

Krashen, S. 2004. A comment on Accelerated Reader: The pot calls the kettle black. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 47(6): 444-445.

Pavonetti, Brimmer and Ciplewski (2003) compared the performance of seventh graders from three different school districts that used Accelerated Reader in elementary school with seventh graders who had no experience with Accelerated Reader. The measure used was the Title Recognition Test, a checklist that correlates highly with other measures of reading exposure as well as with various measures of reading achievement. For all three districts combined, Pavonetti et. al. reported no difference between those children who had used Accelerated Reader and those who had not.

In a response to Pavonetti et. al., Tardew (2003), criticizes Pavonetti et. al., arguing that their research design was not "scientific" because the experimental and control groups were not matched for socio-economic and other factors, and there was no check on fidelity of the implementation of Accelerated Reader.

These accusations are technically correct. Poverty is indeed an important factor. It is well-documented that children from higher-income families have far more access to reading material (e.g. Neuman and Celano, 2001) and do significantly better on tests of literacy development, a result that appears to be linked to greater access to books over the summer (Heyns, 1978). Thus, one could argue that Pavonetti et. al. actually demonstrated the effectiveness of Accelerated Reader if the comparison group was of a significantly higher social class - the low-income Accelerated Reader students, it would be argued, closed the gap thanks to Accelerated Reader. There is, however, no independent evidence that Accelerated Reader is more likely to be found in higher poverty areas. There is, in other words, no reason to suspect a social class difference. (1)

It may be true that Accelerated Reader was not implemented in the best way in these schools. If so, and if Accelerated Reader is indeed effective when done right, this result suggests that Accelerated Reader is not robust, that it requires more than simply "reading the directions."

In my view, Pavonetti, et. al. is an extremely valuable study. It shows that "ordinary" application of Accelerated Reader to large, unselected groups of students did not produce any obvious effect. Their data does not disprove the effectiveness of Accelerated Reader: it simply fails to support it.

It is ironic that Tardew faults Pavonetti et. al. for failing to do an air-tight study. Tardew cites no scientific evidence in favor of Accelerated Reader in his response, relying on the fact that lots of districts have bought it and relying also on appeal to authority, the statement of one scholar who supports it. Bringing in the rest of the research would not help Tardew's case. Accelerated Reader consists of four elements: (1) books (2) reading time (3) tests, and, usually, (4) prizes. Because there already exists clear evidence that factors (1) and (2) are effective in encouraging reading and promoting

literacy development (Krashen, 1993), the obvious study that needs to be done is to compare the effects of providing all four factors with (1) and (2) only. After reviewing the research on Accelerated Reader, I have concluded that this has yet to be done: Accelerated Reader studies usually compare Accelerated Reader to doing nothing, and the few attempts to do the needed comparison have been flawed (Krashen, in press).

Tardrew also attacks Pavonetti et. al. on personal grounds, claiming that they were "obviously biased" against Accelerated Reader and even "biased against teachers" (p. 4). I only wish to point out the obvious. Unlike Tardrew, Pavonetti, Brimmer and Cipielewski do not work for a commercial, profit-making company. They are not, to my knowledge, attempting to promote a product that is in competition with Accelerated Reader. There is no obvious source of bias. Tardrew, however, is an employee of the company that produces Accelerated Reader.

It is interesting that Tardrew accuses Pavonetti et. al. of bad research, yet relies only on unscientific data himself. He also accuses this group of scholars of bias, yet represents the company that produces Accelerated Reader. This is clearly a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

(1) Pavonetti et. al. note, in fact, that some low SES districts could not do Accelerated Reader because they lacked the funds to purchase computers or did not have the necessary wiring (p. 301). This suggests that districts who use Accelerated Reader are of higher SES, not lower, than those that do not do Accelerated reader.

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Tardrew S. (2003). Accelerated Reader: Lasting effects. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 47, 4.