

What is Accelerated Reader?

As part of the Junior Cert Schools Programme we are using the Accelerated Reading Programme to improve the students' reading. This programme tests each student's reading ability through a computer based quiz. This programme allows teachers to guide pupils to books that are suitable to their level. Renaissance Learning is the company that sells this product. It is an English based company which is a subsidiary of Renaissance Learning Inc. (Wisconsin)

Each student is given a password and username which they use to log into the Renaissance Learning website. They are given a number of options, for example to take a test or a quiz. When a student starts the programme they are tested to see what level they fall into. Each test consists of 25 questions. If the student answers correctly the questions get more difficult and if the student gets them wrong the questions get easier. I log in as administrator and can then access the students' level.

The students are put at a level ranging from 0.0 to 6.0. For example students who are at a level of 1.0-2.0 have a reading age of 6. Those with a level of 3.0-4.5 have a reading age of 9. Those who have a level of 4.9-6.0 have a reading age of 16. The levels have corresponding colours for e.g. books from 0.0 to 1.0 have green stickers and this makes it easier for the students to choose the books at their level.

They read books that fall within these levels and are quizzed on them. The students take the same steps as they would if they were taking a test except they log onto the quiz option. Each of the books has a 6 digit number which the students enter into the website. The test takes the form of a multiple choice quiz. The students are given the results when they are finished.

Following each quiz a generalised skills assessment is given to each student. It points out the strengths of each student and also areas where they can improve. If a student's score is 85% or more they can move onto the next reading level.

Why did I choose to run it in the school?

This programme has allowed me as JCSP co-ordinator to keep a close eye on the student's reading and areas where they can improve and the areas that they are doing well at. Having completed a number of JCSP literacy initiatives for example 'Who wants to be a Word Millionaire' I could see how students could benefit from reading when it was put in a more interesting framework. Reading among the JCSP students was not popular and was considered a chore so I felt this programme would benefit immensely and I could also access useful information about the students' strengths and weaknesses!

What did I have to do to set it up?

There were three different aspects in setting up AR in our school.

- a) My training
- b) The AR programme in the computers in the school
- c) Purchasing the books for the AR programme.

In Spring 2008 the principal gave me permission to run the programme.

a) I got in touch with the Renaissance Learning office who outlined how to set up the library. ARbookfind.co.uk is a useful tool in finding if any book has a corresponding quiz. You just access the above website, put in the name of a book and the computer will tell you if there is a quiz for that book or not. This book can then be included in AR library.

b) The Head of IT was very helpful in setting up the AR programme on the computers. She liaised with the RL offices in London while setting

up the computers.

c) Some of the books that were in the JCSP section of the library were suitable for the AR section of the library. The rest of the books were purchased from educational companies like Scholastic, Setanta and Carrolls.

What were the problems in setting it up?

Sourcing books was difficult at the start but once I became more familiar with different AR authors and indeed with the ARbookfind website it became easier to find books.

All the books had to be labelled and colour stickers had to be put on them I did this myself and this took a lot of time.

It was difficult to get time to test/quiz the kids so I ended up doing it in my free classes. Once the students, teachers and SNA's became more familiar with the AR programme it was easier and quicker to get classes tested.

What would I do differently?

Some book companies will sell the AR books covered and with labels and stickers at an extra cost. I would have used them!!

What been the positive aspects of the programme for the students?

Students are now more engaged in reading. The books in the AR programme are very teenage friendly and the students enjoyed being quizzed, seeing their result and getting a new book.

Myself and their English teacher are delighted to see the willingness to read books and hope that this will benefit them in their future.

Why would I recommend it?

There is nothing more rewarding than any student asking for another book to read.