my reading range, like higher and everything. As I got older, reading just started going down because we were forced to take AR tests all the time. So, I got burned out on reading.”

### **Interviews**

The six students that agreed to participate in the individual interview process discussed how AR affected their reading habits. Five of the participants were from Sullivan School and the other interview participant was from Southmont School. During the discussions the students discussed other factors that contributed to how AR affected their reading habits.

### **Home Literacy**

The first theme that emerged from the individual interviews was the theme of home literacy. Out of the six participants that agreed to be interviewed, five of them commented in their individual interviews that their parents and other relatives influenced them to read not only for pleasure, but they looked for books and other reading materials at home that matched their reading interests when they could not find resources at school. All of the participants reported that their parents or other relatives influence their reading habit.

### **Different Genres**

A second theme that emerged from the interviews was the idea that AR introduced the students to different genres. Which, in turn, has influenced their reading interests today as high

school students. One of the participants (Jana) talked about how she liked the idea that “reading for AR did influence her interest in science fiction, fantasy, and general science.” Another student (Bart) discussed that he likes to read “biographies and about history” based on what he read for AR.

### **Reading Time**

Furthermore, the students discussed that they have less time to read, but still try to make time, because they value reading. One participant illustrated this by saying, “We don’t have time to read books for pleasure in class, but I still read. I have a Kindle in my purse.” Another student commented by saying, “I really don’t have a lot of time to read, but I make time to read, even if it is late at night.”

### **Summary**

Results from this chapter presented the data analysis from a mixed method approach that included survey methodology (quantitative) and focus groups and interviews (qualitative). The instrumentation for the analysis provided results from students (n=84) in grades 9-12 who participated in AR in grades K-8. Descriptive analysis using an independent t-test analyzed the instrumentation. The results from the AMRP showed no significance between the two groups of Reader Identity and Value of Reading. The results from the focus groups and interviews glean the students’ perceptions and feelings about their participation in Accelerated Reader and how it has affected their current reading practices as high school students. Themes that emerged in the coding process included Mismatch of Reading Interests and Reading Range, Motivation to Read, Goal Setting, Implementation, and Reading Time.

CHAPTER V:  
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

**Discussion of Findings**

First, a discussion of the findings is presented to determine students' overall perception of AR and how the program affected their reading practices. Next, findings are presented according to how they correspond to the Accelerated Reader framework presented in Chapter III. Finally, the implications of the students' perceptions of AR are presented and the relationship to practice, future research, and policy as well as the limitations that occurred during the study.

**Accelerated Reader and Adolescent Literacy**

The philosophy of Accelerated Reader is that if students are motivated to read more and better books, then 1) other academic domains will improve in conjunction with reading skills; 2) appreciate school more; 3) students who never read will suddenly become voracious readers; 4) and with AR, you build life-long readers and learners" (Pavonetti et al., 2000). However, from the responses of participants in this study, Accelerated Reader can prove to be counterproductive for adolescents.

One can question if the nature of AR is just to promote data-driven assessment by taking quizzes after reading books or truly motivating students to become life-long readers. From the participants' in this study, many of them voiced their frustration as they advanced in grade level with the redundancy of having to take quiz after quiz. The participants, especially from Sullivan and Southmont, perceived this to be monotonous. While, the participants from Vineyard just thought of it as something they just did. Moreover, are students motivated by prizes and setting

their own goals? Or, are they growing tired of data-driven assessment and want other ways to learn about reading such as book clubs and literature circles (Creel, 2007)? As one student from Sullivan explained, “I wish we could just sometimes talk about books.” With this in mind, the way in which AR is implemented does affect students’ attitudes toward reading and their identity as a reader.

### **Level of Implementation**

With this in mind, the level of implementation does effect students’ overall perceptions of Accelerated Reader. Based on the participants’ responses, the findings show an inconsistency among the implementation level of the three schools. It is apparent that one school (Southmont) focused heavily on extrinsically motivating students to read whereas Sullivan School did not reward students in any way for reading. From the participants’ responses from the focus group discussion, only Vineyard School seemed to be the most successful in implementing the program according to the Accelerated Reader framework by providing students with designated time to read in class as well as using small forms of extrinsic motivation to reward students to read. Also, from the student response from Vineyard School, the teachers were more relaxed with the students’ reading ranges by encouraging them to read outside of their range. Therefore, it seems that a medium level of implementation is more successful in encouraging student reading (Everhart, 2005).

### **Attitudes toward Reading**

One part of the AR philosophy is to motivate students to become life-long readers. But, does AR really accomplish this? For many of the participants in this study, this did not happen. Many of them did not develop a love of reading, but were “turned off” from reading as a result of participating in AR (Biggers, 2001; Luck, 2010). It was not until many of the participants

advanced in grade level, especially when they stopped participating in AR, did they develop a love for reading. Furthermore, as high school students, the findings show they disliked reading and only read to complete class assignments. Moreover, other findings indicated that reading for them has declined because they felt forced into taking AR tests and could not read for pleasure. Therefore, it is apparent throughout the number of responses that AR did affect their general attitudes toward reading.

Also, there is a disconnect from what students are doing out of school to what is happening in the classroom. Many of the participants do value reading but, many of them do find reading boring and similarly, they would rather spend their time doing something else like outdoor activities as well computer games, listening to music, and watching television (Creel, 2007). As indicated in previous research (Broaddus, 2001; Intrator & Kunzman, 2009), high school students still enjoy reading with their teachers (teachers reading aloud to them in class). Moreover, students prefer to have more autonomy to make their own reading selections and having a wide-range of reading materials in different genres proved to motivated students to read more.

With this in mind, students viewed reading for AR as a social interaction (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009). Specifically, many of the students voiced their dislike of only taking quizzes with books and wanted more social situations such as group activities or time set aside to discuss their reading interests with their peers. Results from the survey data support the practice of book groups and discussions with their peers and also their teachers. Furthermore, when the participants were interviewed on an individual basis, they indicated that when they did discuss books, it was mostly with a parent or family member.

Furthermore, many of the participants indicated from their survey responses as well as from the focus group discussions and individual interviews their literacy practices were very different out of school. Also, the participants did make several comments that they found AR to be easier in the early grades, but the program was more difficult as they advanced in grade level because the school libraries and classrooms did not have enough interesting books in their reading ranges as well as they perceived their reading ranges were too high. They had a more difficult time reaching their goals because they perceived their point goals too high to reach. Therefore, it is apparent that literacy practices of students do change as they become adolescents and there is a mismatch between what students are practicing in school as apposed to what literacy practices are occurring out of school (Applemann, 2010; Alexander & Fox, 2011).

Overall, the findings from the study do indicate a mismatch between reading practices in school to reading practices out-of-school. Therefore, for the students in this study, there is not a decline in reading habits. However, they choose to read materials other than books or specific authors and titles that match their reading interests. Furthermore, students indicated a desire to read about the world around them and people of the past and present (Hopper, 2005).

### **Reader Identities**

Furthermore, AR's philosophy discusses the idea that struggling readers will become voracious readers as a result of participating in the program. Therefore, how students' view themselves as readers is very important when considering student reading interest and reading motivation (Miller, 2009). Findings from this study show that how students' perceptions of themselves as readers does affect reading habits as adolescents. From their participation in AR, some of the students viewed themselves as being strong readers whereas some of the students viewed themselves as being slow readers. However, those students who considered themselves

to be good, strong readers became non-readers after participating in AR. From their experiences in the program, they currently have a general dislike for reading because of they felt like AR was a forced as well as the monotony of having to read for assessment, not for pleasure. With this in mind, current research shows that the way in which students identify themselves as readers shapes their perceptions of adolescent literacy (Lewis & DeValle, 2009). Therefore, if reader identity does affect students' literacy practices, then is AR really effective in helping struggling readers become voracious readers?

### **Accelerated Reader Framework**

Since previous research has only explored certain portions of AR to determine its effectiveness of AR, this study took the principles of AR and formed questions based on these principles that resulted in the survey, focus groups, and individual interviews. Therefore, the discussion of findings will be organized by the principles of the Accelerated Reader framework (Nunnery, Ross & McDonald, 2006; Renaissance Learning, 2000).

### **Students Need Time to be Better Readers**

According to AR, in order for students to become better readers, a 30 to 60 minute block of time is suggested for reading practice everyday. From the students' responses in the survey, focus group discussions, and individual interviews only one school (Vinemont) had a designated reading time everyday as well as some students from this school reported having designated spots within the classroom and library that encouraged silent reading (Warrican, 2006; Broaddus, 2001). Other students reported not having enough time in class to read, but they managed to get their reading done either at home, in the car, or during after-school programs.

### **Students Will Benefit from Reading Practice at a High Level of Success**

Success is defined by AR as 85% or above on AR quizzes. The findings from this principle varied among student responses. Some of the students freely admitted that they always met their goals, even without having a designated time to read in class. While others, such as Natalie and Mindi admitted having difficulty in meeting their goals because they felt their reading ranges from STAR Reading test were too high. Moreover, the results indicated that none of the students were able to select their own AR goals, but the teachers always made the decision for them without taking into account if the students were successful in making an 85% or higher on the quizzes or if the books within their reading range matched their reading interests. Otherwise, the participants voiced from the responses in the survey and focus group discussions a desire for more autonomy over their reading selections (Broaddus, 2001; Pitcher et al., 2007).

### **All Students Should Be Matched to their Individual Abilities**

The questions from this section were based on reading ranges as well as how these ranges matched their reading interests. Similar to the study by Thompson, Madhuri, and Taylor (2009), many of the responses from this study demonstrate how the mismatch of reading interests to their reading ranges caused a decline in students attitudes toward reading as well as wide-spread cheating on STAR reading to get a lower range as well as the quizzes associated with the books. Many of the students, especially from Vineyard and Southmont indicated a general negative attitude toward their selection of books within their reading ranges in the school library as well as classrooms. Moreover, like previous research indicates (Thompson, Madhuri, & Taylor (2009), many of the students indicated that they felt forced or pressured to read which decreased their interests in reading for pleasure.

## **Immediate Feedback of Information on Students' Comprehension of Books Allows for Differentiated Instruction**

The participants' responses from the three schools indicated that they liked getting the immediate feedback from the quizzes. Some of the students, especially from Southmont indicated in the focus group discussions that if they had not gotten immediate feedback from the computer quiz, their teacher probably would not have related their quiz results to them. The students from the other schools indicated a more structured level of implementation. They received their quiz results immediately and they took the STAR test two to three times a year, which allowed for adjustment to be made to their reading ranges.

Moreover, responses from the focus group discussions indicated that reading goals started over for each marking period. Also, they were never allowed to retake a test. But, the students from Sullivan School did indicate that some of their teachers did assign other forms of assessment with their AR books such as group assignments or book reports. From the survey responses, the majority of the participants did like it when their teachers read aloud to them. (Pitcher et al., 2007) However there is no evidence from student responses that differentiated reading instruction occurred from the students' scores on AR quizzes.

## **Students are Encouraged to Set their own Personal Goals for Independent Reading, Book Level, or Performance**

The fifth principle of AR focuses on goals and the idea that the establishment of goals motivates students to become better readers and read more materials. The implementation of AR goals was different within the three schools. The responses from the students from Sullivan School indicated a strong disconnect between the goal portion of Accelerated Reader. During the focus groups discussion with these students, it was apparent that the students did not

understand this process and they freely admitted that they never really understood the AR program in general. They all felt like it was just something they had to do.

However, the students from Southmont School viewed the goals as a form of bribery. All of these students admitted from this school that they only read because they got prizes at the end. The comments from students from Vineyard School indicated they read for prizes. Therefore, based on the participants' responses, it is determined the level of implementation affects student motivation and the extent of reading (Everhart, 2005).

### **Teachers Provide Students with Individualized Instruction Based on Daily Reports and Progress Monitoring**

The sixth principle indicates the teachers should provide individualized instruction with students based on their quiz grades. It appears from the responses that no individualized instruction occurred during the students' participation in Accelerated Reader.

### **Relationship Between the Findings and the AR Framework**

When the themes are compared to the AR framework, there are some discrepancies. One of the discrepancies is the amount of time set aside for students to read varied between classrooms. Secondly, when the participants' perceptions are compared to the Accelerated Reader framework, it appears that the three schools employed different levels of implementation. Thirdly, some of the principles such as immediate feedback on book quizzes, and silent reading time were followed, but none of the schools closely followed the program according to the AR framework. Table 11 explains how the codes correspond to the AR framework.

Table 11

Themes Matching with the Accelerated Reader Framework

Principle	Emergent Themes
<i>Students need time to be better readers.</i>	Reading Time/Lack of Reading Time, Home Literacy
<i>All students should be matched to their individual abilities.</i>	Reading Interests (STAR, Constraints of Reading Range, Genre)
<i>Students will benefit from reading practice at a high level of success</i>	Designated Reading Time, Lack of Reading Time; Forced to Read
<i>Immediate feedback of information on students' comprehension of books allows for differentiated instruction.</i>	Not Applicable
<i>Students are encouraged to set their own personal goals for independent reading, book level, or performance.</i>	Motivation to Read (extrinsic and intrinsic motivation), Goal Setting
<i>Teachers provide students with individualized instruction based on daily reports and progress monitoring.</i>	Not Applicable

Two (Immediate Feedback and Individual Instruction) of the Six Principles did not correspond to the students' responses. Themes such as Reading Time/Interest, Motivation, and Goal Setting did emerge from the coding process. These themes did correspond with the other four principles. However, two other themes emerged that cannot be categorized into the Six Principles of AR. These two themes are Overall Perceptions and Implementation.

**Implications**

Through this exploration of students' perceptions of Accelerated Reader and how the program shaped in and out-of school literacy practices, it is clear that students' overall perceptions of AR do vary. But, how the program was implemented within each school played a

strong part in shaping their perceptions of reading as high school students. Also, it is apparent through the results that students crave an autonomy of what they read that starts in the early grades. Therefore, based on the inconsistency of empirical research that focuses on adolescents' perceptions of AR, the results from this study have implications for practice, future research, and policy.

### **Implications for Classroom Practice**

There are several implications from this study may have a significant impact on student learning and classroom practice. First, the study does show that how AR was implemented in the three schools does affect student motivation in reading achievement as well as their attitudes toward reading in general. For example, participants from Southmont were motivated to read to get prizes while students from Vinemont were motivated to read because they did not want to get a bad grade. The participants from Sullivan are motivated to read because they developed a love for reading after they advanced in the higher grades. By in large, student motivation does affect their attitudes toward school in general as well as their reading practices. Therefore, teachers and administrators need to listen more closely to adolescents concerning what matters to them in the classroom and understand the broader contextual forces that motivate them to read as well as shape their identity toward learning (Deshler, Palinscar, Biancarosa, & Nair, 2007).

Secondly, in order for teachers or other members of school communities to promote life-long reading achievement, the curriculum that is implemented must be adjusted in order to merge students' reading interests, their reading practices in and out-of school as well as meeting state and federal requirements. It is apparent throughout this exploration of students' perceptions of AR that either they currently do not like to read and consider it to be something they are forced to do to meet school expectations, or they developed a reading habit after their participation in

AR was over and they were free to read materials that matched their reading interests (Broaddus, 2001; Applemann, 2010; Alexander & Fox, 2011; Hopper, 2005). Taking the time to getting to know students' interests in an out-of school does affect classroom practices. Therefore, it is important for teachers' to know how other literacies such as multiliteracies and home literacies impact student reading achievement.

Thirdly, it is important for classroom teachers to know what type of readers are in their classes and that reader identities do affect students motivation to read for school as well as for pleasure (Miller, 2009). When a teacher knows the type of readers in his or her classroom, then he or she is more likely to develop curricula that differentiates student learning with students' literacy practices as well as motivate students to read by incorporating different forms of literature such as Internet resources, magazines, newspapers, and digital resources.

Finally, the majority of students in the study commented that they were tired of participating in the program by the time they entered the fourth or fifth grade. They found the program to be monotonous, which coincided with their current attitudes toward reading. Therefore, it is imperative that classroom teachers and school administration evaluate the overall effectiveness of AR from grades 4 to 12 to determine if AR is truly creating lifelong readers or students who feel forced to read just to meet school requirements.

### **Future Research**

This study opens the door for future research concerning students' perceptions of Accelerated Reader as well as how the program has shaped in-and out-of-school reading practices. Future research should include a deeper exploration of how the program is implemented in all three schools. Future research should also focus on how teachers, parents,

and administration perceive the overall effectiveness of the program in motivating students to become lifelong readers and the reading achievement.

## **Policy**

Currently, this research does have implications for local, state, and federal policy. Many policies across the state and federal governments are now looking at adolescent reading achievement. Many new guidelines such as the Common Core Standards are now being implemented by many state educational departments across the country that include merging contents such as science, social studies, technology, and English Language Arts with literacy instruction. Policy makers hope that with the implementation of these new standards that student achievement will increase as well as their motivating students to become better readers.

Therefore, in order to implement literacy instruction across the disciplines as well as promoting overall reading achievement, school communities must take a deeper look at what motivates students' to read, their reading practices in and out of school, and their reader identities. Also, schools must evaluate their current reading programs such as AR to determine if the program is or is not successful in motivating adolescents to read or what point in grades K-12 does AR become ineffective or become more effective in increasing the overall reading achievement of students.

Even though empirical research is still limited on Accelerated Reader, this study is just a small piece that fits into a larger picture of research on how students perceive Accelerated Reader and how the program has impacted their in and out of school reading practices. It is important for schools to evaluate the implementation of the program to eliminate any inconsistencies among teachers and grade levels. Also, it is important to consider the reading

interests of students and how this plays a role in motivating them to participate in AR as well as how this impacts their reader identities as life-long readers.

As I sum up this research and where it was in the initial stages, I am able to reflect on all of my students over the years that made this project possible as well as all of the snippets of literacy practices that I have learned from working with teachers of all grade levels promote literacy instruction in their classrooms as well as aid them in helping students to become life-long readers.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A  
Adolescent Motivation to Read Questionnaire

Part I. Demographics

1. I am in \_\_\_\_\_.  
 9th grade  
 10<sup>th</sup> grade  
 11<sup>th</sup> grade  
 12<sup>th</sup> grade
  
2. I am a \_\_\_\_\_.  
 Female  
 Male
  
3. My race/ethnicity is \_\_\_\_\_.  
 African-American  
 Asian/Asian American  
 Caucasian  
 Hispanic  
 Native American  
 Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic  
 Other: Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_.

Part II.

Directions: Please answer each question to the best of your ability.

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  
 Not very often  
 Sometimes  
 Often
  
3. 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

4. My friends think reading is \_\_\_\_\_.
- really fun
  - fun
  - Ok to do
  - not fun at all

5. 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

6. I tell my friends about good books I read.
- I never do this
  - almost never do this
  - I do this some of the time
  - I do this a lot

7. When I am reading to myself, I understand \_\_\_\_\_.
- almost everything I read
  - some of what I read
  - almost none of what I read
  - none of what I read

8. People who read a lot are \_\_\_\_\_.
- very interesting
  - interesting
  - not very interesting
  - boring

9. I am a \_\_\_\_\_.
- a poor reader
  - an OK reader

- a good reader
- a very good reader

10. I think libraries are \_\_\_\_\_.
- a great place to spend time
  - an interesting place to spend time
  - an OK place to spend time
  - a boring place to spend time

11. Knowing how to read well is \_\_\_\_\_.
- not very important
  - sort of important
  - important
  - very important

12. I think reading is \_\_\_\_\_.
- a boring way to spend time
  - an OK way to spend time
  - an interesting way to spend time
  - a great way to spend time

13. Reading is \_\_\_\_\_.
- very easy for me
  - kind of easy for me
  - kind of hard for me
  - very hard for me

14. I would like for my teachers to read out loud in my classes \_\_\_\_\_.
- every day
  - almost every day
  - once in a while
  - never

15. When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.
- very happy
  - sort of happy
  - sort of unhappy
  - unhappy

16. What activities do you like to do out of school? (i.e. computer games, listening to music, playing sport, etc.)
  
17. What type of materials do you like to read? (i.e. magazines, Internet, books, newspapers)
  
18. What are some of your favorite books that you have read?
  
19. What authors do you like to read?
  
20. What gets you really excited about reading?

## Appendix B Focus Group Questions

The following focus group discussion questions are based on the six principles of best practice of Accelerated Reader.

- I. Students need time to be better readers
  - a. Where did you spend most of your time reading AR books?
  - b. Did you ever feel that you did not have enough time to complete your AR goals? Why or Why not?
  
- II. Students will benefit from reading practice at high levels of success. Success is defined as 85% or better on quizzes.
  - a. Describe the process you went through as you took your quizzes.
  - b. Describe the way your teachers used AR in your classes.
  - c. Did your teachers every give you any options in testing your knowledge on books you read other than taking AR quizzes?
  
- III. All students should read materials that are matched to their individual abilities.
  - a. Did you find books within your reading range interesting?
  - b. Did your teacher only let you read books within your reading range?
  - c. Did your school library/classrooms have materials that you found interesting and within your reading range?
  - d. How did you feel when you had to read a book only because it was in your reading range?
  - e. As you advanced in grade level, did you find it more difficult to find books you found interesting in your reading range?
  
- IV. Immediate feedback of information on students' comprehension of books they read allow for differentiated instruction.
  - a. Did you like the way AR gave you your quiz grade immediately after taking a quiz?
  - b. Did your teacher ever adjust your point goals based on quiz scores?
  - c. How often did your reading range change in a school year? Did they stay the same throughout the year/change during the year?
  - d. How did you like taking quizzes on the computer?
  
- V. Students are encouraged to set their own goals for independent reading, book level, and performance?
  - a. As you increased in grade level, how did you feel about AR?
  - b. Were you able to read at your own pace or were you still expected to achieve a certain number of points?
  - c. Did your teachers ever let you set your own AR goals?

- d. What happened when you achieved all of your point goals?
- VI. Teachers provide students with individual instruction based on their daily assessment and progress monitoring.
- a. As you advanced in grade levels, did your teachers ever teach you reading strategies to help with comprehension or vocabulary?
  - b. How did you discuss books in your classes?

Appendix C  
Interview Questions

1. From the focus group discussions, do you have any more thoughts about AR?
2. Is there anything you would like to add?
3. Is there anyone at home that has influenced you to read?
4. What do you like to read?
5. What are you reading in school?

## Appendix D

### THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

#### Child: Assent for Research Study

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is called *To Read or Not to Read: What is Accelerated Reader's Influence on Students' in Grades 9-12?* This study is being conducted by Tracy M. Windle a doctoral student at The University of Alabama. Ms. Windle is being supervised by Dr. Elizabeth K. Wilson, who is a full professor in the College of Education.

#### **What is this study about?**

The study is being done to find out high school students in grades 9-12 perceptions about Accelerated Reader.

#### **Why is this study important – What good will the results do?**

This knowledge is important/useful because it can give parents, teachers, and principals more insight in how students perceive Accelerated Reader and how Accelerated Reader has impacted your reading practices.

#### **How many people besides me will be in this study?**

This study is based on the number of participants in grades 9-12 in three high schools. Once permission is granted from the participants, then the number of participants will be determined.

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

\*Participation in questionnaires

-Questions will ask students about their perceptions of their reading practices in and out-of-school and motivation to read. Questionnaire will measure students' attitudes and perceptions about their reading practices.

\*Participation in group interviews

-Questions will be asked about your experience with Accelerated reader in the elementary grades and how Accelerated Reader has impacted your reading practices as high school students.

\*Participation in individual interviews

-Follow-up questions will be asked in order to for the researcher to understand the connection between Accelerated Reader and your reading interests in and out-of-school.

#### **How much time will I spend in this study?**

The study will take place during the RTI (Response to Intervention) period at your school. Each period lasts approximately 55 minutes. The study will take place during 2-3 RTI periods. During the first RTI period, a questionnaire will be administered that should take no longer than 30 minutes. After the survey is finished, the group interviews will begin. During the second RTI period, group interviews will continue. During the third RTI period, individual interviews will be conducted.

#### **Will I be paid for being in this study?**

You will not be paid for being in this study.

**Will being in this study cost me anything?**

There will be no cost for being in this study.

**Can the researcher take me out of this study?**

The researcher may take me out of this study if s/he feels that something happens to you that means you no longer meet the study requirements.

**What are the benefits (good things) that may happen to me if I am in this study?**

There are no direct benefits to you from being in this study.

**What are the benefits to scientists or society?**

This study will help teachers learn new ways of motivating and engaging students in reading and how Accelerated Reader has affected students' reading habits in grades 9-12.

**What are the risks (dangers or harm) to me if I am in this study?**

There are no risks involved in this study.

**How will my confidentiality (privacy) be protected? What will happen to the information the study keeps on me?**

Confidentiality of each participant will be protected. No names will be used. Documents will be stored in a locked file and the researcher will be the only one with access to them. Audio recordings of interviews will also be stored in a locked file. All information will be destroyed in 2 years.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?**

The alternatives/other choice is not to participate.

**What are my rights as a participant?**

Taking part in this study is strictly voluntary – it is free choice. You may choose not to take part at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of any benefits you would otherwise receive.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions about the study later on, please call the investigator Tracy Windle at 205-348-. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact Ms. Tanta Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (205)-348-5152.

I have read this consent form. The study has been explained to me. I understand what I will be asked to do. I freely agree to take part in it. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

---

Print Your Name

---

Signature of Research Participant

Date

---

Investigator

Date

Please mark the appropriate blank: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No I agree to be audiotaped.

## Appendix E

### THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA Parental Informed Consent for Child to take part in a Research Study

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is called *To Read or Not to Be: What is Accelerated Reader's Influence on Students in Grades 9-12*. This study is being conducted by Tracy M. Windle who is a doctoral student from The University of Alabama. Dr. Elizabeth K. Wilson from The University of Alabama will be supervising her.

#### **What is this study about?**

This study is being conducted to find out how Accelerated Reader has influenced students reading habits in and out-of-school and students' perceptions of the program.

#### **Why is this study important – What good will the results do?**

The knowledge is important because it will help schools and school systems understand how Accelerated Reader has shaped student reading habits in and out-of-school.

#### **Why has my child been asked to take part in the study?**

You have been asked to take part in this study because your child is in grades 9-12 and has taken part in Accelerated Reader in grades K-8.

#### **How many students besides my child will be in the study?**

The study is small. Since the study is only targeting students in grades 9-12, it will be only students in these grades that are currently enrolled in the three high schools in the school system.

#### **What will my child be asked to do in the study?**

If you decide to let your child be in the study, he will be asked to do these things:

##### **\*Participation in questionnaire**

-Questions will be asked about their perceptions of their reading practices in and out-of-school and motivation to read. The questionnaire will measure students' attitudes and perceptions about their reading practices.

##### **\*Participation in group interviews**

-Questions will be asked about your experience with Accelerated Reader in the elementary grades and how Accelerated Reader has impacted your reading practices as high school students.

##### **\*Participation in individual interviews**

-Follow-up questions will be asked in order for the researcher to understand the connection between Accelerated Reader and your reading interests in and out-of-school.

#### **How much time will my child be spending being in this study?**

This study will take place during the RTI period at each school. Depending on the amount of participants, the study will take approximately 2-3 RTI periods. Each RTI period lasts

approximately 55 minutes. During the first RTI period, the questionnaire will be administered and group interviews will begin. Group interviews will continue and finish during the second RTI period. Individual interviews will take place during the third RTI period.

**Will my child be paid for being in this study?**

Your child will not be paid for being in this study

**Will being in this study cost my child anything?**

No, there will not be a cost for participating in this study

**Can the researcher take my child out of this study?**

The researcher may take your child out of the study if he or she wishes to stop participating in the study, or if he or she wishes to stop participating in the study.

**What are the benefits (good things) that may happen to my child if he or she is in the study?**

There are no direct benefits of your child being in the study.

**What are the risks (dangers or harm) to my child if he or she is in the study?**

There are no physical or psychological risks to this study.

**How will my child's confidentiality (privacy) be protected? What will happen to the information the study keeps on him?**

At no time will your child be identified during this study. False names will be given at all times. All data will be held in the researcher's possession for two years and then be destroyed.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study? Does he or she have any choices?**

The alternative/choice is not to participate.

**What are my child's rights as a participant?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice to let your child participate. You may choose to not allow your child to take part in the study and can request for your child to stop participating at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of any benefits your child would otherwise receive.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the committee that protects the right of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Who do I call if I have questions or a problem?**

If you have any questions about the study please ask them. If you have any questions about the study please contact Tracy Windle at 205-348-6058, or her advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Wilson at 205-348-6058. If you have any questions as your right as a participant you may contact Ms. Tanta Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at 205-348-8461 or 1-877-820-3066.

I have read this consent form. The study has been explained to me. I understand what I will be asked to do. I freely agree to take part in it. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

---

Signature or Parent or Guardian

Date

---

Print Child's Name

---

Investigator

Date

\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no **I agree for my child to be audiotaped.**

## Appendix F

### IRB Research Proposal

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** To Read or Not to Read: What is Accelerated Reader's Influence on Students in Grades 9-12?

**STARTING DATE:** Upon approval

**ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE:** January 31, 2011

#### RESEARCH PROJECT:

Purpose:

The research I wish to conduct is a mixed methods study that investigates nine through twelfth grader's perceptions of the computerized reading program, Accelerated Reader and how this program has impacted their reading practices in and out-of-school.

#### RESEARCH/STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What are high school students' (grades 9-12) perceptions regarding Accelerated Reader?
2. What are high school students' (grades 9-12) perceptions in how Accelerated Reader has impacted their in and out-of-school reading habits?

#### STUDY DESIGN/METHODOLOGY:

In order to examine these questions, mixed methods research will be employed. Mixed methods research utilizes the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. (Creswell, 2009). Since this study utilizes both forms of research, data collection will occur in two phases.  
*Phase I*

The first phase of data collection is quantitative research. In this phase students will be administered the Adolescent Motivation to Read Questionnaire (AMRQ) (appendix A). This questionnaire was created in 2007 by literacy researchers. (Pitcher, et al.) Once the AMRQ has been administered, then the next phase of research will occur. The questionnaire will be used to describe participants' perceptions about themselves as readers and what motivates them to read.  
*Phase II*

In the second phase of data collection, qualitative research will be employed. The form of qualitative research that I will use is focus groups and interviews. Focus groups will be based on the number of participants. Focus group questions will be based on *Accelerated Reader's Six Principles of Best Practice*. Follow-up interviews will be conducted once focus group discussions have been completed. The interviews will be recorded with a digital audio recorder while subsequent field notes and jottings will be taken by the researcher.

#### *Gaining Consent*

##### *9-12 Grade Participants*

Since permission has already been granted from the Superintendent and Curriculum Director of the Lamar County School System, as soon as IRB approval is given, consent forms will be distributed to and collected from all 9-12 grade students in the Lamar County School System. To protect students' rights, information about who consented and who did not will be withheld by the researcher and kept in a sealed envelope.

### *Student Participants*

Participants in the study are from one school system located in the Lamar County School System. This system houses three secondary schools. All of the schools employ Accelerated Reader in grades K-8. To assure anonymity, all participants and the school system will be given pseudonyms. Participants in this study will be selected based on their willingness to participate as well as certain characteristics that are important to the study. Participants have the choice to terminate their participation at any given time during the study. Participants will be selected based on the following characteristics: (1) availability of the study, (2) must have participated in Accelerated Reader during grades K-8, and (3) participants must be in grades 9-12. Permission to collect data during the RTI (Response To Intervention) period has been given by the Superintendent of the school system.

### **RISKS:**

Since I will be investigating students' perceptions concerning their reading habits and their participation in Accelerated Reader, the risks are extremely low. The questions that focus on their perceptions as readers will be asked in the form of a questionnaire (AMRQ) that was created in 2007. The results from the questionnaire will be compiled according to the directions of the authors. During the second form of data collection, which is focus groups and interviews, questions will be asked based their participation in the Accelerated Reader program. (appendix B).

Participants will be given the opportunity to decline full or partial participation at any time and non-participation will not negatively affect students. At no time will participants be identified by name or no personal information will be collected. Since the benefits will far outweigh the risks, participants might have their comments featured in a professional publication and/ or co-present and/ or presentation (a benefit).

### **SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS/SAFEGUARDS AGAINST RISKS:**

In order to ensure the safety of any participants, this research will not divulge any names of any persons, including subject, school, or community. Geography will be described (if necessary) very broadly, i.e. southeastern United States. Any taped conversations that may be made will be destroyed following the expiration date determined by the IRB. If any action is needed to suspend the study for any reason due to unforeseen circumstance, all action will be reported to Dr. Elizabeth Wilson, chairperson of the study and the IRB. Students will be notified that they will be audiotaped by the following statement that will appear at the bottom of the Child Assent Form and the Parental Consent Form: "I agree to be audiotaped \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No." All audiotapes will be kept in a locked container in the researcher's home.

### **PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

Privacy will be maintained throughout the data collection process. This will be achieved through the anonymity of the subject in the actual writing, as well as barring markers of location in relation to specific geographers. After data collection is complete and writing has reached an acceptable point, all identifiable data will be destroyed as dictated by the IRB deadline. If there is a need to conduct follow-ups on the part of the researcher, I will follow IRB guidelines in doing so. If the subject wishes to see data collected at any time during the process they have full access to it and reserve the right to strike or remove any comments or remarks they feel unacceptable. The privacy and confidentiality of the participant will be protected in several

ways. Consent forms, transcriptions, field notes, and other relevant paperwork will be safely secured in a locked file in the researcher's home. All audio tapes will be deleted immediately after they have been utilized, and transcribed data will be kept on the home computer of the researcher which remains locked when not in use. All data will remain securely in the possession of the researcher for three years, after which time, it will be destroyed. The researcher may use the data for presentations or articles in the study, but pseudonyms will be used for the participants in order to maintain their anonymity. As previously mentioned, the school will only be identified by its general location and demographic information gleaned from the state department of education. No other persons will see the data other than the subjects and the researcher's chair/advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Wilson.

### **INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS:**

Informed Consent will be constructed via a form of consent regarding participation (attachment C) and audio taping (see appendix D) to use the subjects in the data gathering and then subsequent writing. Subjects, if they wish to participate, will sign the form (appendix C) and check the appropriate box. Since participants are minors, parents or guardians will be asked to sign the form (appendix D) which gives them the permission to give their child permission to participate. Subjects will be allowed to have a waiting period of at least two weeks before consenting to the study.

### **RECRUITMENT METHODS:**

In order to gain as much participation in the study as possible, it is important to provide methods of recruiting participants. In the initial meeting with the superintendent, permission has been granted to conduct the study during the school day in the Response To Intervention (RTI) class period. Therefore, an initial meeting with the principals in the building as well as the RTI teacher will be held in order to explain the study process as well as their role in the study. During the meeting with the superintendent, he requests that all forms be distributed through the principals and the Response To Intervention (RTI) teacher in the schools. In this meeting, permission has been granted from the superintendent for the researcher to speak to every RTI class (there are 7 RTI periods) to explain the study. Once the study has been explained to the students, the researcher will then give the forms to principals and the principals will then place the forms in the RTI teacher boxes. Once the RTI teacher has received the forms, then the RTI teacher will distribute the forms to the students. Only students in grades 9-12 will receive forms by the RTI teacher. The forms that will be distributed will be the Parental Consent Form and the Child Assent Form. The forms will be collected by the RTI teacher every day over a 10 day period. Every day, the RTI teacher will turn the forms that he or she collects into the principal. The principal will keep all forms in a locked cabinet. Once 10 days are over, the researcher will then come to the school and collect the forms. The researcher will keep all forms locked in a filing cabinet.

Once the Child Assent Forms and the Parental Consent Forms have been collected, the researcher will then begin collecting data for the study. On day one of the study, the researcher will arrive at the school at 7:30 a.m. and spend an entire school day at the school with the Response To Intervention teacher. Each period in the school day lasts approximately 55 minutes. On the first day, in the Response to Intervention classroom, the Adolescent Motivation to Read Questionnaire will be administered by the researcher and collected by the researcher. This should take approximately 45 minutes. This form of data collection will take place on day one at

each of the three high schools. Research participants will take the survey one time. The second form of data collection will begin on day 2. On day 2, focus group interviews will take place. Participants for the focus groups will be grouped based on the subjects from the survey. Subjects who did not participate in the survey will not be allowed to participate in the focus groups. One focus group of 6-9 students will be formed at each of the three schools. Focus group participants will be selected by the principal. The principal will select participants in the focus groups based on a cross-sectional analysis of the research subjects. Focus group discussions should last approximately 50 minutes for one time only. During the focus group discussions, the researcher will audio-tape the subjects' responses with a hand-held electronic audio recorder. During this discussion, each participant will be given the opportunity to respond to the questions in Appendix B. The researcher will read each question and then the participants will have the opportunity to respond. The responses from the participants will be oral and not hand-written. Focus group interviews will be conducted in a conference room located in the library.

Once the focus group discussions have been transcribed, then individual interviews will be conducted based on the focus group participants' responses. Two individual interviews will be conducted at each school. This will take place on a third day of data collection. The third day of data collection will not consecutively follow day 1 and 2, but will occur once focus group interviews have been transcribed. No new subjects will enter the data collection process. The follow up-interview questions will be based on the AMRQ and the focus group questions. No new questions will be asked. The following timeline will be used to collect data from all three schools:

#### REFERENCES:

- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Pitcher, S., Albright, L., DeLaney, C., Walker, N., & Seunarinisingh, K. (2007). Assessing adolescents motivation to read. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50 (5).

## Appendix G

### Field Notes

#### The Story behind the Results

This story begins in Vinemont, a small southern town. The sense of community is strong among its members and is evident through Friday night football, Christmas parades, and Fourth of July celebrations. The place in question is the county seat that houses the Board of Education and is where I make my entrance as a researcher into the study. In the beginning of the semester, I contacted the Superintendent's office to make an appointment to discuss my research study. After the appointment was made, I met with the Superintendent and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Both of them were very supportive and gave me permission to conduct research at all three high schools in the county. I was given time for data collection during the Response to Intervention (RTI) period each day that is approximately 50 minutes. This was the only time that I could collect data in the schools. By their request, I was to make appointments with the principals of each school and follow their protocol for data collection. It was during this time period, that I was waiting for IRB approval.

However, I did not have to wait long and by the end of 4 weeks, I was able to visit each school to administer permission forms. The first school that I visited was Sullivan School. This school is located in the northern section of the county and houses some of the poorest students in the district. I visited the school for the first time on a Thursday and met with the principal and the guidance counselor. As I wrote in my journal, "Even though I was nervous about collecting data and worried about the logistics of the process, both the principal and the guidance counselor were more than willing to help me with this process." The first day that I met with the principal, he turned me over to the guidance counselor. She and I both decided that the best way to

administer the permission forms was through the two English teachers for grades 9 through 12. Both teachers were then called to the office and after meeting them and explaining my study, they were both eager to help me administer the forms. The two English teachers, the guidance counselor, and myself decided that we would collect permission forms for 5 school days, which is equivalent to one week. Then, I would come back to Sullivan School and begin data collection.

After a week, I returned to Sullivan School and begin the data collection process. When I returned to the school, like I wrote in my field notes, “I was thrilled to learn that 45 students in grades 9 through 12 agreed to participate in the study.” I was very pleased with this number considering there are only 185 students in grades 9 through 12. Once I collected all of the permission forms, a list was made of participants and then the students were called to the library to take the survey. Before the surveys were administered to the participants, volunteers were asked to participate in the focus group discussion. Five students agreed to participate in the focus group discussion. The survey took approximately 20 to 30 minutes depending on how long it took the students to answer the questions. After the students completed the surveys, I collected them. Survey administration took place on the first day of data collection.

On the second day of data collection at Sullivan School, focus group discussions took place. Since the school day was disrupted due to extracurricular activities, the principal and guidance counselor gave me as much time as needed to a focus group discussion. Even though the original research design allotted for 6 to 10 focus group participants, only 5 students volunteered to participate. The focus group discussions took place during the RTI period. The participants in the focus groups were not selected prior to data collection but after the survey were administered.

The focus group discussion lasted approximately over an hour. At first, the students were hesitant about the process because of the audio recording. After reassurance that no one but myself would hear their responses, they began to feel more comfortable about the process. As the discussion progressed, the participants forgot about the audio recording and freely expressed their thoughts and feelings. After the focus group discussion ended, the participants were asked to volunteer for individual interview discussions. All five participants wanted to further the discussion of their perceptions of AR and their reading habits by volunteering to participate in individual interview discussions. Since I did not want a large amount of time between the focus group discussion and the individual interviews, I came back the next day for individual interview discussions.

Therefore, on the third day of data collection, all five participants were interviewed during the RTI period. The individual interviews took place in the guidance counselor's office, which is located in a room inside the central offices of the school. During each of the interviews, the participants were allowed to make additional comments about the focus group discussions and elaborate more on their personal preferences as an adolescent reader. The individual interviews were semi-structured. As a researcher, I wanted the participants to feel comfortable in expressing their emotions and perceptions, but still have a certain amount of guidance over the discussion.

During the second week of data collection, I went to Southmont School, which is located in the southern portion of the district. Before data collection began, I made an appointment with the principal to set up protocol for administering permission forms to parents and students as well as acquiring participants. Even though permission was granted from the principal to collect data at the school, initially, I did not receive any help in administering permission forms for the

study. Therefore, as I recorded in my field notes, “apprehension began to set in” and I began to worry about getting permission from parents and students. So, I suggested calling the students by grade level to the library and talking to them about the study. Since I could only collect data during a certain time period in the school day, I returned to the school the next day to meet with students in grades 9 through 12.

As I wrote in my field notes, “Meeting with the students at Southmont proved to be a process of mixed emotions with little results.” As the students were called to the library, no one from the school administrative personnel watched the students as they came in and out of the library. Because of the size of the school, the librarian splits her time between the elementary side and the high school side. The high school library was empty. Therefore, even though I do hold a valid Alabama teaching certificate, I was left alone with students that I did not know and there were times through out the process, that some of them were very disrespectful.

In order to not cause disruption, any students that did not want to be in the meeting were allowed to return to their classrooms. During the meeting with the students, the majority of them were disinterested as I explained my study and passed out parental and student permission forms. After the meeting, I received permission for the students to return the signed forms to the school office. After 5 school days, I returned to the school to learn that only 8 students had turned in both permission forms. It was at this time, that I took it upon myself to make an appointment with the high school guidance counselor to get help in soliciting participants for the study. After explaining the study to her, she agreed to help and within 3 days time, she had 12 students for the study. With the previous eight, the total number of participants came to 20. Therefore, the guidance counselor and I agreed that I would return to the school in a week to administer the reading survey and conduct focus groups.

When I returned to Southmont School, permission was granted for me to take longer than the allotted RTI time to administer the survey and conduct a focus group discussion. Then, the guidance counselor introduced me to the participants and data collection began. Since there were 20 participants who agreed to participate in the study, 7 students out of the 20 agreed to participate in the focus group discussion.

The focus group discussion took approximately 60 minutes. During this time, the participants were apprehensive at first in participating in the discussion because of the audiotaping. Once I reassured them they would all have pseudonyms, they became more comfortable with the process. After the discussion ended, they were asked to volunteer to participate in the individual interviews. From this group, only one participant, Lynn, volunteered to participate. The individual, semi-structured interview was held in the main office in a small conference room. Like the individual interview process at Sullivan School, the individual interview at Southmont began the following day. From the focus group participants, only one person volunteered to participate in the individual interview process. Lynne, a female participant in the eleventh grade volunteered to participate in the individual interviews. Like the interview process at Sullivan School, the interview with Lynne was semi-structured.

The last school for data collection was Vinemont School, which proved to be the most difficult. Data collection for Vinemont School began between the Thanksgiving holidays and Winter Break. As I wrote in my field notes, "I expected the largest amount of data collection from Vinemont because it held the largest population of students." But, as I quickly learned, getting cooperation proved to be quite tedious. When I entered the school, I first made an appointment with the principal. He was very agreeable to work with me and then he turned the data collection process over to the school counselor. On the same day, I met with the counselor

and she decided that the history teachers, there are only two of them, for grades 9 through 12 would be the best case scenario for me to distribute and collect permission forms. She did not grant me access to speak with the students nor teachers. She volunteered to distribute and collect the forms without me having any contact with neither the students nor the teachers. Therefore, as I wrote in my field notes, “This made me extremely nervous to not have any control over this process.” So, set a date for me to return to the school the next week, make a list of participants, and begin the actual data collection process.

The next week, I emailed the counselor two days before I was to return to Vinemont and everything was set. However, this did not go according to plan. When I returned to the school, the counselor was out for a three-day professional development seminars and no permission forms had been distributed or collected from the students. Therefore, I returned home and sent another email about setting a date for data collection process. The guidance counselor made the date for me to return to Vinemont again for data collection in three days. Like the previous time, I emailed and called to make sure that everything was set for me to return. But, when I returned to the school for the third time, the guidance counselor still had not distributed or collected any permission forms. It was at this time, that I asked to speak with both of the teachers. I was given permission to talk to the two history teachers about the data collection process. I brought new permission forms for them to distribute and we agreed on a date and that they would return the forms to the guidance counselor. The guidance counselor and I made another date for data collection.

So, for the following week, I returned to Vinemont School and waited for an hour and a half for the guidance counselor in her office. She never showed up for our appointment. Now, it was time for Winter Break and data collection would extend into January. As I wrote in my field

notes, “I was very, very tired and frustrated at the lack of support and cooperation.” But, as a researcher, I know that obstacles do happen in the data collection process and decided that I would not give up on getting participants from Vinemont School.

Therefore, I decided to email the counselor again during the holidays to make a time when the students returned from Winter Break. Since the students returned from Winter Break in the middle of a school week, we decided that I would collect my data on a Friday. So, I returned to Vinemont School after Winter Break for the fifth time. However, this time proved to be successful. Just to make sure we were set, I called and emailed the guidance counselor. When I returned to Vinemont, I was thrilled to find that 22 students agreed to participate in the data collection process. Once a list of these students was compiled and permission forms checked, the principal called all of these students to the lunchroom. Out of the 22 participants who took the Reading Survey, 7 of them agreed to participate in the focus group discussion.

The focus group discussion began with all of the students sitting at a table. Since I was only allotted a small amount of time (45 minutes) and only one day of data collection, I felt pushed for time as a researcher. Since the allotted time was so close to the lunch period of the school, the noise level was often difficult for hearing the participants’ responses. Also, I did not get any volunteers for individual interviews from Vinemont School. Therefore, data collection only took place for one day.

## Appendix H

### Open Ended Survey Questions

16. *What activities do you like to do after school?*

Category	Examples
Sports	Dance, cheerleading, football, baseball softball, volleyball
Recreational	Hunting, fishing, 4-wheelers, skateboard, swimming, play, riding horses, team roping, run
Leisure	Shopping, going places, reading, sleeping
Friends/Family/Significant Other	Friends, family, significant other
Music	Listening to music, playing instruments, writing music, singing
Movies/Television	Movies, television, video games
Social Media	Texting, Facebook, Twitter
Other – Religious/Work	Religious related, work related

17. *What are some of your favorite books you have read?*

Genre	Title
Fantasy/Science Fiction	<i>Twilight,</i> <i>Harry Potter,</i> <i>Percy Jackson (The Olympians, The</i> <i>Lightning Thief),</i> <i>Hunger Games,</i> <i>Chronicles of Narnia,</i> <i>War of the Worlds,</i> <i>Artemis Fowl,</i> <i>The Supernaturalists,</i> <i>Wicked,</i> <i>Tuck Everlasting,</i> <i>Hex Hall,</i> <i>The Time Traveler's Wife</i> <i>The Forest of Hands and Teeth</i> <i>Mattimeo</i> <i>The Throne of Fire</i>

	<i>Howls' Moving Castle</i> <i>The Arctic Drift</i>
Drama	<i>Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants</i> <i>Sarah Dessen Books</i> <i>Crank</i> <i>Burned</i> <i>Glass</i> <i>An Abundance of Katherines</i> <i>My Sister's Keeper</i> <i>Pretty Little Liars</i> <i>Anne of Green Gables</i> <i>Don't Hurt Laurie</i>
Adventure	<i>The Hatchet</i> <i>Tom Sawyer</i> <i>Brian's Winter</i> <i>Little House on the Prairie</i> <i>The Boxcar Children</i> <i>The Secret Garden</i> <i>Huckleberry Finn</i> <i>Day of the Assassins</i>
Classics	<i>Moby Dick</i> <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> <i>Gone with the Wind</i> <i>Macbeth</i> <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> <i>War and Peace</i> <i>Phantom of the Opera</i> <i>Dante's Inferno</i> <i>White Fang</i> <i>Hamlet</i> <i>The Odyssey</i> <i>Oliver Twist</i> <i>The Prince and the Pauper</i> <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
Biography/Historical Fiction	<i>The Kite Runner</i> <i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i> <i>Heaven Is For Real</i> <i>Marilyn Monroe</i> <i>Titanic</i> <i>Trail of Tears</i> <i>Role Me Over</i> <i>The Help</i>
Mystery	Stephanie Plum books <i>The Wrong Number</i>

	<i>The Lovely Bones</i> <i>The Secret Deliverer</i> <i>Goosebumps</i> <i>Hardy Boys</i> <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> <i>Angels and Demons</i>
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18. *What authors do you like to read?*

Authors	Gary Paulsen J K Rowling Stephanie Meyer Shakespeare Edgar Allan Poe Mark Twain C S Lewis Dr. Seuss Sarah Dessen Eoin Colfer Ellen Hopkins Stephen King Jodi Piccoult Nicholas Sparks Rick Riordan Clive Cussler R L Stine
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19. *What really gets you excited about reading?*

The suspense in books. Adventure or action in a book When you read, you can escape to other worlds Nothing Finding the conclusion When I stumble on an interesting book. Mysteries Science fiction I don't really need motivation to read, I just like it. Adventure Learn about different things I get excited about reading mystery books because I don't know what's going to happen and I like knowing what's gong to happen. Being able to get sucked into a storyline and feeling like you are practically living in a book.
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The mystery of what can happen next and I like to learn new things.  
 Learning about God and learning about the stuff I like to do.  
 Reading to me is great. You are allowed to be in someone else's shoes and travel to places you haven't been before.  
 Nothing really. I have to be in the mood or find a book that interests me.

20. *What type of materials do you like to read?*

Category	Activity
Magazines	Sports, hunting, fishing, Guitar World, Seventeen
Books	Comic, journals, YA Lit, novels, paper backs, Bible, adventure, mystery, horror, spiritual, fantasy, health
Internet	Articles, newspapers, blogs, websites
Social Media	Facebook, Twitter, texts
Other	Essays, poetry, historical documents