**AR-Do you love it or hate it?**

I have had an opportunity to use accelerated reader as a librarian and as a teacher. During this time, I have also researched the best practices for teaching reading and improving reading attitudes. These are my thoughts about AR and reading.

**Misconceptions about AR**

**My child has to read from a specific list and there is nothing there that he likes.**

Fact: Virtually every book you pick up will have an AR test. We use a web based program for AR so we have access to every book that has a test ranging from Dr. Seuss to John Grisham. We do not restrict students to books from our library. They can read books from home, the public library or from a digital device. Visit <http://www.arbookfind.com/> to see all of the AR tests available.

**My child is so busy with activities. We do not have time to read at home. That is the schools responsibility. Besides, they worked hard all day. Give them a break!**

Fact: It is true that we are all busy with activities. But reading is the most important skill you will ever learn. At Oil Hill we have discussed our beliefs about reading and what our goals are for our students. Of course, we want them to be lifelong, successful and independent readers. But we also want them to have positive attitudes about books now and after they leave our school. That is why we set attainable goals.

Goal 1-Earn 10 points each 9 weeks. (This is equivalent to 2 small chapter books or 20 picture books.)

Goal 2-Keep a test average above 85%.-this shows that they understand what they read.

If your child reads 20 minutes each day-in the car, before bed, waiting at the doctor-they should easily attain this goal. I feel that 20 minutes of reading is not too much to ask.

Students are encouraged to “Meet It or Beat It” by earning the same or more points each grade level than they did the year before. This is a personal goal that is not punishable but only intended to guide students to always do their best.

**My child used to love reading in first and second grade and now she hates it. I think it is because the teacher is always nagging her to read in order to meet the goal.**

Fact: There is a decline in reading interest around 4th grade until around 10th grade. This is true of children, regardless of if they participate in AR or not. This only makes our jobs as parents and librarians that much more difficult.

My experience with teaching first grade was that students couldn’t wait to start AR. They were just learning how to read and they wanted to do it all the time. As they become more mature readers, they begin chapter books (less pictures) and they discover other forms of entertainment (TV, video games, computer, etc.) Unfortunately, they see reading as less fun/more of a chore. This is where you, as the parent, can foster reading by; talking with them about new books, promising to take them to a movie if they read the book version first, turning off the TV for the whole family while you all read.

Again, we have tried to set attainable goals. If you feel that your child is not able to make his/her goal, please talk with your child’s teacher. There may be other factors that are contributing to your child’s reading attitude. If the teacher does not know your concerns, she can’t fix the problem.

**My child’s reading level is so high that there is nothing in the library for him to read. The teacher makes him read books that are too easy for him.**

Fact: AR uses a system called ATOS to find the reading level of each book. They look at how long the words are, how many syllables in a word and word difficulty.

It is not designed to tell you how appropriate the content is for your child. It does not check how complex the text is by looking at the subject, prior knowledge, themes, and language variances. You might be surprised to know that many adult books are written at a 5.0 level or lower. Would you refuse to read John Grisham’s The Client because it was not in your reading level? You wouldn’t if it was your favorite author. It is just a 4.8 reading level.

My point is, there are a lot of great books out there that may not be in your child’s reading level. Of course, we want them to always be improving their reading skills and achieving higher levels. But we do not want them to miss out on good literature because a computer program places it at a particular reading level.

Helping students find the perfect book is one of my most important jobs in the library. Mrs. Hogoboom and I try to become as familiar with the books as we can so that we can make the most accurate recommendations.

**The teacher won’t let my first grader read chapter books. He is bored with picture books. If he could read chapter books, he would get more points, too.**

Fact: If a picture is worth a thousand words than a picture book is work a million. Not only are they enjoyable but also teach key skills to beginning readers. I often encourage older students to read picture books because the stories are so amazing. It is important for beginning readers to have the pictures, larger text, patterns and controlled vocabulary. Why the rush to get in to chapter books? We have seen students frustrated when their first chapter book test earned them a 40%. It is an adjustment that often takes several tries to master. For that reason, we do not like to go there until the student has been very successful with the previous level.

Students are required to read 20 points of picture books at a reading level of 1.0-2.9 before moving on to chapter books. They must also be able to read and take the tests independently and score 85% or better. Generally, by the start of 2nd grade, students are reading mostly chapter books.

Final Thought: AR is just a tool for our school to use. A tool that helps us to find an approximate reading level and track student test scores. It does not instill the love of reading, or even teach reading. We, as teachers are responsible for that huge task by monitoring student success, reading to our students, researching teaching strategies and getting to know the interests of our students. All of this is what goes into our program. I believe that overall, the positive that comes from AR outweighs the negative