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Accelerated Reader: No clear evidence it is effective & it may be harmful.

Susan Straight's "Reading by the Numbers," (Winter, 2009, Rethinking Schools) accurately describes problems with Accelerated Reader's scoring system. AR could fix this easily. However, Straight also points out that AR encourages reading only to earn points. This is a very profound criticism. The program alters the nature of reading as it pushes readers to focus on often irrelevant details in order to pass tests.

AR could also have the effect of discouraging reading in the long run. Reading is intrinsically pleasant. Substantial research shows that rewarding an intrinsically pleasant activity sends the message that the activity is not pleasant, and that nobody would do it without a bribe. AR might be convincing children that reading is not pleasant. No studies have been done on the long-term effect of AR.

There is no clear evidence that AR works, even in the short term. AR has four components: access to books, time to read, quizzes, and prizes for performance on the quizzes. It is well-established that providing books and time to read are effective, but AR research does not show that the quizzes and prizes are helpful. Studies claiming AR is effective compare AR to doing nothing; gains were probably due to the reading, not the tests and prizes.

Stephen Krashen