

Success Story

The Axe Valley Community College

“The increase in Year 7, 8 & 9’s reading ability has led to more creativity and improved vocabulary, especially for the boys! ”

As a school catering for a predominantly rural community, it was found that reading at **Axe Valley Community College** took second place to other activities in the home and a reading ethos didn’t come naturally to many of the students.

In a bid to stimulate reading amongst all students, which was calculated to have a profound effect on raising academic achievement and particularly examination results, the school introduced **Accelerated Reader™ (AR)**¹ from Renaissance Learning™ in 2008 – as School Librarian Helga Hughes explains:

“As the School Librarian, I welcomed the challenge of AR four years ago and have a great sense of pride in watching how the students have developed through their ability to read well and enjoy books – and consequently acquired essential new skills.

The timing of us choosing to implement **AR** at Axe Valley coincided with the whole school upgrade for internet access. I was able to reallocate some of the budget that would have been spent on non-fiction titles to fiction – thereby reaffirming the Library as a valuable resource centre within the school for **AR**, reading and Internet research. *The turnover of our fiction stock since we encompassed AR has far exceeded our expectations and the reading level of the books creeps up each year.*

Since the introduction of **AR**, reading has become an integral part of our curriculum – instilling the reading habit amongst many of our previously reluctant readers, both at home and at school. The ability to accurately identify reading levels and monitor progress with **STAR Reading™²** assessments provides us with invaluable data at the touch of a button.

From these regular tests and combined with quiz data, all staff have been able to monitor student development and fluctuations instantly.



School Background

Located in Axminster, Devon, **Axe Valley**



Community College is a smaller than average secondary school with a specialist status for Business and Enterprise. The majority of students are of White British origin and the proportion known to be eligible for Free School Meals and/or those who speak English as an Additional Language – including those at an early stage of learning English – is low. However, the number identified as having Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities is above average.

Renaissance Learning Success Stories

To qualify as a Success Story, a school must be able to demonstrate measurable ‘success’ with Renaissance Learning products, particularly in terms of the implementation of **Best Classroom Practices**³ to motivate students of all ages and abilities, improved academic achievement, development of a reading culture and other key criteria.

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These results often tell us about more than just ability, the reports can also provide insight into individual students who are experiencing other pressures or issues at school or in the home, which can then be monitored accordingly.

The facility to monitor the progress groups are making has enabled us to set up inter-tutor competitions, which has really motivated everyone and expanded the opportunities for students to read into tutor time. Each half term the tutor group with the highest score gains a non-uniform day – an inexpensive but very satisfactory prize!

All of the students thrive on the competitiveness of **Accelerated Reader**, especially the lower ability readers who, for the first time, receive recognition alongside more able students and gain rewards.

Furthermore, *we have seen the written word enhanced by the introduction of AR – the increase in Year 7, 8 & 9's reading ability has led to more creativity and improved vocabulary, especially for the boys!*

For me personally, the biggest buzz is listening to the students recommending and talking about books to one another – **AR** has really opened up a new horizon for

many of them. In fact, **AR** so impressed me that I approached my Headteacher with the idea of encompassing our small feeder schools within the Axe Valley Learning Community. This made such sense to me and I can now look forward to seeing confident and independent readers coming into our school in September as the idea was taken up.

I am currently timetabled to go out to the schools in order to help them in their early stages of setting up – I remember only too well how daunting it all seemed in the beginning, thank goodness Renaissance Learning has such patient customer service staff!”

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¹ **Accelerated Reader** offers personalised reading practice for pupils of all ages and abilities with over 24,000 fun, motivational quizzes on popular books ranging from *The Hungry Caterpillar* to Roald Dahl, and the *Harry Potter* series to the Classics, which test a pupil's understanding of what they have just read.

² **STAR Reading** is computer-adaptive baseline assessment software that quickly and accurately establishes the actual reading age and National Curriculum Level of individual pupils, so that growth can be easily measured.

³ **AR Best Practices** are research-based guiding principles for using Accelerated Reader to ensure fidelity of implementation.